

Why we should discourage House Sparrows and European Starlings



Both of these species were introduced from Europe. In fewer than 150 years, they have become two of the most abundant species in the county. Both are aggressive, and compete with

native species for food and nesting places.

House Sparrows played a major role in the declines of such species as bluebirds, Tree Swallows, and even Cliff Swallows and Eastern Phoebes, following their introduction into Michigan. Starlings were a factor in the decline of Red-headed Woodpeckers.

Both species will chase native birds away from boxes, or enter boxes where a nest is already in progress, destroy the eggs or kill the young, and take over the box.

They also monopolize bird feeders and their acidic droppings under communal roosts kill plants or damage paint on cars.

Resources

Books:

Everything You Need to Know About Birding and Backyard Bird Attraction by Alan Pistorius. Includes nest box plans.

Stokes Birdhouse Book: The Complete Guide to Attracting Nesting Birds by Donald and Lillian Stokes

Web sites:

Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Birdhouse Network

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/birdhouse>

Everything you need to know, all based on science. Also gives you an opportunity to contribute data to their studies. Fabulous resource!

North American Bluebird Society

<http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/bluebirdfacts.htm>

The authority on boxes for bluebirds.

U.S. Geological Survey's Northern Prairie Research Station

<http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/tools/ndblinds/ndblinds.htm>

Includes all likely Michigan species, including nesting platforms for American Robins and Barn Swallows.

Nest Boxes

Be a good landlord



Rouge River Bird Observatory
University of Michigan-Dearborn
Dearborn, MI 48128
www.rrbo.org

Why we put up bird houses

People enjoy attracting birds to their yards and the idea of providing a place for them to raise their young is especially appealing.

Unfortunately, using an improperly designed box, placing it in the wrong area, or not maintaining it inevitably results in the box not being used at all, or the box being used by aggressive, non-native birds. In terms of helping the ecosystem, this does more harm than good.

Who will use them?

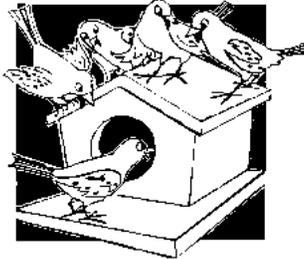
There are only few species of birds that will nest in boxes in a typical backyard. For a small nest box, the most likely candidates in this area are House Wrens, occasionally Black-capped Chickadees or Carolina Wrens, and House Sparrows.

Nest boxes are often put up for bluebirds, but unless a backyard is measured in acres rather than feet, bluebirds will not nest. They are not an urban bird, but prefer open habitats.

Purple Martin “apartments” are also usually unsuccessful unless they are placed near water, or in rural areas.

Some tips

❖ Make sure the entrance hole is sized precisely for the species you want to attract. For House Wrens it should be **no larger** than one inch in diameter. An entrance slit is even better.

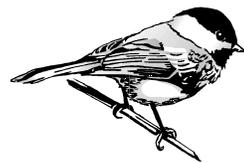


❖ Make sure the entrance hole is positioned the correct distance from the bottom of the box so that nestlings

are able to leave the nest, but not so high as to make it easy for them to fall out or visible to predators.

❖ No outside perches.

❖ Material should be untreated, unpainted wood, at least 3/4 inch thick. If



you want to display decorative boxes (which are not designed for birds), block the entrance holes.

❖ Boxes should have drainage and ventilation holes, rough inside walls, and an extended, sloped roof.

❖ Mount the box on a pole to prevent predators access. Poles may have to be greased or fitted with a baffle to discourage climbing predators such as snakes, cats, or raccoons. Place the box high enough so that cats can't jump on the box.

❖ Nest boxes must be maintained. Clean out old nests after the young have left the box. This gets rid of parasites, discourages the boxes from being taken over by wasps, spiders or mice, and eliminates a build-up of nest material that would hinder new nesting attempts.

❖ If House Sparrows begin building in your box, immediately remove the nest materials. You may have to do this several days in a row. If they persist, take the box down or move it. Since House Sparrows are not native to North America, they are not a protected species, and it is okay to remove their eggs or nestlings from a box.

❖ Make sure the box is placed in the appropriate habitat for your target species.