

Nomination for Citizen of the Year 2017 Ecology.

Nominee: Mr. Elmer Gross, (

Nominator: Richard Gaffney

How do you know the Nominee?

I first met Elmer in 2005 at a Buffalo Lake Naturalist's (BLN) club meeting. Reporting on his Blue Bird (nest box) trails, it quickly became evident that nest boxes are more than a hobby. They are his passion.

He commented that he had more than he could look after (900+ at that time). When I expressed an interest, he asked where do you live and how many nest boxes would I like? I replied I live at Rochon Sands and 100 would be a manageable number for me. He quickly identified nest boxes in that area that were mine if I committed to maintaining them i.e. at a minimum to clean each out each fall and move/repair them. Which I have done. He continues to attend our BLN club and report on his nest boxes.

Explain why Elmer should be recognized as Citizen of the year 2017 for Ecology.

For years Elmer has constructed, modified, sold (for a very modest price) , given away, set out and maintained hundreds of nest boxes. West on highway 12, on the road parallel to highway 12 to Shuckburgh's (Leo's lake); south past the airport, south on highway 56, east and west on Ross Lake Road, east and west on Linda Hall Road, west and north past the sewage treatment ponds, north on highway 56, north and east on the ring road past the transfer station, south of Buttermilk lake, south and east of Botha. Those are all Elmer's nest boxes.

In 1993 Elmer's Ross Lake Blue Bird Trail Report had 702 nest boxes. 140 had Mountain Blue birds, 383 had Tree Swallows. In his late 80's he is cutting back, giving away portions of his trails. Yet, he wants to maintain 283 nest boxes.

List any awards or recognition of merit he has received.

In 2009 he was awarded the Ellis Bird Farm's "Blue Feather" award for he outstanding contributions to Blue Birds in Alberta.

List any additional information ...

Elmer quietly and independently builds nest boxes and chickadee feeders from scrap plywood and recycled bus stop benches from Calgary. His nest box designs changes each time he learns of a problem or a potential improvement. I.e. When he learned mature chicks stuck their heads out of their nest box expecting to be fed only to be greeted by a hungry magpie or crow, he extended the roof overhang so the chicks could not be reached. Hinges for roofs are expensive, so he scrounged local implement dealers for used belts that could be cut up. When mice overwintered in his nest boxes, he covered the front around the entry with some scrap sheet metal. Cleaning a nest box

from the top is difficult but a top opening is very useful for checking who's home. So he changed his design to include both a front and a top opening. He quickly picked up on the idea of sloping the floor of the nest box to the front making them much easier to clean out.

Cavity nesting birds (primarily in our area Tree Swallows, Mountain Blue Birds, House Wrens) quickly move into nest boxes when they are available. When 50 of Elmer's nest boxes were set out in the Rochon Sands Provincial Park, only 5 were empty/unused by first summers end and only 2 were not used the second summer.

Taking Elmer's report of 1993, considering Mountain Blue birds and Tree Swallows, one could estimate:

Given Mountain Blue Birds typically have 6 eggs/nestling.

Tree Swallows " " 7 " "

If 90% of these fledge i.e. leave the nest.

That would result in

Mountain Blue birds	750.
Tree Swallows	2400.
Total per year	3,100.

Given Elmer has maintained 700+ boxes for 24 years,

That would be an estimated 75,000 birds.

Thank you for your consideration.

RFG Sept 18, 2017.

Attached please find pictures.