

Minnesota Bluebird Recovery Program Presents

Top Ten Tips for Successful Bluebirding

--- by Keith Radel

1. **COMMITMENT!** Commit to open and check the contents of your nest boxes AT LEAST once a week during nesting season. Keep written records of what you find. Weekly checking identifies problems and determines the success or failure of each location to attract and raise bluebirds. **IF YOU CANNOT MAKE THIS COMMITMENT, DO NOT INSTALL NESTBOXES.**
2. **HABITAT!** Select habitat in an open area with scattered trees, at least 300 feet from brush. Place the nestbox in SHORT or MOWED GRASS, with nearby perching sites: overhead wires, pasture fencing, or a standing dead tree.
3. **THE RIGHT NESTBOXES!** Select a durable, waterproof nestbox with an entrance hole the CORRECT SIZE for bluebirds. The box MUST be easy to open for regular checking and cleaning. BBRP recommends the Gilbertson PVC, the Peterson, or the Gilwood box. But none should be installed without proper mounting:
4. **THE RIGHT MOUNTING!** First: have the site checked for underground utilities. Mount nestboxes on 1/2 inch to 3/4 inch SMOOTH METAL PIPE, with at least five feet from ground to entrance hole, with the hole toward a tree or perch, not a road or highway. To eliminate climbing predators, NEVER mount on trees, fences or wood posts. The Steve Gilbertson idea of electrical conduit over rebar makes an ideal mount.
5. **SPACING!** Space nest boxes at least 500 feet apart. Overloading an area with nest boxes may result in increased populations of competitive birds such as house wrens and tree swallows, causing problems in future years.

Minnesota Bluebird Recovery Program Presents

Top Ten Tips for Successful Bluebirding

--- by Keith Radel

6. **WELCOME DESIRABLE BIRDS!** Allow nestboxes to be used by native cavity nesters, such as black-capped chickadees and tree swallows. If tree swallows are competing with bluebirds, try **PAIRING** two nestboxes 10-15 feet apart, with at least 500 feet to the next pair.
7. **DEAL WITH UNDESIRABLE BIRDS!** The nests and eggs of **HOUSE SPARROWS MUST** be removed. House sparrows are not native to this country and are the worst enemies of bluebirds. **IF YOU CANNOT DEAL WITH SPARROWS, DO NOT INSTALL BLUEBIRD NESTBOXES.** Avoid placing boxes where house sparrows are abundant - near livestock farms or within cities. The PVC nestbox is the most sparrow resistant. House wrens have become a problem for all cavity nesting birds. These sweet-singing little birds poke holes in other birds' eggs, and take over nestboxes by filling them with sticks. Avoid areas where house wrens are likely to nest - brushy areas. Install nestboxes at least 300 feet from trees or brush.
8. **MONITOR! MONITOR! MONITOR!** Open the nestboxes at least once a week until the nestlings are 12 days old. Check after a heavy rain for wet nests, which can be replaced with dry grass. Keep blowfly larvae out of box. Remove a dead nestling immediately. Remove old nests after young have fledged, and before the second nesting begins. After the nesting season, if house sparrows are in the area, leave the door of wooden boxes open, and tape the entrance hole of PVC boxes. The next spring, no sooner than April 1 in Minnesota, close wood doors and open PVC holes.
9. **SHARE THE WORK AND THE JOY!** Help your friends and neighbors check their bluebird nestboxes.
10. **REPORT YOUR RESULTS!** Become a member of a bluebird organization that publishes results and makes recommendations. Send reports with your bluebird results every year. Share your experiences and knowledge so that bluebirds will be here for **FUTURE** generations to see and enjoy!