

# ATTRACTING BLUEBIRDS

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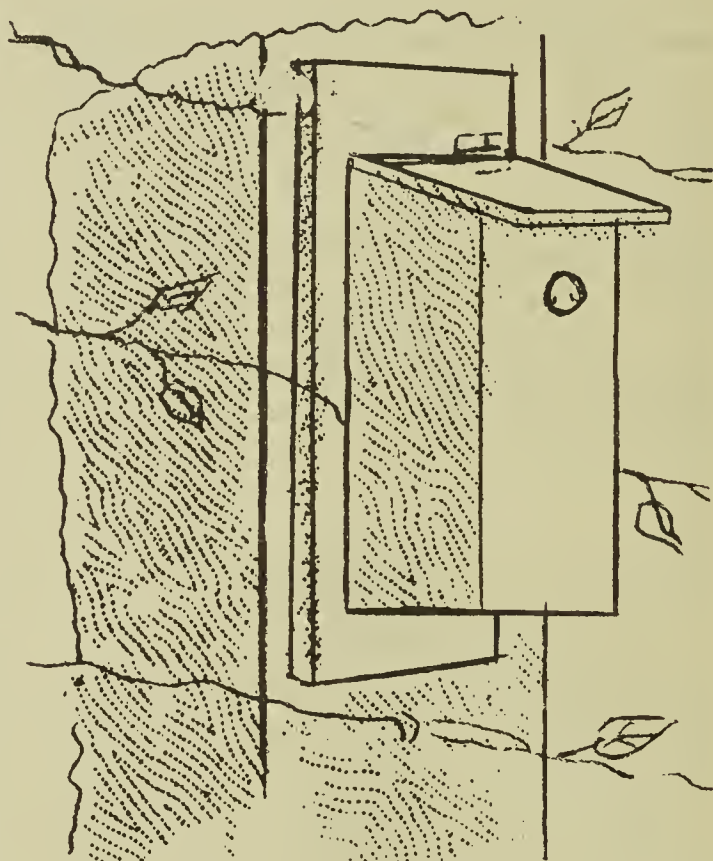
When I was a boy in Illinois, every orchard, every rail fence, had its bluebird family. When I returned from the University of Illinois in 1910—bluebirds were gone. The orchards had manicured limbs; steel posts and iron fences had displaced rail fences. The bluebird had no welcome—no place to nest.

While walking down a creek, I discovered a bluebird using the nesting hole of a Downy Woodpecker in a willow tree. I took the hole and cavity measurements and duplicated them in an "up and down" type of box. I placed twenty-five such boxes along a country road and had remarkable success—**every box had a nest**, and one was actually used four times in a single season—though not by the same female each time. The following year we put up a second route of 68 boxes, and since then we have added new routes nearly every year. Now I have more than 1,000 units posted along the highways leading into Quincy.

## A Simple Bluebird Box

Experimentation with many types of Bluebird boxes has proved the following simple box very effective. It is particularly attractive to birds when properly placed.

There are but six pieces necessary for this box. The material should be of pine, cypress, fir, or some other soft lumber, an inch in thickness. The sides are composed of two pieces of 1x4, 9½ inches long with a diagonal cut to 9 inches. This will give sufficient fall for rain or water. The bottom is a piece 3¼x3¼ while the roof may have a slight overhang. Notice in the drawing that the upper edge of the roof is cut on an angle to fit flush with the backboard. The front piece should be 3¼ inches wide and 9 inches long. About 1¼ inches from the top a hole 1¾ inches in diameter should be cut. The backboard can be of almost any size but should be long enough to give ample space above or below for nailing. A pair of strips one inch square and six inches long nailed to the rear of the backboard will give an air space, thus preventing decay and destruc-



