

# Getting started with **BLUEBIRDS**



## *Protecting the places you cherish*

Over the years, land has been cleared for housing and industrial developments, shopping malls, highways, and cropland; many old trees have been cut down for firewood. Wooden fence posts that provided nesting cavities have now been replaced with metal posts. With modernization, the supply of natural nesting cavities for bluebirds and other native cavity nesters has been greatly reduced.

During the summer, bluebirds feed mainly on insects. In the winter, bluebirds depend on many kinds of wild berries for their food supply. However, the supply of wild berries has also decreased over the years. The few berries that remain are often stripped quickly by large flocks of starlings (an introduced species).

Even though the bluebird population has greatly decreased, the future can still be promising for them. The most important step we can take to help bring back the bluebird is to provide nesting sites by setting out a bluebird box or starting a bluebird trail. A bluebird trail

is a series of bluebird boxes placed along a prescribed route. In areas where nesting boxes have been put up in suitable habitat, bluebird populations are increasing. Bluebirding is a great environmental, hands-on project that people of all ages can enjoy. By following the instructions in this brochure, chances are good that you will be able to attract and enjoy bluebirds.

### **THE BLUEBIRD BOX**

A good bluebird box should be well ventilated, watertight, have drainage holes, be easy to monitor, and easy to clean. Cedar and redwood are ideal, although plywood and other types of wood can be used. Boxes can be painted or stained if a light color is used. Treated lumber should not be used because of its toxic content.

A bluebird box should never have a perch. Sparrows and wrens are attracted to perches. Boxes for Eastern Bluebirds should have a round entrance hole of 1 1/2" or an oval hole measuring 1 3/8" x 2 1/4".

## BUILDING THE BLUEBIRD BOX

All construction materials, with the exception of the backstrap should be 3/4" thick in order to provide good insulation. Dimensions as shown below are for boards or plywood 3/4" thick. All joints should be glued with waterproof glue and nailed with 1 and 3/4" galvanized or aluminum nails.

The entrance hole must be exactly 1 and 1/2" in diameter. Drainage holes and air vents are an important feature and should not be omitted. Provision should always be made for opening the nesting box easily for cleaning. The top may be attached to the front by either wood screw and washer or nail.

If a nesting box is painted, only a light colour exterior grade paint should be used to minimize the danger of overheating. Paint only the outside of the box, except for the top board which may be painted or varnished on both sides and all edges to prevent warping.

## MOUNTING THE NESTING BOX

The most important step for creating a safe nesting environment for bluebirds is to mount the nest box a smooth galvanized steel post. Coating the pole with grease will also help to keep predators off the box. Make sure the post is smooth, a rough surface enables



predators such as deer mice and weasels to gain access to the box. Hardware cloth placed under a box helps to prevent snake predation. Avoid mounting bluebird boxes on a fence line or on trees. Raccoons are known to walk fence lines and may find your nest boxes.

Bluebird boxes should be 80 to 100 meters apart (bluebirds are territorial and won't allow another pair within that distance) and at least that distance

from woodlots or bushy areas. Position the box so the entrance hole is facing in a southeastern direction. Most winds come from the south and the west, and the young birds benefit from sunshine early in the day.

## CHOOSING A LOCATION

The best habitat for bluebirds is a grassy open area with mature trees for hunting perches. Areas that are mowed throughout the nesting season provide easy insect hunting and enable the adults to remain close to the nesting box for protection from possible nest predators. Hayfields, large well kept lawns and pasture fields make great habitat.

