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SHOP AT TOROMARK

Nest-boxes serve real purpose

By ART BRIGGS-JUDE

High on the list of priorities to anyone interested in attracting more wildlife to their property, especially birds, is the placement of suitable nest-boxes.

Of the 45 or so species of birds known to use some sort of nesting device in Canada one can reasonably expect up to half that number to do so in this part of the country.

What governs the acceptance rate and variety of visitors in your particular location are the other factors that form the basic needs of any wildlife — food, water, and natural cover.

And as this so-called habitat requirement differs from one kind of bird to another, you would need a wide variety of landscapes to accommodate all the possibilities.

If, for example, your property contains lawns, or borders on open fields, don't expect to attract wood ducks there.

Similarly, a residence set in a surrounding of mature woodlands is not likely to entice a barn swallow to nest nearby.

Before you build a number of nest-boxes and put them where you think they might be acceptable, walk around your property and make a rough diagram marking in the fence lines, big trees, any creeks or ponds, and outbuildings.

Armed with this illustration, you can now construct not only the correct type of nesting device, but also the right number.

A good method of ensuring a place for bluebirds is to mount nest-boxes for these birds in pairs, 10 to 15 feet apart. Then move down the line fence for a hundred yards and erect another pair.

In this way both the tree swallows and the bluebirds will use only the alternative nesting units.

Over and above territorial rights, the various kinds of birds have individual nesting requirements that likewise must be taken into consideration.

Fortunately, the standard bluebird nest-box has the right dimensions and hole size to accommodate not only tree swallows, but house wrens, chickadees, nuthatches, and house finches. To include larger birds such as hairy woodpeckers, flickers, and crested flycatchers, one only has to increase the overall measurements. The floor size now becomes 6x6, the depth 15 and the hole size 2½ (all in inches).

Keep in mind that flickers and woodpeckers, like the colorful wood ducks, need a couple of inches of wood shavings in the bottom for nesting.

Again many of the larger cavity nesting birds, such as the sparrow hawk (kestrel), screech owl, and hooded merganser find the regular wood duck nest-box suit their requirements? One only has to erect these in the right location for the specific birds to get the desired results.

Incidentally, squirrels can be pests or pests, depending on your inclinations. Wrapping the mounting post with tin will discourage them and raccoon predators.

For birds like robins, phoebes, and barn swallows that are readily attracted about our yards, a simple shelf fastened under the eaves of the garage or other outbuilding is all that is needed.

Mount it about 5 or 6 inches below the overhang to allow the birds room on which to build their nest.

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