



Thank you for providing this nest box for Eastern Bluebirds and other cavity nesting birds. The information that follows will help ensure success for both you and the birds!

Placement

Proper placement is critical in order to attract birds and protect them from predators. Select an area that allows you to view the nest box without disturbing the birds. The box should be in a relatively secluded area of your yard with shrubs and trees nearby. Make sure the box is placed at least 6 to 8 feet away from overhanging branches of trees. Mounting the box directly on a tree is not recommended because predators can easily get in it by climbing the tree. Also if you must mount the box on a fence or fence post, make sure the fencing is at least 3' below the bottom of the box. If there are cats around, make sure the nest box will be out of the cat's jumping distance.

Mounting the box

A smooth, metal pole, such as ½ or larger electrical pipe, is best. PVC pipe is usually too flimsy to support a nest box. Round wooden posts (e.g. fence posts) are ok but adding a cone-shaped predator guard below the box is necessary to prevent snakes or raccoons from climbing the post. Put the pole or post deep enough into the ground so that the entrance hole of the nest box is at least 4 feet from ground level. Adding concrete mix to the hole will make the installation more secure but more permanent!

If using a metal pole, purchase two U-shaped pipe clamps to fit the pole and attach the box using these. Attach one side of the clamp, using short wood screws (3/4") to the back plate of the box, fit the U part of the clamp over the pipe and attach the other side of the clamp to the back plate. If using a wooden pole, pre-drill pilot holes into the back plate somewhere above the lid and below the bottom. Use at least 1 1/2" decking screws to attach the back plate to the pole.

Monitoring your nest box

Watch for birds on or near the box beginning in February or March. For Bluebirds, nest building usually begins mid to late March. It is best to open the box only about once a week to prevent disturbance that might cause the pair to find another nesting location. Clap your hands as you walk toward the box. If there is a bird in it, this will give her time to leave before you open the box. Bluebirds lay one egg per day until the clutch is completed. She will start incubating when the last egg has been laid. Incubation lasts about 12 days on average. Usually the nestlings hatch on the same day but sometimes over 3 days. Nestlings are in the box for

about 19 days. It is important to be extremely careful opening the box after the nestlings are 14 days old. This can frighten them and cause premature fledging which usually results in their demise. Watch for signs of feeding by the parents. If you don't see feeding for three days, then the nestlings have probably left the box.

To clean or not to clean?

I recommend cleaning out old nesting material after the clutch fledges. This helps reduce the buildup of parasites in the old nesting material. Bluebirds will build a new nest on top of the old one if it is not removed. Wear a dust mask, eye protection, and disposable gloves when cleaning out the box. Discard the old nesting material in a compost pile or a tightly sealed bag in the garbage.

What about winter time?

There is no need to take down the box for the winter because some birds DO use their nest boxes to roost over night when it's cold. Check the box in January or February and do a pre-nesting season cleaning out if any droppings are present.

No birds and other problems

It may take a full year before your nest box is used. Bluebirds prefer large, open areas bordered by trees so if your yard is mostly wooded, then you probably won't get bluebirds. You may have Nuthatches, Chickadees, or Titmice nest in the box or Tree Frogs may shelter there. Wrens will remove the eggs and young nestlings of resident birds and House Sparrows will kill bluebirds in order to take over the box. If this happens, you need to remove the invaders nest and probably relocate the box. Wasps will build their nest inside the nest box. I prefer not to spray pesticides so I just let them be or remove the nest if possible.

There are many excellent sources of information about Bluebirds and other cavity nesters on the internet. One of the best is the North American Bluebird Society's webpage at www.nabluebirdsociety.org. Be sure to visit (and join)!

This nest box was constructed following the design I have used in my bluebird research since 2002.

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