How To Make An Inexpensive Raccoon/Predator Baffle For Nest Box Poles

By Kurt Hagemeister

As bluebirders, we all know the critical importance of keeping our nesting boxes safe from climbing predators. This can be a challenge in areas with lots of snakes, raccoons, opossums, and various rodents. Waxing the pole can be effective – in the short run. But often it will war off over time or simply be ineffective against a persistent and strong raccoon.

The metal stove pipe-type predator baffle has proven to be very effective in most areas of the country. It is usually a 6 to 8 inch diameter cylinder made of galvanized sheetmetal with a top that has a mounting collar of some sort to hold it firmly on the pole just below the nest box. This baffle works because most raccoons and mammals that can shimmy up the pole can not get their legs around the cylinder. Also, they can't dig their claws into the metal to get a grip to be able to climb over it either. Finally, the solid metal top with no gaps deters snakes and smaller animals from climbing up inside the baffle to get past it.

On big challenge for bluebirders is to be able to put these baffles on all their nest box poles at an affordable cost. To buy a commercially made baffle can cost upwards of $40 or more. Below is a step by step procedure for making one for around $15-$18 from material you can purchase at a home center or hardware store that is just as good as the commercially made baffle. And it isn't very hard to make either.

Tools Required:

Power drill/driver, medium Phillips screwdriver, a 1" hole saw bit capable of cutting through metal, 5/32" drill bit, a measuring tape, possibly a pair of tin snips.

*(**NOTE:** The above tools and instructions below assume you are mounting this baffle to a ½" electrical conduit pole. If you are using a thicker pole, use a larger diameter hole saw that matches as closely as possible to the outside diameter of the pole. And then you might need a slightly larger conduit clamp connector.)*

Materials:

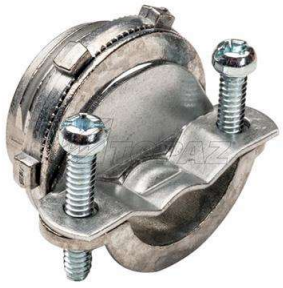
1 24" long, 6" diameter galvanized steel stove pipe

1 stove pipe cap, 6" diameter

1 ¾ galvanized electrical conduit clamp connector

4-5 ½" #8 Hex sheet metal screws

(NOTE: substitute 7" or 8" diameter to the first two items if you want a larger baffle that can be even more effective. But this will add $4-$6 to the cost)



¾" conduit clamp connector

Steps:

1. Using the measuring tape, find the center of the stove pipe cap and mark it with a pencil.
2. Drill a pilot hole in the center. Then, use the 1" hole saw to cut the hole. If you're using tin snips to cut the hole, you'll likely need to make a larger pilot hole.
3. Join the stove pipe section together along the pre-formed, locking seam. Then, insert the stove pipe cap into the non-crimped end of the stove pipe section. The top of the cap should be almost flush with the top of the stove pipe.
4. Secure both pieces together with the sheet metal screws installed equidistantly around the top.

5. Now you're ready to install the baffle on the pole. Put the conduit clamp connector on the pole, threaded end facing up, and locate it so the top of the baffle will be about a few inches below the bottom edge of the nest box. Tighten the 2 screws on the clamp connector so that it's level and tight on the pole.
6. Lower the baffle over the top of the pole so that the threaded part of the conduit clamp connector goes through the hole in the top. You may have to rotate the baffle to "screw" it onto the collar. The baffle should rest on the collar with some sideways movement.

The baffle will flop around some on top of the clamp connector collar. This is what you want, as it makes it harder for animals to hang onto the baffle as it moves sideways back and forth. If it moves so much it hits the pole, and you don't want it to make noise, you can always stuff some steel wool or packing material up around the top of the baffle to cushion it. Also, if you want the baffle to stand out less in your landscape, you can always paint it and the pole black with an exterior, rust-protecting paint like Rustoleum.

CAVEATS: As stated above. The 6" diameter baffle is effective against most climbing predators. However, large, strong raccoons or big snakes can get past them sometimes. **So, this is another reason for diligent monitoring of all your nest boxes**. If you find some evidence of predation, you may need to take further steps by replacing the baffle with a larger diameter one (7" or 8") , or using a longer than 24" baffle. In particular, large rat snakes might get past a 24" long baffle, but increasing the length to 36" or more should stop them.