

Golf Course Real Estate For Wildlife

A nest box program on your course can have many benefits for wildlife and golfers.

by RON DODSON

NESTING BOXES can be a rewarding component for managing wildlife on the golf course. Nest boxes also can be an important way to educate golfers about wildlife on the golf course and your efforts to promote various species in golf course management activities.

Some of the most common and delightful bird species are cavity nesters. Unfortunately, many golf course maintenance practices promote keeping trees trimmed, thinning out dead or dying trees, and planting new trees in which natural cavities rarely have a chance to develop. By placing artificial cavities (nesting boxes) around the course, you can usually entice birds such as wrens, chickadees, purple martins, bluebirds, screech owls, and kestrels to use the course for nesting. In addition, placing nesting shelves and wire mesh cones will encourage robins, phoebes, and mourning doves to do the same.

Nest Box Construction

Nest box construction doesn't have to be a complicated undertaking. As a matter of fact, the simplicity of most designs makes construction easy. Scrap wood is adequate for most nesting boxes; however, avoid using plywood because the wood separates after a few seasons.

Most nesting boxes do not need a perch. More often than not, a perch will attract curious and pesky sparrows to the entrance hole. The aggressive nature of this species is too competitive to allow more desirable species such as wrens and chickadees to take up residence. Make sure the side or front of the box is easily removed for ease in cleaning out sparrow nests and cleaning the box in preparation for spring. The color of the box is not very important, but natural tones are preferred for most species. Painting the boxes isn't really necessary—a stain or well-weathered wood will work just fine. For a few species, like the wood duck, it is essential to put sawdust,

wood chips, or other nesting material in the box.

Placing and Maintaining Nest Boxes

The types of habitat on your course are an important consideration in knowing what birds you can expect to attract. The accompanying chart provides information about the likelihood of attracting certain species depending on whether your golf course is located in a city, suburb, or rural setting. The chart also provides information about nest box construction dimensions and placement specifications for a variety of common species frequently found on golf courses.



Purple martins enjoy their new home. A properly constructed and positioned nest box stands an excellent chance of attracting the desired species.

Nest box placement is an important aspect of successfully attracting birds. Bluebirds prefer a low site in relatively open country, such as the sides of fairways. On the other hand, wrens and chickadees prefer heavier cover, such as a small woodlot area. Flickers, a rather common woodpecker, go for the high-rise style, so find a large tree where you can place the house 8 to 20 feet from the ground.

Placing nest boxes where you can easily watch is half the fun in attracting the birds to the boxes. Most golf course birds don't mind living in close proximity to people. You'll also have the chance to discourage wandering cats or other predators when the houses are located close by.

For older nest boxes, a spring house cleaning is usually in order. Soap and hot water are necessary for removing old droppings or mites. After nest boxes are cleaned, you may want to plug the entrance holes to keep out starlings or sparrows. When a desirable occupant is observed inspecting the house, the entrance hole can be opened. It's surprising that some birds almost have a sixth sense in knowing a human benefactor will soon open the house for nesting use.

The Benefits of a Nest Box Program

Golf course superintendents sometimes feel that a nest box program is a low priority and something they simply don't have time to do. What you need to remember is that it is a highly visible program. Not only can you frequently obtain help from members of the club, you also can encourage community involvement that serves as another source of good public relations.

A nest box program can serve as an educational and community service project for young people. Frequently, a phone call to a local scout troop, a local elementary, middle, or high school, or a 4-H club will provide you with the human resources you need to build and monitor the nest boxes.

A nest box program not only benefits the golf course aesthetics by encouraging more bird species, it also educates golfers about the efforts you're making for wildlife habitat enhancement. It helps develop positive relationships in the community and it can be used as an educational opportunity that may encourage others to follow your lead. Not the least important benefit is the personal enjoyment and satisfaction of being actively involved in attracting and observing wildlife on your golf course.

