

# Homes For Wildlife

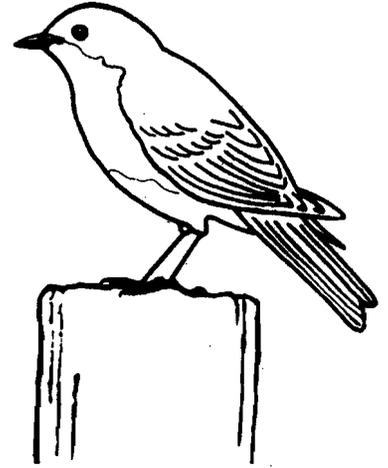
## BRING BACK THE BLUEBIRDS

Bluebirds once were common among the woodland edges and pasture fence rows of Michigan over 50 years ago. Their pleasant songs, beautiful appearance and large appetite for insects made them a favorite of Michigan residents.

However, loss of habitat, increased pesticide use and competition for nesting cavities from non-native starlings and English sparrows caused a dramatic decline in bluebirds and other native cavity nester populations.

Michigan forest edges once contained many old or dead trees with natural cavities and woodpecker holes--the only place bluebirds can nest. Wooden fencepost, which also contained many cavities, lined farm fields and roads. But today, many stands of old trees are cut for development and wooden fenceposts have been replaced by steel posts.

This loss of important nesting habitat has been compounded by another problem facing bluebirds--competition from house sparrows and starlings. These European birds were introduced to North America, where they have quickly adapted to both city and countryside. There are few natural controls here on these adaptable birds. Both species drive bluebirds away from their homes, often destroying the eggs or killing the young.



### BLUEBIRD COUNTRY

Knowing all this, how can you help bring back the bluebirds? You can supply nesting boxes that will help restore part of the habitat needs. Bluebirds are species of the open grasslands. Meadows, pastures, school yards, city parks, golf courses, large yards, cemeteries, and highway right-of-ways are all suitable.

### FOOD

Bluebirds hunt for food by sitting on an elevated perch and watching for caterpillars, grubs, and grasshoppers in the summer. During fall migration and on its winter range, the bluebird subsists primarily on wild berries. So in addition to building homes, you can also plant native fruit-bearing shrubs, bushes, and vines (serviceberry, hawthorns, currants, wild grapes, pokeberry, elderberry, dogwood, sumac) that will help provide food.

### DESIGN AND PLACEMENT

Any 1" or 3/4" wood may be used, including plywood down to 3/8". Soft woods are easiest to work with. Boxes need not be painted. Do not use treated wood. Nest boxes should be in place by the second week of March, when bluebirds begin returning from their southern wintering grounds. The boxes should be placed at 100-yard intervals in open areas with scattered trees, especially where ground vegetation is mowed or sparse.

Each box should be installed on a smooth metal or wooden post at a height of about five feet and within 100 feet of a tree for adult birds to perch in and newly fledged young to fly to for protection from predators. The entrance hole should face the tree, but try to place it out of the prevailing wind.

### NEST BOX MAINTENANCE AND MONITORING

Improperly or poorly maintained nest boxes can actually be harmful to bluebirds and other cavity nesting wildlife. All nest boxes should be checked throughout the nesting season from April to mid-August.

As soon as the young have left, you should check the boxes, and the old nesting materials should be removed. (This will help encourage use by bluebirds. If the boxes are not cleaned out, the bluebirds may build a second nest on top of the first, promoting blowfly infestations, and making the second nest closer to the entrance hole and thus more susceptible to predators). Remove any hornet or wasp nest and USE CAUTION in doing so.

Keep in mind that you will need to use some form of predator guard. Our plans include an additional layer of wood around the opening that makes it harder for a predator to reach in and get at the eggs or young. This needs to be supplemented with something on the pole or post that you use. You can use a length of stove pipe, a collar of metal flashing or, if using a metal post, automotive grease.

### REDUCING COMPETITION

House sparrows, house wrens, tree swallows and starlings often compete with the bluebird for nesting sites. There are some ways to reduce competition from each species.

*House Sparrows*-Place the nest box at least 100 yards away from buildings. Research has shown that the color white on boxes attracts house sparrows, so if you choose to paint the boxes, avoid white paint.

*House Wrens*-Keep the box well away from shrubs and trees.

*Tree Swallows*-Put up two boxes 15 feet apart and 100 yards between pairs. The tree swallows can nest in one box and, as they will not nest close to others of their own species, this leaves a box free for bluebirds to use.

*Starlings*-Be sure the opening is no bigger than 1 1/2", and the starlings cannot get in.

### WHAT TO EXPECT

It would be nice to expect that every box put up would be occupied by a successful pair of bluebirds. However, in reality only some of the boxes will have bluebirds in them. Your box will probably provide homes for a variety of other wildlife. Careful placement, monitoring, and maintenance of the box will increase your chances of attracting bluebirds.

