

Nest boxes support beneficial avian predators on farms

Cavity nesting birds can successfully nest on farms with specially designed and properly maintained nest box networks.

Typically, these birds nest in hollowed cavities of old trees, but many old trees are removed to make room for development or because they are hazardous to humans. Often times invasive species, like European Starlings, can outcompete native birds for the limited natural nest sites that are available.

Some cavity nesting birds that use nest boxes on farms are Barn Owls, American Kestrels, Western Bluebirds, and Tree Swallows.

These birds provide natural pest control as they are predators of common agricultural pests including many rodents, birds, and insects.

Barn Owls

Diet: Specialize on small rodents such as, gophers, voles, mice, and rats. Families consume 3-4,000 rodents a year! Occasionally eat songbirds and insects.

Placement: Open areas, such as grasslands, vineyards, or edge of orchards. Keep away from busy roads. Mount on a pole at least 10 feet high. Spacing can be relatively close, 3-500 yards apart. Barn Owls are less territorial and may tolerate some human activity or noise in daytime.

Maintenance: August through November. Should not be cleaned out in winter, as nesting can start early some years. Inspect and repair wear and tear, clear overfilled debris (smaller nest boxes can fill up quickly), leave small layer of debris or replace with wood shavings. Wear a mask.



30 days incubation + 60 days
nestling development



American Kestrels



Diet: Broad diet including small rodents, songbirds, and reptiles. Insects such as crickets, grasshoppers, mantis, beetles, moths, and flies.

Placement: Open areas, such as grasslands or vineyards, and away from any roads or areas with regular human activity. Mount on a pole at least 10 feet high. Space out ½ mile apart. Kestrels are secretive and territorial at the nest. 3 inch opening.

Maintenance: Late summer through early winter. Inspect and repair wear and tear, clear overfilled debris, leave small layer of debris or replace with wood shavings. This is important for proper egg and nestling development! Wear a mask if needed.



30 days incubation + 30 days nestling development

Western Bluebirds & Tree Swallows

Diet: Insects! Bluebirds forage for insects by perch hunting or by gleaning bugs off plants. Swallows fly in the air with their mouths open and have specialized feathers to direct bugs into their mouths.

Placement: Edge of riparian areas, woodlands, orchards, open areas such as grasslands, farm fields, or vineyards. Mount on poles at least 5 feet high, 50-100 yards apart. 1.5 inch diameter opening.

Maintenance: Fall and winter months. Inspect and repair wear and tear, remove all nesting material and scrape out debris. Songbirds build their own nests each year. Wear a mask if needed.

Bluebird



Swallow



Approximately 2 weeks incubation + 2-3 weeks nestling development. A successful nest will be left with a lot of poop (see above!)