BLUEBIRD NEST BOX PLANS

The Eastern Bluebird, Missouri’s State Bird, may be a declining species in our state. Some of the problems responsible for this population decline are loss of habitat, lack of good nesting sites, and competition from sparrows and starlings for the few natural nesting sites available.

Bluebirds readily accept manmade homes and they have been helped by well placed and properly managed nest boxes. Below are two designs that have proven effective. The standard box is easier to construct and is suitable in most situations. The Bauldry box has special features that lessen predation and competition.

LOCATION—An area that bluebirds frequent in spring or summer is an ideal location for a bluebird nest box. If no such place is known, place the box in fairly open grasslands with scattered trees and brush. Orchards, pastures, hay fields, open waste lands, large lawns, cemeteries and golf courses are satisfactory.

MOUNTING—Fasten the box with nails or wire to a wooden or metal post at a height of 4 to 5 feet. Face the entrance away from roads and toward an open area with a tree, large shrub, or fence at a distance of 25 to 100 feet. The young birds have a good chance of reaching this perch on their first flight. If more than one box is erected, place them at least 100 yards apart to encourage maximum use. Nesting bluebirds are highly territorial and will not usually tolerate a closer box, unless something in between prevents them from seeing it.

MAINTENANCE—In Missouri, bluebird boxes should be up by March 1. Nesting may begin soon afterward. Bluebirds usually lay from 3 to 6 eggs. Incubation of the eggs requires around 14 days and the raising of the young about 16 days. The progress of older nestlings can be checked by gently tapping the box to make certain the adult has left and then slowly opening the top. Remove the nesting material as soon as the young have left. This will increase the chances of another brood. Successive broods in the same box may continue until mid-summer. The box should be inspected, cleaned and repaired, if necessary, in February of each year making certain that drain holes in the floor are open. CONSCIENTIOUS MANAGEMENT OF THE BOX IS ESSENTIAL.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS—The common house sparrow, an introduced foreign species, is serious competition for nest sites with the bluebird. Place the box away from where sparrows congregate. If they take over the box anyway, remove the sparrow nest immediately. Their bulky, feather-lined nests may have to be removed repeatedly during the nesting season to give the bluebirds a chance.

To protect the box from predators such as cats, raccoons and snakes, position it a safe distance from tree trunks and branches. An inverted funnel of sheet-metal at least 18 inches wide, or a metal sleeve, can be attached to the supporting post just below the box. A pipe used to support the box can be coated with soft grease during the nesting season.

The entrance, which is 1 1/4” in diameter to exclude starlings and cowbirds, is occasionally enlarged by woodpeckers or squirrels. Restore the proper hole size with a piece of sheet metal.

Dimensions shown are for boards 3/4” thick. Cedar is not recommended because of odor. Use 1 3/4” nails. Top must fit snugly under dowel. Cut 1/4” off each corner of floor for drainage. Painting is not necessary, but if painted, use a light color so the box doesn’t overheat on hot days.

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