

Nest Box Installation

Detailed tips from Mark Stanback, Davidson College, professor of biology, emeritus

Nest boxes

Nest box plans are available on the North American Bluebird Society website. Nest boxes are available for purchase at Wild Birds Unlimited or other nature stores. Inexpensive, decent-quality nest boxes are available at any NC State Employee Credit Union office.

If you wish to attract brown-headed nuthatches, you'll need to put an excluder plate on the 1.5-inch hole on the box. A brown-headed nuthatch takes a 1-inch hole (or 1 1/8 inches).

Poles

Purchase poles at Lowe's. All are sold in 10-foot lengths. Ask them to cut the poles to the correct size. The primary pole is a 1-inch diameter electric metallic tube (EMT) conduit. Cut to a 5-foot length. The ground pole is a half-inch galvanized pipe (rigid conduit). It comes in 10-foot lengths; ask them to cut it in thirds (40-inch lengths).

To install a box, hammer a ground pole about 10 inches into the ground. Consider an east-facing spot.

The EMT slides down over the ground pole, but first, use a large hammer to dent the EMT about 1 inch up from the bottom. Make sure to dent the EMT near the end they did NOT cut. This way, when you slide the EMT down over the ground pole, the dents will catch on the ground pole and suspend the EMT about 6 inches above the ground.

Predator guards

You can purchase predator guards/baffles at a Wild Bird Center. One option is a disk that attaches to the pole under the box. Another option is a stovepipe-style baffle that hangs under the box. Both are somewhat expensive (especially the latter). In the last few years, I've started using a different predator guard: 5 feet of green 4-inch-diameter PVC sewer pipe. It comes in 10-foot lengths and must be cut in two (easy to do with a standard wood saw). Slide this down over the EMT before you attach the box. If you've dented the EMT so that it catches on the ground pole, the poles should be tall enough that the box sits above the top of the PVC.

The only downside to the PVC predator guard is that some birds (especially bluebirds) will fall inside the PVC and die. So, you will need to prevent bluebirds from getting in. One option is to make a 1-inch hole in the middle of a large peanut butter jar lid and slide that down over the EMT until it hits the PVC. If it's a big lid, the PVC should fit right into it. Alternatively, you can cut a piece of wire mesh (6 inches by 6 inches), cut a hole in the center and slide it down over the EMT until it meets the PVC. That will prevent a bluebird from falling in (even if the PVC isn't perfectly centered).

The final piece

The easiest way to attach the box to the pole is with a single large nail. Drill a hole straight through the end of the EMT about 1 centimeter down from the end (the end they cut). Drill a hole through the top of the back of the box, slide a washer on a large nail, then slide the nail

through the back of the box and then through the EMT. Once it's on, you will need to pound a 90-degree bend in the nail so it will hold the box against the pole.

Make sure the box is at least 3 feet from any tree trunk or vegetation.