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NEST BOX BUILDING GUIDE

Species	House & Hole Dimensions	Placements	Colors	Likelihood			Control		Special Notes
				Urban	Suburb	Rural	Sparrow	Starling	
House Wren	4" x 4" or 4" x 6" base x 8" high. Hole 1" centered 6" above floor.	Post 5' - 10' high or can be hung in tree. 60% sun.	White, earth tones	Good	Excellent	Excellent			Easiest to attract of all native birds.
Chickadee	4" x 4" or 5" x 5" base x 8" high. Hole 1½" centered 6" above floor.	Post 4' - 8' high. 40% - 60% sun.	Earth tones	Good	Good	Excellent			Easier to attract than formerly thought. Needs large tree in area.
Tree Swallow	5" x 5" base x 6" high. Hole 1½" centered 4" above floor.	Post 5' - 8' high in open area. 50% - 100% sun.	Earth tones, gray	Poor to fair	Fair to good	Good to excellent	●		Proximity to lake or pond (within 2 miles) a must! Rural areas.
Violet-green Swallow	5" x 5" base x 6" high. Hole 1½" centered 4" above floor.	Post 5' - 8' high in open area. 50% - 100% sun.	Earth tones, gray	Poor to fair	Fair to good	Good to excellent	●		A western bird exclusively. Suburbs.
Purple Martin	Multiple compartments 6" x 6" x 6". Hole 2½" with base of hole 2¼" from floor.	Post 15' - 20' high in open.	White			Fair to excellent	●	■	Open yard with no tall trees is best. Proximity to water is important.
House Finch	6" x 6" x 6". Hole 2".	Post 8' - 12' high. 40% - 60% shade.	Earth tones	Fair	Fair	Fair	●	■	A western bird, common in some eastern areas. Suburbs.
Bluebird	5" x 5" base x 8" high. Hole 1½" centered 6" above floor.	Post 3' - 5' high in open. Sunny.	Earth tones	Poor	Fair	Excellent	●		Likes open area, especially facing a field. Rural areas.
Tufted Titmouse	4" x 4" base x 8" high. Hole 1¼".	Post 4' - 10' high. Sun or shade.	Earth tones	Fair	Fair to good	Excellent	●		Prefers to be near or in wooded area.
Flicker	7" x 7" base x 18" high. Hole 2½" centered 14" above floor.	Post 8' - 20' high.	Earth tones	Fair	Good	Good	●	■	Needs 4" sawdust for nesting.
Nuthatch	4" x 4" base x 10" high. Hole 1¼" centered 7½" above floor.	Post 12' - 25' high on tree limb.	Likes a natural cavity	Poor	Poor	Fair	●		Should be covered with bark. Rural areas.
Downy Woodpecker	4" x 4" base x 10" high. Hole 1¼" centered 7½" above floor.	Post 12' - 25' high on tree limb.	Likes a natural cavity	Poor	Poor	Poor	●		Prefers own excavations. Needs sawdust for nesting material. Rural areas.
Hairy Woodpecker	6" x 6" base x 15" high. Hole 1½" centered 7½" above floor.	Post 12' - 25' high on tree limb.	Likes a natural cavity	Poor	Poor	Poor	●		Should be covered with bark. Rural areas.
Crested Flycatcher	6" x 6" base x 15" high. Hole 2" centered 6" - 8" from floor.	8' - 20' high on post or tree limb. Shade preferred.	Simulate woodpecker cavity	Poor	Poor	Fair	●	■	Needs secluded, private spot. Should be covered with bark. Rural areas.
Red-headed Woodpecker	6" x 6" base x 15" high. Hole 2" centered 6" - 8" from floor.	8' - 20' high on post or tree limb. Shade preferred.	Simulate woodpecker cavity	Poor	Fair	Fair	●		Needs sawdust for nesting material.
Wood Duck	10" x 10" base x 24" high. Hole should be an ellipse 4" wide x 3" high, centered 20" above floor, excluding most raccoons.	On post 2' - 5' over water or on tree, 12' - 40' high.	Earth tones	Poor	Poor	Good		■	Shavings or sawdust 3" - 4" needed for nesting if wetlands or lake within ¼ mile, wood duck will explore most nearby habitat.
Sparrow Hawk (Kestrel)	10" x 10" base x 24" high. Hole should be an ellipse 4" wide x 3" high, centered 20" above floor, excluding most raccoons.	On post 2' - 5' over water or on tree, 12' - 40' high.	Earth tones	Poor	Poor	Fair		■	Open approach needed. Box should be on edge of woodlot or in isolated tree.
Screech Owl	10" x 10" base x 24" high. Hole should be an ellipse 4" wide x 3" high, centered 20" above floor, excluding most raccoons.	On post 2' - 5' over water or on tree, 12' - 40' high.	Earth tones	Poor	Poor	Fair		■	Prefers open woods or edge of woodlots.
Robin	6" x 6" base x 8" high. Roof required for rain protection.	On side of building or on arbor.	Earth tones, wood	Fair	Fair	Fair			Use is irregular.
Barn Swallow	6" x 6" base x 8" high. Roof required for rain protection.	On side of building or on arbor.	Earth tones, wood	Poor	Fair	Excellent			Prefers open country.
Phoebe	6" x 6" base x 8" high. Roof required for rain protection.	On side of building or on arbor.	Earth tones, wood	Poor	Fair	Fair			Likes water best.