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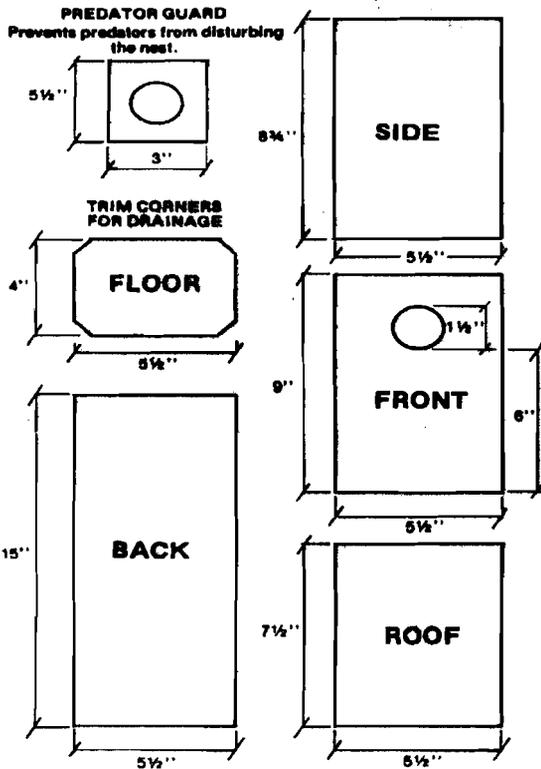
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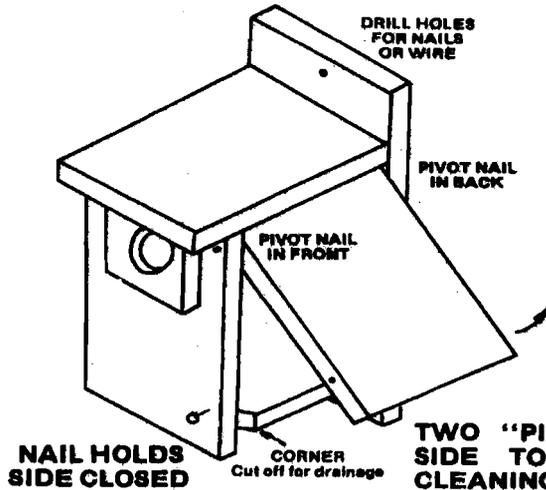
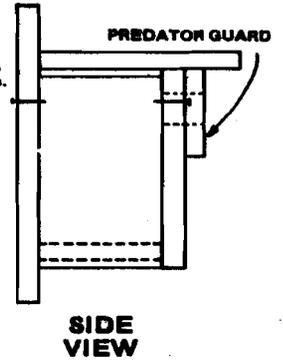
Michigan Department of Natural Resources  
Wildlife Division  
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# EASTERN BLUEBIRD NEST BOX

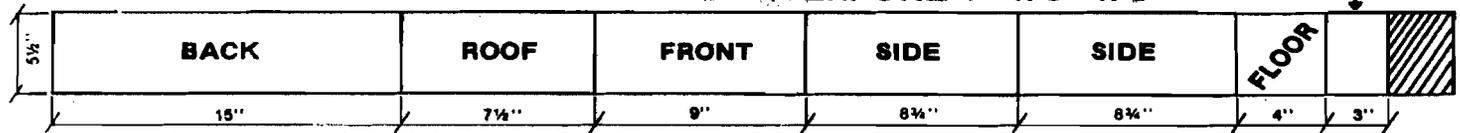


Side should be approx. 1/4" less than front to allow for ventilation.



TWO "PIVOT" NAILS ALLOW SIDE TO SWING OUT FOR CLEANING. USE ONE NAIL AT BOTTOM TO CLOSE SIDE.

LUMBER: ONE 1" x 6" x 6'



(Box plan: Compliments of Minnesota DNR, Nongame Wildlife Program)

**T**here are many different designs for bluebird boxes. We suggest the one above. Whatever plan you choose, there are several considerations to keep in mind:

1. Entrance hole should be 1½ inches. This makes it startling-proof.
2. Be sure to allow for ventilation (top) and drainage (bottom).
3. Keep in mind how you are going to mount the box--place it on a metal post.
4. Be sure to use a predator guard.
5. The boxes should be in place by the second week of March.
6. Select good habitat--open area with scattered trees and low or sparse grassy ground cover.
7. Avoid brush and heavily wooded areas, as this attracts house wrens.
8. Place box away from buildings (100 yards). This discourages house sparrow usage.
9. Place box so the opening faces a tree, no closer than 100 feet. The
10. Place box 4-6 feet above the ground.
11. Monitor the box every week during the nesting season (mid-April through mid-August).
12. Nest should be removed as soon as brood leaves. This allows a second brood to be raised.
13. Inspect box in winter. Clean and repair.

Compliments of:



### MICHIGAN'S WILDLIFE NEED YOUR HELP.

"Look For the Loon" on your State income tax form and give to the Nongame Wildlife Fund. You can make a direct contribution to the Fund with a check made payable to: "Nongame Wildlife Fund." Mail to: DNR WILDLIFE DIVISION  
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Your contributions are the primary support for critically important work for Michigan's nongame wildlife and endangered plants and animals.