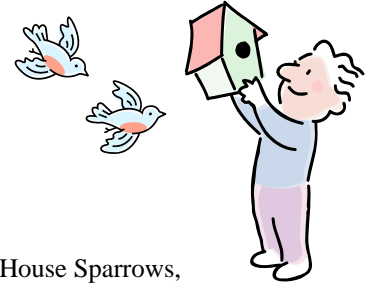




Basics from the Texas Bluebird Society



Attracting bluebirds

- Do not feed common mixed bird seed. The millet in mixed seed attracts non-native House Sparrows, which compete with native species. House Sparrows will break eggs and peck nestlings to death.
- Provide water features (e.g., bird baths, bird drips) and keep clean to prevent disease.
- Plant native trees, bushes, vines and grasses to attract insects (90–95% of the bluebird diet is insects).
- Plant native trees, bushes and vines that produce berries that bluebirds eat in winter.

Selecting nestbox

- Use a 1 1/2" nestbox entrance hole for Eastern Bluebirds and a 1 9/16" hole for Mountain/Western Bluebirds.
- To combat Texas heat, consider using a box that is somewhat larger, thicker and more ventilated than standard bluebird nestboxes (for a heat-resistant nestbox, go to www.texasbluebirdsociety.org and click Building Plans).

Selecting a nestbox location

- Place in an open area overlooking short grass so birds can see insects on ground.
- If possible, the location should have shade from late afternoon sun.
- If possible, a small tree or shrub should be within 100 feet or so.
- In Texas, space nestboxes by at least 50 yards if you want each nestbox occupied by bluebirds.

Mounting and installing nestbox

- Do not mount on trees or wood posts (too easily accessible to predators).
- Consider mounting the nestbox on 3/4" EMT conduit using mounting brackets or screws through drilled holes. Pound a 4' segment of 5/8" rebar into the ground and place the conduit (with box attached) over the rebar.
- If feral or roaming cats are a concern, mount the box at least 7' high (top of box to ground).
- Register nestbox location at www.nestwatch.org.

Preventing predators

- Apply a wide ribbon of grease to deter fire ants and other predators (a ribbon of tree Tanglefoot is an option). This must periodically be refreshed to remain effective.
- Add a Kingston Predator Baffle (plans located on www.texasbluebirdsociety.org, under Building Plans) to deter predators that climb with claws.
- If snakes are a problem, add a 5' tube of 3" or 4" PVC and paint it with thin grease to deter them. Alternatively, add nursery netting above a Kingston Predator Baffle to snare them.
- Trap House Sparrows with a Van Ert Trap if sparrows persist after their nest and eggs are removed.
- To discourage wasps, rub the interior of the roof with a bar of Ivory soap.

Monitoring nestbox

- During nesting season (Feb–Sept), look inside nestbox and record observations once or twice each week (no less than once every 25 days to prevent House Sparrows from fledging).
- Knock and speak before opening. If mom does not leave nest, wait until next time.
- Be wary when opening nestbox in case something other than a bird is inside.
- Remove House Sparrow nests and eggs. If in doubt, contact someone with more expertise before removing because any egg other than a House Sparrow egg is that of a native bird.
- Record observations from each visit at www.nestwatch.org (TBS now uses NestWatch instead of the TransTexas Nestbox Network).

Maintaining nestbox

- Remove old nest and sweep clean after each nesting (dispose nest far from nestbox).
- If entrance hole is enlarged by woodpeckers or squirrels, attach a new block of wood with correctly sized hole.