

Mountain Bluebird

Sialia currucoides

Male Mountain Bluebirds lend a bit of cerulean sparkle to open habitats across much of western North America. You may spot these cavity-nesters flitting between perches in mountain meadows, in burned or cut-over areas, or where prairie meets forest—especially in places where people have provided nest boxes. Unlike many thrushes, Mountain Bluebirds hunt insects from perches or while on the wing, at times resembling a tiny American Kestrel with their long wings, hovering flight, and quick dives.

Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

Mountain Bluebirds are fairly small thrushes with round heads and straight, thin bills. Compared with other bluebirds they are lanky and long-winged, with a long tail.

Color Pattern

Male Mountain Bluebirds are sky-blue, a bit darker on wings and tail and a bit paler below, with white under the tail. Females are mostly gray-brown with tinges of pale blue in the wings and tail. They occasionally show a suffusion of orange-brown on the chest. Mountain Bluebirds' bills are entirely black. Juveniles have fewer spots than the young of other bluebirds.

Behavior

Unlike other bluebird species, Mountain Bluebirds often hover while foraging; they also pounce on their insect prey from an elevated perch. In winter, the species often occurs in large flocks wandering the landscape feasting on berries, particularly those of junipers.

Habitat

Mountain Bluebirds are common in the West's wide-open spaces, particularly at middle and higher elevations. They breed in native habitats such as prairie, sagebrush steppe, and even alpine tundra; anywhere with open country with at least a few trees that can provide nest cavities. They also readily take to human-altered habitats, often nesting in bluebird boxes and foraging in pastures.

Cool Facts

- Historically, the Mountain Bluebird depended for nest sites on forest tree cavities excavated by woodpeckers. Today, many Mountain Bluebirds breed in artificial nest boxes, which tend to be situated in more open areas and have smaller openings to keep out marauders and bad weather. Most of what we know about Mountain Bluebirds comes from studies of these human-made nesting sites.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 6.3 - 7.9 inches
- Weight - 1.1 ounces

