

Homes For Wildlife

House Wren

The house wren is one of our most common and enjoyable backyard birds. Its beautiful bubbling calls are a joy to hear during the summer.

House wren nest boxes are likely to be used if they are 5-to-10 feet above the ground and located under the eave of a building or in a tree. This is the only kind of bird house which can be free-hanging from an eye-screw. All other bird houses need to be firmly anchored. House wren holes are too small for house sparrows or European starlings to use. Don't put a perch on the nest box. Perches invite sparrows to try using the nest. If you have a perch on a wren house, take it off.

The entrance hole for a wren house should be 1-inch in diameter. The 1 1/4-inch hole size shown in Figure 1 also allows use by chickadees and nuthatches, but not house sparrows.

House wrens generally nest in wooded, shrubby habitats. Their nests are characterized by twigs and the six-to-eight eggs are finely speckled with reddish spots. Sometimes wrens will take over the nest of a tree swallow or eastern bluebird after puncturing the eggs of the other birds with their bills.

As soon as one family of wrens leaves a house, clean it out so another brood of young ones can be raised.

Prothonotary Warbler

The prothonotary warbler was referred to by Dr. Thomas S. Roberts in *Birds of Minnesota* as the "Golden Swamp Warbler." The name is very appropriate. This warbler is orange-yellow with wings and tail that are slate-blue.

It usually nests in flooded backwater habitats that are characterized by woodland pools and oxbow ponds. Its nest is typically an abandoned downy woodpecker hole in a dead willow snag in standing water. Often the nest will be no more than 3 to 5 feet above the water level.

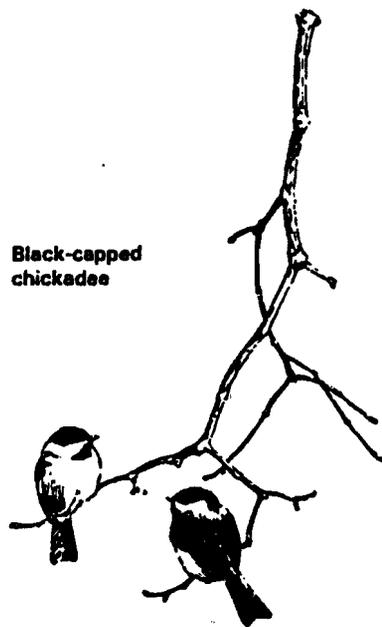
Most people don't realize that this beautiful woodland warbler is rather adaptable and will also use bird houses.

If you live in lowland hardwood forest habitat within the range of this warbler, try using the bird house plan in Figure 1. Use a 1 1/4-inch diameter hole. This will exclude use by house sparrows. Place the house on a snag or post in shallow woodland pools or in oxbow ponds of river bottom habitat, 3-to-5 feet above water level. If predator guards are used on free standing posts, nests can also be placed on adjacent shoreline habitat with the hole facing the open water. Prothonotary warblers will also nest in these bird houses if they are placed on the sides of homes or outbuildings that are near water.

Black-capped Chickadee

People enjoy these delightful birds at their feeders every winter but don't realize they will also nest in yards and woodlots with mature hardwood trees.

The house shown will be used by black-capped chickadees if placed in the proper habitat: either mature hardwood shelterbelts and woodlots in agricultural areas or mature hardwood forests in other parts of the state. The house should be mounted 5-to-15 feet high with 40-to-60 percent sunlight. About an inch of sawdust should be placed in the bottom of the nest box. The chickadee needs an entrance hole 1 1/8 inches in diameter. The 1 1/4-inch diameter hole shown in Figure 1 also allows use by wrens and nuthatches, but not house sparrows.



Woodland Deer Mouse and White-footed Mouse

The woodland deer mouse and white-footed mouse are frequent occupants of nest boxes placed for house wrens, chickadees and bluebirds. They are distinctively marked by brown or grayish backs, white bellies, long tails and very prominent eyes.

They can be a fascinating occupant of nest boxes in their own right. Some people intentionally place nest boxes for these two native mouse species on fence posts along fencelines near their northern cabins or at nature centers. A wren house as shown in Figure 1 is appropriate for use by these two mice. Nest boxes should be on posts about 3 or 4 feet above the ground.

As the mice raise their families they can provide a constant source of enjoyment and fascination for children who may occasionally open the side of the box and peek at the bug-eyed occupants within. Mice will winter in these boxes, so the entry hole should face east or southeast to avoid prevailing northwest winds.

The only problem with mouse use in nest boxes is that if birds return to a songbird nest box in the spring and enter a box occupied by deer mice or white-footed mice, the mice might kill and eat the birds in order to defend "their" box. Nest boxes for house wrens, chickadees, nuthatches, tree swallows, bluebirds and other small songbirds should therefore be left open in the winter to prevent their use by wintering deer mice and white-footed mice. Boxes intended for these mice should be left closed in winter.

