



How To Monitor Bluebird Nest Boxes by Kurt Hagemeister

WHAT is monitoring?

- The periodic (once or twice a week) checking inside each nest box to determine nesting activity (if any) and to try and solve any problems if present.
- Involves visiting the nest box, opening it, observing findings, and recording results.

WHY monitor?

- Responsibility for native birds
- Productivity: Monitored boxes > un-monitored boxes
- Removing House Sparrows (HOSP)
- Better management in future seasons
- Learning

HOW do you monitor a nest box?

1. Gather your tools: putty knife, gloves, cell phone/camera, pliers, non-toxic insecticide, breathing mask (if you have respiratory issues).
2. Walk out toward the box, making soft sounds on the way.
3. Tap on the front of the box a few times, then open.
4. Note type of nest, any eggs, any young, etc. If you find:
 - **Young:** Try to “age” them with the help of the nest box growth chart from NABS.
 - **A HOSP nest:** Remove it. Dispose of it some distance away.
 - **A wasp nest:** Leave the box open and come back later to remove the nest at dusk or in early a.m., when it’s cooler.
5. Record your results.
6. Close up the box and move away briskly.

Timing: Monitor at least once a week; ideally twice. Do not check the box every day or multiple times a day, which stresses the birds.

Deterring House Sparrows

Passive control:

- Remove their nests from the box until they stop re-building them.
- Leave the nest box open for several days. They may move on to another site.
- Locate the nest box in spaces away from all buildings and thick cover.
- Use monofilament line on the box front or suspend it in front of the entrance hole.
- Suspend feeding birds, especially with cheaper grains.

- Use smaller cavity boxes, like Gilbertson PVC.
- Put up a Sparrow Spooker or Chaser on top of the box AFTER eggs are laid.
- Plug up all openings or cavities in the sides of your house such as under eaves.
- Refer to Lynn Ward’s materials on HOSP control.

Active control:

- Remove and destroy their eggs.
- Trap them with in-box traps. (**Note:** House Sparrows are non-native birds and NOT protected by state or federal law.)
- Shoot them.

TAKEAWAY: Keep HOSP from nesting by any means possible. Trapping and euthanizing are most effective. If you are not able to remove HOSP from your boxes, **take down the boxes.**

Data Collection

- Helps you track which boxes are successful and record factors affecting nesting success
- Offers the opportunity to contribute to citizen science by submitting data to the MBS or to Cornell’s Nest Watch program (website below) weekly and at end of season

Resources

- MBS website: Information and tips on monitoring:
<https://michiganbluebirds.org/nest-boxes/monitoring-forms>
- Find your local MBS County Coordinator: www.michiganbluebirds.org/contact
- NABS Monitoring Handout with daily nestling growth chart: Pick one up today!
- Cornell Nest Watch online data collection: <https://nestwatch.org/>

Notes
