

Please Help Bluebirds and Other Native Birds Survive and Thrive: A House Sparrow Advisory

Dear Property Owner,

If you have a birdhouse in your yard, your good intentions in attempting to provide birds with a place to nest should be applauded. However, many people don't realize that by allowing a birdhouse to stand unmanaged, they are indirectly harming the very birds the house was meant to benefit, by providing a breeding ground for the worst enemy of bluebirds - the house sparrow.

The once common bluebird underwent a dramatic decline during the 1900's. A major cause was the introduction of the house (English) sparrow (*Passer domesticus*). The avian equivalent of pests like rats, gypsy moths and crabgrass, house sparrow populations exploded. They are harmful to native species such as bluebirds, purple martins, chickadees, and tree swallows. (If you're not sure what a house sparrow looks like, they can often be seen in the garden section of a Lowes/Home Depot, or around fast food restaurants.)



House sparrows are persistent, aggressive and destructive predators. They may destroy eggs and nestlings; and kill adult birds caught inside the box, sometimes building their own nest on top of the corpse. House sparrows will not only prevent native birds from nesting in your birdhouse, but they will also breed there. One pair of house sparrows could theoretically multiply into more than a thousand birds over a five year period. Soon house sparrows take over all available boxes. **It is better to have no box at all than to allow house sparrows to reproduce in one.**

Bluebirds rely on pre-existing nest sites like nestboxes. Please help native bird populations rebound in our area by taking steps to keep house sparrows and European starlings (another aggressive bird that was introduced) from breeding in any birdhouses on your property.

Because house sparrows and starlings are not native, and are considered nuisance species, they are not protected by federal law. House sparrow nests, eggs, young, and adults may be legally removed or destroyed. If you are not willing or are unable to do this, please consider taking the nestbox down altogether. If you want to leave the house up as a decoration, but don't have the time or desire to control this predator, please either plug the entrance holes, use a "fake" painted hole on decorative boxes, or remove the birdhouse floor.



One person indiscriminately putting out bird seed can also radically change neighborhood wildlife. Please do not feed birds bread, or seed that contains a lot of millet or cracked corn, as this attracts house sparrows. Thistle, safflower, and black oil sunflower seeds are enjoyed by many native birds, but are not preferred by house sparrows. Dumping food on the ground can attract rats.

If you would like more information on how to attract native birds or manage house sparrows, please contact your local bluebird society or see <http://www.sialis.org>. Thank you so much for helping reduce the population of house sparrows and starlings, and thereby enabling native birds to survive and thrive.

Rev.0.3, 03/01/06. Eastern bluebird photo by Wendell Long