

Attracting bluebirds

Have you ever seen a bluebird? Most people haven't. These people are missing out on a remarkable experience.

Bluebirds are gentle creatures that naturally bring a smile to your face. The sky blue color of their plumage is rich and brilliant--it is a shade of blue rarely found in nature. The rusty feathers of its breast further accentuate its beauty.

The Eastern bluebird is a summertime resident of North Dakota. Its cousin the mountain bluebird sometimes nests in the northwest corner of our state.

Once threatened across the Great Plains and Midwest, bluebird populations are starting to make a comeback.

The decline of bluebirds was mostly caused by the reduction of its habitat. Bluebirds prefer to nest in cavities of older trees and wooden fenceposts. But more intensive farming practices, increased use of metal fenceposts, greater use of pesticides, and the sprawl of urban development have reduced the available habitat for bluebirds.

If that wasn't enough, two aggressive birds were introduced from Europe into the USA. These species, the house sparrow and starling, viciously kill bluebirds and take over their nesting sites.

The most effective way to restore the bluebird population is to provide adult bluebirds with good nesting sites so they can successfully raise their young.

Building a bluebird nesting box is a fun project. Many designs are available. Some common features are the use of one-inch-thick wooden boards; holes at the top of the box for ventilation and at the bottom of the box for drainage; a one and a half-inch-diameter entrance hole in the front of the box, and a door that opens for monitoring the progress of the nest.

Keep the nesting sites at least 100 yards apart. A pair of boxes is often mounted at each site. Often a bluebird will nest in one box, and another bird such as a house wren, tree swallow, or chickadee will nest in the other.


Install your nest boxes in areas that provide open space, such as near open grasslands, pastures, orchards, hayfields, and along roadsides.

The ground below should have grass. Bluebirds will perch on fenceposts or branches to look for insects in the grass. Once they locate an insect, they will swoop down to eat it.

Bluebirds raise one or two broods from late April through early August. Nest boxes should be visited at least every seven days during this period.

Bluebird nests are easily identified. They are neat and cup shaped, and typically made of fine grass. The eggs are powder blue or white.

In contrast, sparrow nests are messy and coarse in texture. Their eggs are cream in color with irregular brown speckles.

By checking on a regular basis, you can defend the bluebirds against sparrows and other natural enemies. You can also watch the progress of the birds as they raise their young. You won't be disappointed! 

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