



Building Nest Boxes

Learn how building nest boxes and installing them on your farm can help manage wildlife that lives and visits there.

By John J. Morgan
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Boxing up the farm can be a fun and rewarding project for you and your family. Get some Construction Tips!

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More Management

Try Travel Corridors to provide for wildlife on your farm. Building nest boxes and installing them on your farm is one of the most popular wildlife management practices.

Few efforts are more simple and capable of generating a significantly positive response for wildlife. Many landowners will admit the first wildlife project they tried was building a nest box. Some nest boxes are readily available, but a host of boxes can be constructed.

Understanding basic concepts about wildlife using man-made “houses” can nearly guarantee success.

Common Nest Boxes

The bluebird box remains the mainstay of wildlife nest boxes. The bluebird box can be found in nearly every hardware store. Homemade designs can be works of art ranging from log cabins to castles.

Despite some of the unnatural appearances, bluebirds will still use them for nesting as long as they are limited to a single hole (bluebirds are territorial).

The Eastern Bluebird is a wildlife success story that is largely attributed to interested people installing boxes in grassland habitats. In many cases, even suburban yards could support a breeding pair.

The Wood duck box is a distant second to the bluebird box in popularity. The dabbling duck also made an incredible recovery from critically low numbers in the early 20th century. Their success may not be as closely tied to nest boxes, but they certainly played a positive role.

Wood duck boxes are large and often erected in wetlands or ponds. However, a Wood duck box can be placed hundreds of yards from water.

Wood ducks using natural cavities can travel over a mile from water and be incredibly high off the ground. However, the closer to water these structures are the fewer hazards are encountered by clutches traveling to aquatic habitat.

Animals That Use Nest Boxes

Wildlife are not always birds: Flying squirrels and mice can take up residence in boxes as well. Just about any critter that seeks a cave-like setting can benefit from boxes. Man-made structures offer many opportunities to support wildlife.

Consider designs that transform old tires into nest structures for fox squirrels.

Match the box's size, openings or hole dimensions and habitat to the wildlife of interest. Pay attention to animal behavior; many species will be territorial, but some, like the Purple Martin, are communal. Finally, protect boxes from predators by mounting them on metal poles or installing tin predator guards.

Nest Box Construction Tips

When constructing and installing boxes, keep in mind some basic rules of thumb. First, avoid toxic materials like



pressure-treated wood and paint. Metal boxes are not a good idea either because they can become excessively hot.

Wood boxes should offer ventilation and access for cleaning. Do not install perches on boxes as they often attract non-native, aggressive birds like starlings and house sparrows. Finally, limit yourself to one box for every couple of acres and face them away from prevailing weather.

Boxing up the farm can be a fun and rewarding project for you and your family. From construction to monitoring and cleaning, kids and parents can enjoy the wonders of nature.

Nest boxes can be a great introduction to managing wildlife. With a little research, a few tools and supplies, a blueprint, and some quality family time, the hobby farm can be home to more wildlife—both furred and feathered!

Sizing Tips

The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Services offers the following guidelines for sizing the boxes and holes when you construct your nest boxes.

SPECIES

BOX SIZE

HOLE SIZE Bluebird 6"x6"x9" 1 3/8" X 2 1/4" Carolina chickadee 6"x6"x9" 7/8" House wren 6"x6"x9" 7/8" Carolina wren 6"x6"x9" 1 1/4" Barred owl 12"x12"x24" 7"x 8" Wood duck 12"x12"x24" 3"x 4" oval Screech owl 12"x12"x24" 3"

About the Author

John Morgan is a Certified Wildlife Biologist who earned a B.S. in Wildlife and Fisheries Science from Penn State University and a M.S. in Wildlife Management and Ecology from the University of Georgia.