White-breasted Nuthatch

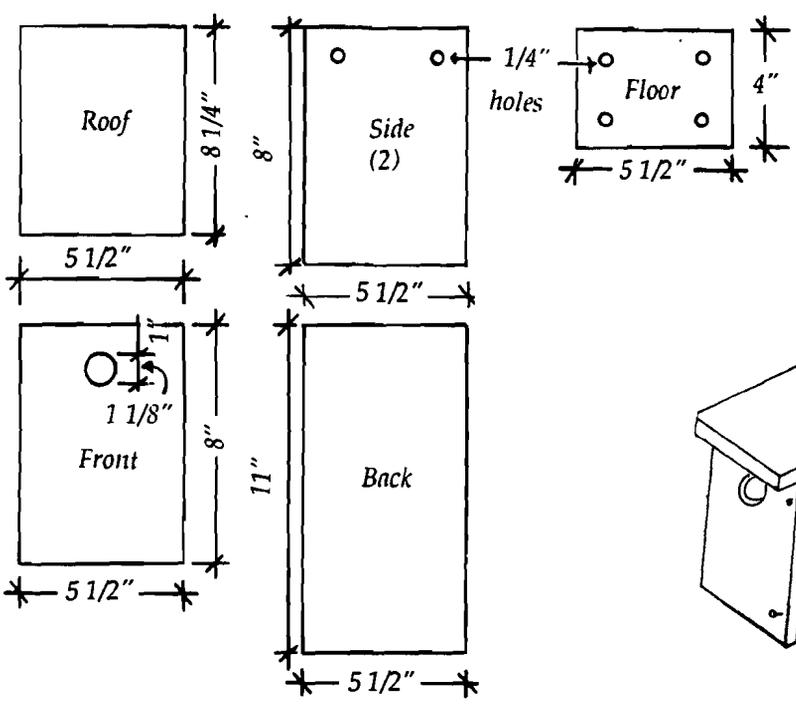
The white-breasted nuthatch is well-known at winter bird feeders as it hangs upside down to eat suet and probe for insect larvae under the bark of trees. It will also nest in mature hardwood forests in habitat similar to that used for chickadees.

As soon as each brood of young leaves the nest box, clean it out so more birds can use it. Nuthatches need an entrance hole 1 1/4 inches in diameter. This allows use by house wrens and black-capped chickadees, but not house sparrows. Houses should be about 12-to-20 feet above the ground.

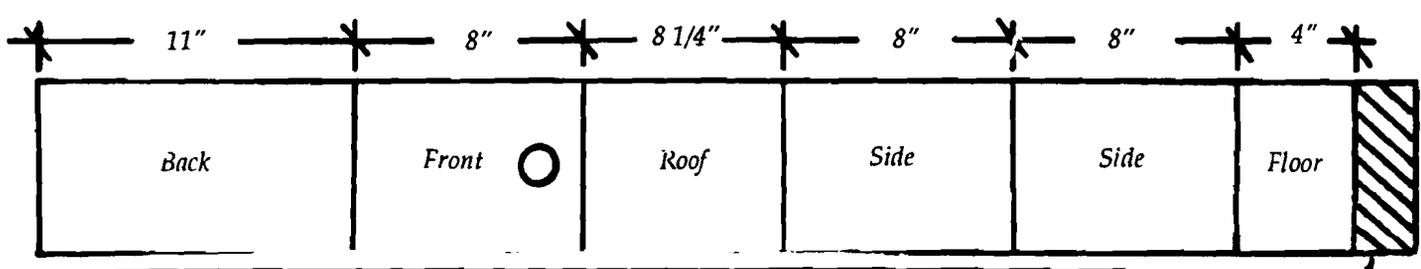
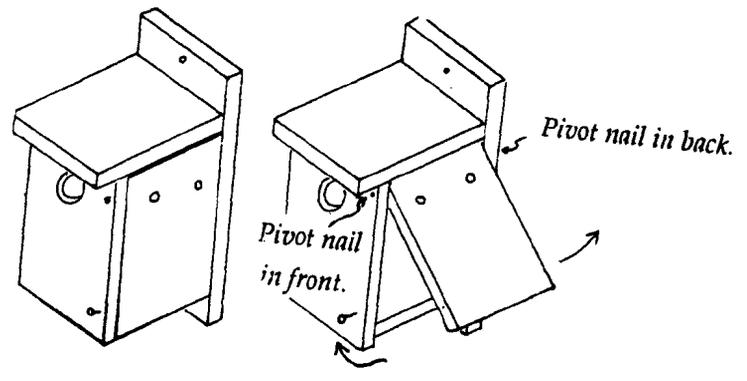
House Wren*, Black-capped Chickadee*,
 White-breasted Nuthatch, Prothonotary
 Warbler, Deer Mouse, Flying Squirrel and
 White-footed Mouse Nest Box



*Please note that any birdhouse entrance 1 1/4 inches in diameter or larger will admit house sparrows! All wren and chickadee nest boxes should have an entrance hole of 1 1/8 inches in diameter.



Use one nail or screw at bottom to close side. Nail or screw holds side closed.
 Two "pivot" nails allow side to swing out for cleaning.



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Your contributions are the primary support for critically important work for Michigan's nongame wildlife and endangered plants and animals.

Lumber: One 1" x 6" x 4'0".

Acknowledgement: Minnesota DNR, Nongame Wildlife Program