



# Avian Housing

## Before setting up your nesting habitat consider what type of birds you'd like to attract.

Not all birds use nest boxes. They have specific nesting instincts. Some will nest on the ground: juncos and towhees. Some will nest in shrubs and trees: bushtits, hummingbirds, robins, and many others. Still others will nest in tree cavities or nest boxes: chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, swallows, wrens and some woodpeckers.

## HABITAT

Habitat is the single most critical factor for successfully attracting certain bird species. The kinds of trees and vegetation, both on and near your property, will determine what kinds of birds will nest on your property. All birds have four basic needs: food, water, shelter and habitat. An excellent way to determine what types of birds you already have in your yard is to notice what species come to your feeders. This is a good indicator if a nest box will be attractive to the resident birds.

## SIZE & DESIGN

Along with habitat, nest box dimensions are extremely important in determining what kinds of birds will nest in the box. **Boxes designed for specific species are better than a "one size fits all" approach.** The size of the entrance hole is particularly crucial. Make it too large and you'll likely lose the box to starlings and house sparrows. Make it too small

and the birds you want to attract will look elsewhere for accommodations.

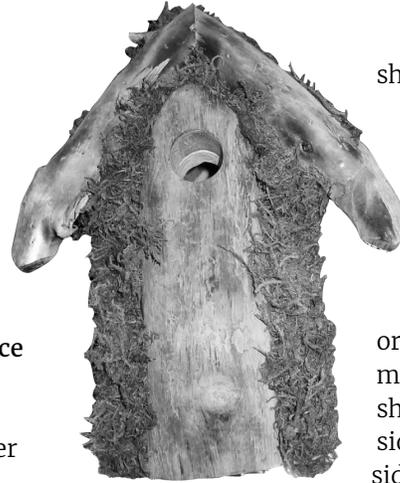
**Perches near the entrance hole are not advisable** as they primarily assist house sparrows and other predators such as jays.

Cavity nesting birds are perfectly capable of clinging to the outside of the box, exactly what they would do in the wild when using a tree cavity.

**Ventilation and drainage** are two other important features of properly functioning nest boxes. Simplicity and natural wood are also crucial. If you do want to paint the outside of the nest box, use leadfree paint and leave the inside of the hole and the inside of the box unpainted.

## WHAT MAKES A GOOD NEST BOX?

**Wood is the best material for nest boxes.** Pine, cedar, and redwood are most commonly used—cedar and redwood being the most weather resistant. Unlike metal or plastic, wood is a good insulator and doesn't overheat in hot weather. The box



should be designed so that the roof overhangs slightly to channel off rain. It should be able to be easily opened for cleaning and/or monitoring. For monitoring, access should be through the side only. Bottom, top, side or front access is ok for cleaning.

## MOUNTING THE NEST BOX

Nest boxes should be mounted on a tree trunk, a post, or possibly a fence. Hanging birdhouses are not as attractive to most birds. For most woodland species it is helpful if you can mount the nest box within ten to fifteen feet of shrubs or nearby trees to provide the nesting birds with a perching spot. Mount the nest box so that the entrance hole is away from the prevailing wind. If you're providing more than one nest box on your property, don't mount them too closely. Place boxes away from feeder activity or high traffic areas around your house.

## PREDATORS

Nesting birds are vulnerable to predators during nesting season. Raccoons, squirrels, cats, snakes, and other birds such as crows and jays prey on eggs or nestlings. **Obstructive devices fitted on poles called "baffles" keep raccoons, squirrels, and sometimes cats from getting to nest boxes** if the pole is not accessible from nearby structures. A thick block of wood surrounding the

### THE VALUE OF DEAD TREES

Dying or dead trees provide shelter for many birds but are not readily available in most of our local areas. Cavity nesters are most likely to use a nest box in the absence of dead trees or snags.

entrance hole makes it more difficult for predatory mammals to reach in and get to the eggs or nestlings. A metal plate surrounding the entrance discourages squirrels from chewing and jays and woodpeckers from pecking to enlarge the opening.

**Make sure to give your nesting birds plenty of privacy.** If there is too much human activity around the nest box, it may cause the parent birds to abandon their nest site. Assist children in watching the nest box activity from a distance, such as through binoculars or a spotting

scope. In this way, your entire family can enjoy the thrill of watching nesting birds in your backyard!

### COMPETITORS

House sparrows and European starlings are two nonnative bird species that were imported from Europe in the 19th century. Now populating the entire North American continent, these birds are aggressive and drive off native bird species from available cavities or nest boxes by killing existing bird nestlings in the box (or the parent birds) in order to

claim the space. **House sparrows and starlings contribute substantially to the decline of many native birds**, particularly bluebirds and woodpeckers.

### RESOURCES & GROUPS

- Check out our selection of nest boxes at the Los Gatos Birdwatcher.
- Through the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, you can join the Cavity Nesters Recovery Program to monitor boxes put up in neighborhood parks. For more information, visit their website [www.scvas.org](http://www.scvas.org).

### Recommended Dimensions for Birdhouses

Bird Type	Entrance Hole Diameter	Entrance Hole Above Floor	Box Interior Floor Dimensions	Box Height	Distance From Ground
Bewick's Wren	1" oval	4 to 5"	4x4" oblong	6 to 9"	5 to 10'
House Wren	1 to 1-1/2"	6 to 7"	4x4" to 5x5"	9 to 12"	5 to 10'
Chestnut-backed Chickadee	1-1/8 to 1-1/4"	6 to 7"	4x4" to 5x5"	9 to 12"	5 to 10'
White-breasted Nuthatch	1-1/8 to 1-1/2"	6 to 7"	4x4" to 5x5"	9 to 12"	5 to 10'
Oak Titmouse	1-1/4"	6 to 7"	4x4" to 5x5"	9 to 12"	5 to 10'
Downy Woodpecker	1-1/2"	8 to 12"	4x4"	9 to 12"	5 to 20'
Nuttall's Woodpecker	1-1/2+"	8 to 12"	5x5"	9 to 12"	5 to 20'
Tree Swallow	1-1/2"	6 to 7"	4x4" to 5x5"	9 to 12"	5 to 10'
Violet-green Swallow	1-1/2"	6 to 7"	4x4" to 5x5"	9 to 12"	5 to 10'
Western Bluebird	1-9/16"	6 to 7"	5x5"	11 to 12"	5 to 10'
Hairy Woodpecker	1-3/4 to 2"	10 to 14"	5x5" to 6x6"	14 to 16"	8 to 20'
Northern Flicker	2-1/2 to 3"	10 to 20"	8x8" to 9x9"	16 to 24"	10 to 20'
Western Screech Owl	2-1/2 to 4"	10 to 12"	6x6" to 8x8"	15 to 18"	8 to 30'
Northern Saw-whet Owl	2-1/2 to 4"	10 to 12"	6x6" to 8x8"	15 to 18"	8 to 20'
American Kestrel	3"	10 to 12"	8x8" to 9x9"	14 to 16"	20'
Barn Owl	6 to 8" oval	8"	12x24"	17"	15 to 30'
<b>Other Birds:</b>	<b>Nest Type:</b>				
House Finch	hanging basket or shelf				
Mourning Dove	hanging basket or shelf				
Black Pheobe	shelf at height of eave				
American Robin	shelf at height of eave				



### LOS GATOS BIRDWATCHER

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