



Monitoring Your Home Bluebird Nest Box

Procedure #5
Updated Aug 2021

It's best if you monitor your bluebird box regularly. Doing so gives you a better idea if and when baby bluebirds leave the nest, and when to clean out a used nest. It is also especially important to clean out the box at the end of the season in late August, as birds sometimes use a nest box to escape harsh winter weather.

1) Bella Vista Bluebird Society volunteers monitor their assigned boxes every 7-9 days throughout the nesting season (early March to mid-August). If you would like to do regular monitoring, you can use one of our blank [monitor data sheets](#).

Do your best to schedule every 7 days. The eggs hatch fast & the chicks grow fast. Going past 7 days allows some chicks to fledge (leave the nest) without you even being sure that they did, and ants or wasps can invade the nest and drive the adults away.

2) Record all activity on your data sheet and report the number of bluebird fledglings at season's end by emailing it to bellavistabluebird@gmail.com. Reminders for submitting your results will be published in *The Weekly Vista*, on local Facebook pages and on our website – bvbluebirds.com.

3) Clean out the used nest after all the fledglings have left the box. Although the adults will build a new nest on top of an old one, the primary reason you want to remove the old nest is to keep the nest low in the box. With a buildup of three nests, the eggs and chicks will be very close to the opening, making it easier for animals to reach in and take them.

4) Tools you need are minimal. Use a scraper/putty knife and/or paint brush for removing the nest, cleaning out the box, and knocking wasp nests down. Save clean, unused nests for future uses, such as swapping it for an ant infested one or replacing a wet nest.

For more information on how long it takes for eggs to hatch, how long chicks are in the nest and other birds who use bluebirds nest boxes see [Eggs, Chicks, Birds](#).

DEALING WITH HOUSE SPARROWS, INSECTS & OTHER PREDATORS:

HOUSE (ENGLISH) SPARROWS

- House sparrows are not a native species, and are therefore not protected by federal law. For more info on house sparrows, go to www.sialis.org/hosp.htm.
- House sparrows will kill bluebirds and their chicks in the nest box. They are the most difficult pest we face with bluebird boxes, and they **must not be allowed to raise their chicks in your box**.
- If a house sparrow takes over your box, allow it to build a nest and lay eggs, THEN remove the nest & eggs and dispose of it. The sparrow may try a second or even a third time, but remove the nest each time. They are very fast in building nests & laying eggs, so it is important that you monitor weekly. If they persist, it is probably best to move the box to a location where house sparrows will not be a problem.
- Another possibility is to plug the opening with a rag as soon as you notice sparrow activity. Leave it plugged for two weeks, then try again.

- If you have a house sparrow problem with a hole box, we have found that a box with the right size opening is sometimes an effective deterrent to house sparrows without affecting its use by bluebirds. Plans for making a slotted box are on our website – [Nest Box Plans](#). We make a box with a slotted opening that is sold exclusively at [The Bluebird Shed](#) in Bella Vista.

ANTS

- Ants will kill baby birds. For an ant infested box, carefully remove the nest with the eggs or chicks in it. Check the nest to see if ants are in the nest itself. If not, reuse the nest. If yes, use a clean nest which you have saved from a previous nesting. Transfer the eggs/chicks into the new nest. Use caution if the chicks are near the fledgling stage to be sure they don't try to fly away. Cover them with a cloth so they don't fly away.
- Clean the remaining ants out of the box. **Never use insect spray in an active box.** We recommend treating the box with food grade Diatomaceous Earth. DE will kill the ants, but does not bother the birds.

WASPS

- When checking your box, always look at the top inside. If a wasp nest is started, use your scraper/putty knife to scrape the wasp nest from the ceiling. Do this throughout the season, constantly keeping wasp nests out of the box.
- Use bar soap to rub on the interior ceiling and sides of the box to keep wasp nests from sticking to the wood. You may have to apply it several times throughout the season. (Ivory is recommended, but others say any bar soap is fine.)
- Another option is to use cooking spray to spray the wasp nest & wasps. This will deter the wasps and not contaminate the nest box the way a pesticide will. Go to www.sialis.org/paperwasp.htm for more details and suggestions.

OTHER PREDATORS

Includes raccoons, snakes, flying squirrels and cats.

- Bluebird boxes should not be attached to trees or under branches that predators can easily jump from to the box.
- Leave cats indoors especially around the time that chicks are due to leave the nest. Baby birds can't fly far when they first leave the nest and might be on the ground or in a nearby bush before flying into the trees.
- There are wire guards that make it difficult for raccoon, flying squirrel, and cat paws from reaching eggs and chicks. Go to sialis.org/noel.htm for instructions on how to make a wire guard for a hole box. If you have a slotted box, go to [Our Newsletter](#), Spring 2019 The Bluebird, p.5, has instructions on how to make a wire guard for a slotted box.
- Snakes can climb pretty much anything. If you have a PVC baffle, coating it with car wax or petroleum jelly to make it slick, can help prevent a snake or raccoon from climbing. Go to sialis.org/baffle.htm for instructions on making a stove pipe guard.

Our [Procedure 3 – Nest Box Pests](#) has expanded information on pests and instructions on using diatomaceous earth.