In the springtime in Nebraska, some birds, like robins, build an open nest, but others prefer nesting in cavities in decayed trees or stumps. Cavity-dwelling birds, like woodpeckers, chickadees, house wrens, and bluebirds, will substitute a nest box for a tree cavity. Natural nest sites have disappeared as weakened or dying trees are removed from our landscape. Depending on other attributes in your landscape, providing an appropriately sized nest box may help attract some bird species to your yard.

Although elaborate designs for boxes are available, you can successfully attract birds by building an inexpensive, simple, six-sided box. Whatever the design or material used, the boxes must be strong, weatherproof, and securely fastened.

Single-compartment nest boxes are the easiest to build and the most frequently used by birds. When you are building the box, be sure to allow easy access for cleaning and occasional observations. You can use the same basic box design for all species (see the diagram). Table 1 gives the proper dimensions and hole sizes that are appropriate for different species.

There is no need to put nest material into the box in the spring because lining the box is often part of each species’ mating ritual. For some birds (woodpecker, owl, chickadee, and duck families), a layer of wood chips or shavings (not sawdust) about 1-inch deep may be placed in the bottom of the box.

Drainage and ventilation are important features of a nest box. Drill a few small holes just below the roof overhang and in the floor of the box near the walls.

You can suspend the box from a tree, mount it on a pole, or attach it to a building 3-ft below the roof. Find a location that is protected from the sun for part of the day, and turn the entrance away from the usual direction of wind and rain.

Protect your boxes from predators. The most common predators are squirrels, raccoons and cats—all of which are excellent climbers. Do not place a platform or perch below the entrance hole of the nest box because these structures provide a support

### Table 1. Dimensions for nest boxes for some species of birds found in Nebraska

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Entrance hole diameter (inch)</th>
<th>Width of floor panels (inch)</th>
<th>Height of wall panels (inch)</th>
<th>Minimum height above ground (feet)</th>
<th>On pole or tree near shrubs</th>
<th>On pole or tree in open areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>House Wren</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4x4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5½</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chickadee</td>
<td>1¼</td>
<td>4x4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5½</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuthatch</td>
<td>1¼</td>
<td>4x4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5½</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downy Woodpecker</td>
<td>1½</td>
<td>4x4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5½</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Bluebird</td>
<td>1½</td>
<td>5½</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6½</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House Sparrow</td>
<td>1½</td>
<td>5½</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6½</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starling</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5x5</td>
<td>12½</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Flicker</td>
<td>2½</td>
<td>6x6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screech Owl</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8x8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Kestral</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8x8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood Duck</td>
<td>3x4 oval</td>
<td>10x10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
for animals raiding the nest. Place
nest boxes on poles at least 15-ft
away from trees and shrubs to stop
squirrels from jumping to the roof
of the box. To prevent raccoons
from raiding wood duck boxes,
make the entrance hole oval in
shape and erect the pole in water
near the shore. Protect boxes that
are placed on poles with a predator
guard, such as a large inverted cone
or a 1-ft. strip of metal wrapped
around the pole. A large clean
plastic bottle (e.g., a bleach con-
tainer) with the bottom cut out and
nailed to the pole at the neck would
also work.

Parasites, like lice and mites,
are common in most nests, and
their numbers increase as the season
progresses. Young birds usually leave
the nest before parasites become a
major problem. If weather and food
conditions allow the adult pair to start
a second clutch, and the eggs are laid
in a box already infested with para-
sites, the young may not survive.
Providing a second box approxi-
mately 15-20 ft away will give the
birds an alternative nesting site that is
free from parasites. Leave the
second box closed until about two
weeks after the first eggs have
hatched. You can help control
nestlings have died in the nest, it is
best to remove them. Sometimes
predators will follow a human’s trail to
find eggs and young in nest boxes. If
you are worried about predators,
postpone your inspection until after
the nesting season. At the end of the
nesting season, remove the nesting
materials from the interior of the
nest box.

Table 2. Information on nesting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Number of eggs in a clutch</th>
<th>Incubation period (days)</th>
<th>Age when the young leave the nest (days)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>House Wren</td>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chickadee</td>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuthatch</td>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downy Woodpecker</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Bluebird</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House Sparrow</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starling</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12-14</td>
<td>16-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Flicker</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14-16</td>
<td>25-28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screech Owl</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Kestral</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood Duck</td>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1-2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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postpone your inspection until after
the nesting season. At the end of the
nesting season, remove the nesting
materials from the interior of the
nest box.

Tips to improve the nesting
of these species:

• Wrens like to build “dummy”
  nests before they choose one to lay
  eggs in. Provide more than one box to
improve the chances of attracting a
nesting pair.

• Chickadees prefer their nest
  boxes set close to shrubs or bushes.
  They will not tolerate any other
  chickadees in the vicinity of their
  nest.

• Bluebirds may attempt a
  second nesting and would benefit
  from the chance to lay their next
  clutch in a second box.

• Wood Ducks prefer a nest box
  near (or standing in) water. The young
  leave the nest within 48 hours of
  hatching by climbing up from the floor
to the entrance hole and tumbling to
  the ground. Horizontal sawcuts or a
  piece of hardware cloth stapled to the
  inside wall between the floor and the
  entrance are essential for these
  species.

Source: Nest Boxes for Birds,
www.ec.gc.ca/cws-scf/hww-fap/
estbox/nestbx.html. Another
excellent publication that gives
diagrams of do-it-yourself bird
houses is Shelves Houses and
Feeders for Birds and Mammals,
North Central Regional Publication
338. It is available for $4 from the
extension office. For more specific
information about bluebird nesting,
contact Bluebirds across Nebraska;
P.O. Box 67157; Lincoln, NE
68506. (BPO)