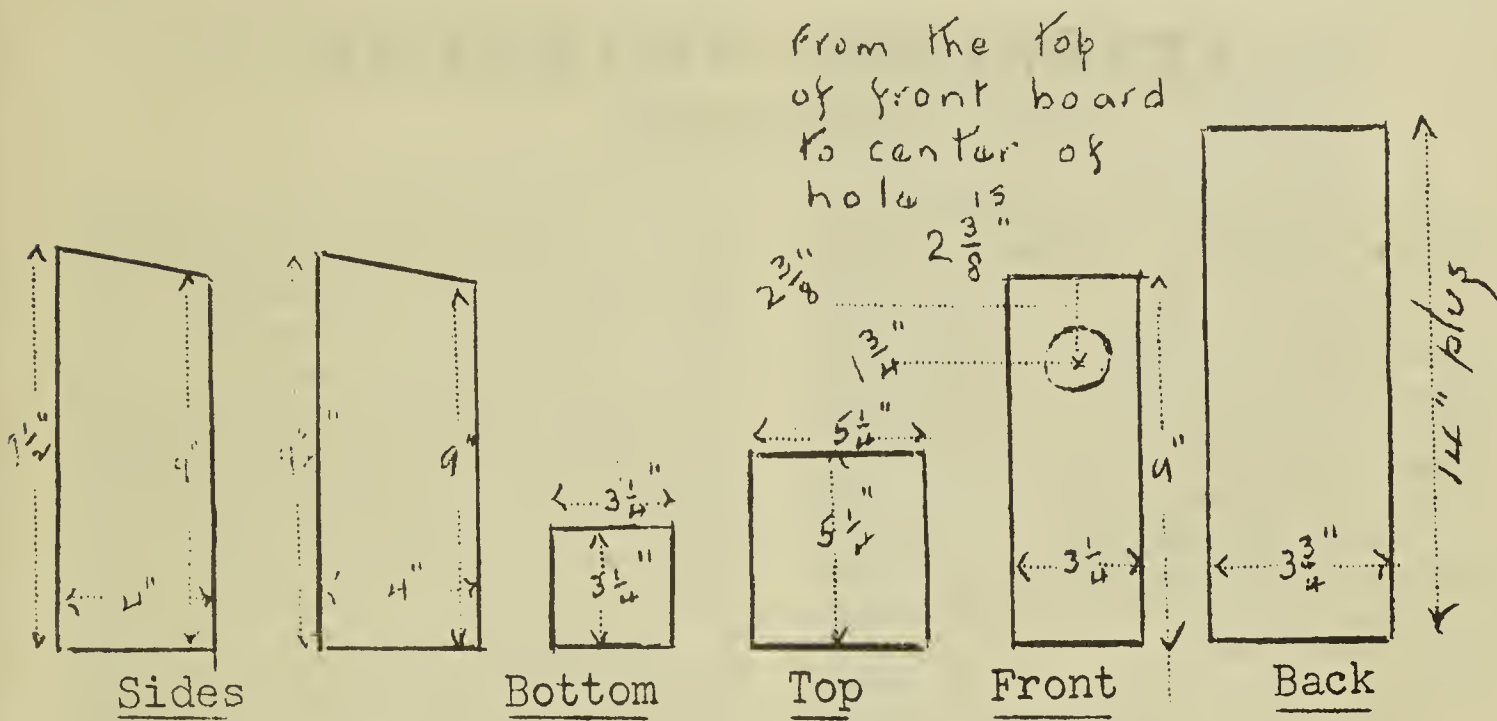
tion from termites. This box should be constructed with inside dimensions at least 3¼x3¼. A slightly larger interior is acceptable.

The thickness of material used will cause a slight variation in the size of the box.

The top should be attached to the backboard by a small hinge. This allows the study of the nesting activities and makes the banding of the immature birds possible. Ventilation holes ½ inch in diameter should be drilled in the bottom and sides.

After the box has been constructed, it is well to paint it, using some neutral color, such as dirty brown or blue gray.

The proper placing of these boxes is of the utmost importance. The best results are obtained if the box is erected not over three or four feet above the ground and preferably nailed to a solid fence post, facing the south or southeast. I suggest placing the box some distance from the farm house or barnyard to avoid attracting Sparrows and Starlings, which prefer a site close to human habitation. Bluebirds do not care for neighbors, human or feathered.



They normally complete their nests before the House Wrens make their appearance, thus avoiding this competition. You will be more successful if you employ a fence post as your nest site rather than a tree.

The erection of Bluebird boxes is a fine project for High School Biology classes; boy and girl scouts; 4-H club members; and Vacation Bible Schools, as it teaches a valuable lesson in conservation and bird study.

## HERONS

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On July 1st, we had an interesting experience in visiting a Heronry in Manitoba. As we approached the place, we heard a lot of chattering by the birds, then hidden by the foliage of the trees. Coming close we found an area of several hundred square yards on which large maple trees were growing with a majority of the trees spreading and leaning over. Some of the trees contained several nests ranging in size from about ten inches across to some almost three feet across. The smaller nests were mostly lower down and were occupied by the Black Crowned Night Herons, while the larger nests higher up, housed the Great Blue Herons. There were possibly fifty of the Black Crowned Night Herons and twenty or more of the Great Blue Herons. The families ranged all the way from eggs to almost full grown young, about ready to try their wings.

All the nests were built of dry sticks. The larger nests had been built on, year after year, and some were now about eighteen inches

deep. The undergrowth was mostly nettles and wood violets. Under each large nest was a circle, some seven feet in diameter, where nothing grew, owing to the volume of droppings from the nest. Beyond this was a circle of white where the nettles were splashed with lime from the droppings. Many of the sloping tree trunks and the branches close to the nest were worn smooth by the birds' feet.

The noisy clamour of the birds reminded one of a large flock of barnyard fowl being disturbed. There was a great confusion of birds leaving nests and returning to nests, as we went along. About seven or eight Great Blue Herons soared above at one time. We tried taking pictures, but it was difficult to get close to the adults. We might spot three or four almost full grown Blue Herons standing on their long legs towering high above their nests, but on having approached them, they sunk into their nests and refused to pose for a picture. A few nearly full

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