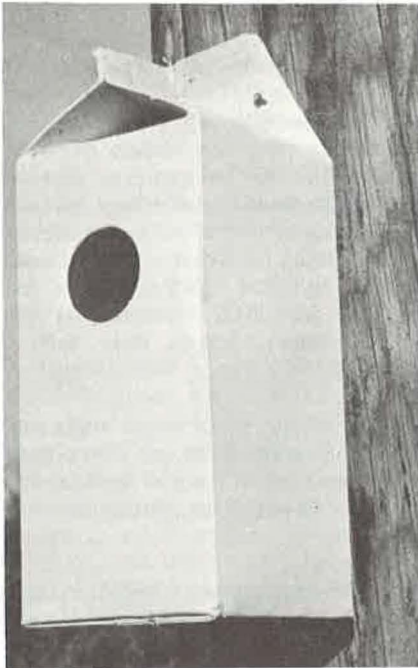


TOWARD A BETTER BLUEBIRD HOUSE

By Wayne H. Davis

I have been experimenting with various designs of bird boxes trying to build one that Bluebirds will use but that English Sparrows will not. I have been disappointed when I found that even the boxes I had built with a 3" x 3" inside diameter and placed four feet above the ground in a Minnesota pasture were taken over by these pests. This year I have been trying several radical designs, some of which show promise. However, I have also come up with success with a remarkably simple and inexpensive box which I think may be of interest to EBBA News readers. A painted half-gallon milk carton makes an ideal Bluebird house! The birds seem to choose these in preference to my wooden boxes, and the English Sparrows do not seem to be interested in them. Apparently they are too open or lighted inside, due to the thin paper wall, to be satisfactory for the English Sparrows.



Unpainted cartons are readily used by the Bluebirds, but they weather quickly and are displeasing to the eye. However, a coat of barn paint or house paint makes a carton an attractive house which weathers excellently. Cartons which have weathered two Minnesota winters are in as good shape as my wooden boxes. The milk cartons have a hard plastic coat to which paint sticks well; there is no flaking or peeling.

I nail my boxes to a tree or post as shown in the picture. If one wants to band the young, the nails should be toed in from the sides instead of through the top flaps. The top can be opened and then re-closed with paper clips.

Last summer I had a dozen boxes on a Minnesota farm and raised more than a brood per box. The only one in Bluebird habitat that was not used by this species produced a brood of Tree Swallows. One box that was in the woods was used by House Wrens.

I find that the best site for these boxes is on a tree trunk. I place them about six feet above the ground, as high as I can easily put them and easily check the contents. Of course the tree must be free of lower branches, so that the house is in the open, well away from the foliage. I find fence posts less satisfactory because cattle and horses

molest the boxes and predation seems more frequent at lower sites.

If you start now you can have a large collection of cartons by March. Here is an opportunity for people with no carpentry skill to run a productive line of Bluebird houses, at a cost of practically nothing.

Dept. of Zoology, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Ky. 40506



RETURNS OF TRANSIENTS: It is well known that nearly all station re-
 A REQUEST FOR INFORMATION turns pertain either to species which breed
 near the banding station or to species which
 winter there. With the exception of large birds such as hawks and water-
 fowl, returns of species which occur at the banding station only on spring
 or fall migration are extremely rare. I know of only one published record
 of such a return of a transient species in North America: Kathleen S. An-
 derson and Herbert K. Maxfield (Bird-Banding, 38: 218-233) recaptured two
 Blackpoll Warblers in September 1963 in Raynham, Mass., which they had
 banded at the same place in September, 1962.

I have recently asked a number of banders whether they have any com-
 parable records: the only two others which have reported to me also refer
 to Blackpoll Warblers in Massachusetts. However, I have not yet searched
 thoroughly for other published records, and other banders probably have
 unpublished records.

I should like to request all EBBA members to check their banding re-
 cords, and to send me any records they have of returns of species (other
 than hawks and waterfowl) which are known only as transients in the area
 of the banding station. All records received will be published in a list
 in a later issue of EBBA News, with full acknowledgments to the banders.
 The information required is the date and year of banding, the date and
 year of recapture, and the nearest place where the species regularly
 breeds or winters. Negative records from banding stations which have
 handled large numbers of transients in two or more years will also be of
 great value in defining exactly how rare this phenomenon is.

Please send all records to: Ian C.T. Nisbet, c/o Massachusetts
 Audubon Society, South Great Road, Lincoln, Mass. 01773.