



Congratulations! You have a nest box!

But those aren't bluebirds!

## Who's in My Nest Box?

The good: Bluebirds  
 Chickadees  
 House Wrens  
 Nuthatches  
 Tree Swallows

The bad: Ants  
 Blowflies  
 Cow Birds  
 House Sparrows  
 Wasps

**Your bluebird box** was meant to invite bluebirds to your property, but suddenly you're seeing other birds checking it out, perhaps moving in. Don't be too hasty to remove other birds! You may be breaking the law! Several other cavity nesters/songbirds will also find your nest box inviting. Let's find out who to welcome and who should "get the boot"!

### THE GOOD:

**Bluebirds**, of course. Check out the companion article "Attracting Bluebirds". You will recognize bluebirds by their blue backs, orange chests and white bellies.

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Bluebird nests are neatly made of all grass and sometimes all pine needles if the nest box is near pines. Their eggs are sky blue, somewhat smaller and lighter than robin eggs. They may be white.



**Chickadees** are those sweet-looking little birds we see all year round. Males and females look alike. During warm weather, they will happily nest in your bluebird box.

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Chickadee nests are short and made of grasses, animal hair and moss. First-year birds may lay the eggs right by the door, so always open your box slowly and carefully. You may move the eggs toward the center of the nest. Birds cannot smell, so your scent will **not** keep them from returning to the nest. Chickadee eggs are quite small. They are white with brown to reddish-brown specks.



**Tree Swallow** males and females look much the same. They have blue-black backs and white chests and bellies. > > > > > > > > > > > > > > > >

As you approach a box with tree swallows, one or more may swoop down to scare you away. They will not strike you if you stay calm and talk quietly to them. If you are monitoring your boxes for an organization like BRAW (Bluebird Restoration Association of WI), look quickly and move away to fill out the paperwork.



Tree swallow nests are made of coarser grass and straw, then lined with feathers when the white eggs are laid. The feathers may be from local chickens.





**House Wrens** also have identical males and females. You can recognize them by their perky upswept tails and melodious songs.

The nest is large and made of twigs, sometimes twigs with thorns. If you are monitoring your boxes for an organization like BRAW, you'll want to be careful of the thorns. Deep inside the twigs toward the bottom of the box will be a small grass nest in active boxes. Males come early, setting up multiple nests for prospective females. Females select only one box. If your

box with twigs does **not** have a grass nest after two weeks of checking, it is a "dummy" box. You may remove the twigs to a place far from the nest box. Dropping the twigs below the box will attract raccoons and other animals who may later rob the nests. Eggs are quite small and reddish.



**Bluebirds, chickadees, tree swallows, and wrens are all protected song-birds. Their nests can only be removed from boxes after eggs hatch. "Dummy" wren nests may be removed after 3 weeks with no grass nest inside at the bottom of the twigs.**

**THE BAD:**

**Ants** may crawl up a nest box pole, and **wasps** may build a nest in your nest box. Control is the same for both. Carefully remove all invaders you see. **Do not use insect spray.** Brush ants out and off the pole. Remove the wasp nest in early morning or after dark when wasps are less active. Then, rub the entire nest box with a bar of Ivory soap, inside and out. Rub the pole as much as possible. Put down **diatomaceous earth** at the bottom of the pole and for a distance around it for ant prevention.



**Blowflies** suck blood from bird nestlings, causing anemia. Unless the infestation is severe, or nestlings are stressed (under-fed, wet nest, etc.), they usually don't kill nestlings. Brush out any you see under the nest. You might consider a nest change (see article in Resources). Keep nest boxes dry and clean them out after each fledge as prevention.

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**House Sparrows** are non-native birds **not** protected by law. If you find house sparrow nests, you may remove them and destroy the eggs. House sparrows will kill the other songbirds listed in this brochure and the nestlings. ©Van Ert Universal Sparrow Traps are useful to capture adult sparrows for removal.

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House sparrow nests are made of grass, straw, paper, plastic, feathers, and wrappers and fill the entire box. The eggs are white with brown speckles.



**The Brown-headed Cowbird** is a brood parasite. It lays its eggs in nests of other species. The foster parents unknowingly raise the young cowbirds, starving their own offspring.



The brown speckled eggs should be removed to save the nestlings. Opinions differ on such removal, though. Some sources say the cowbird will kill the other young if its eggs are removed from the nest. This author has successfully removed the eggs with no ill effect to the remaining eggs or nestlings on several occasions.

- Resources:
- [Blowflies in the Nestbox - Sialis.org www.sialis.org/blowflies.htm](http://www.sialis.org/blowflies.htm)
  - Van Ert Universal Sparrow Traps [www.vanerttraps.com](http://www.vanerttraps.com)
  - Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin [www.braw.org](http://www.braw.org)
  - [Cornell Lab of Ornithology - Official Site www.birds.cornell.edu](http://www.birds.cornell.edu)
  - Cowbird eggs and young in nestboxes - Sialis.org [www.sialis.org/cowbirds.htm](http://www.sialis.org/cowbirds.htm)



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