



[Dorene is the author of the widely read, highly regarded book, Bluebirds in the Upper Midwest that has been renamed, Bluebird Trails. Bluebird Trails, can be purchased

Says Gilbertson box ignored by sparrows; mounting system defeats raccoons

I feel compelled to write a note regarding the last issue of Wisconsin Bluebird (which I always enjoy and learn something from). The Minnesota Bluebird Recovery Program now sends out plans for the Gilbertson PVC box as well as the Peterson box in all the new information packets because we feel after six years of testing that the PVC box equals any bluebird box available.

I personally have about six different kinds on my trails, including the Hill Lake and the Herman Olson. I first used Steve's PVC five years ago after house sparrows mutilated bluebird babies nine days old, in both the first and second broods of bluebirds near a farm. The year I put up the pair of PVCs a bluebird selected it and laid six white eggs. The sparrows ignored the PVCs and flew some distance to try the next pair, of Peterson type. That same bluebird returned (laying white eggs) the next three years and raised young successfully from the same PVC box. Those years included one of severe heat and one of very cold prolonged rains in June-July, years in which I lost young to weather in other wooden boxes. I have used PVCs scattered throughout my trails and in Lake Maria State Park ever since, with successful broods of bluebirds, tree swallows and, unfortunately in some cases, wrens.

But the reason I write is because of your concern about raccoon predation. That amazes me! The PVC box mounted as recommended on conduit over rebar (reinforcing rod) is the least predator-prone box of any in current use today. I can't imagine a better mounting to deter raccoons. Though Steve makes doubly sure by sanding with steel wool, and then putting on some carnauba wax, I have never taken that extra precaution and have had no raccoon predation on my PVCs, even when they got into nearby wooden boxes mounted on tin-wrapped wooden posts and through, in two instances, the Noel guards.

I cannot testify about blowfly larvae problems in the PVCs because for some reason, I have never had any in them. I don't really know why. I do find the PVCs very easy to manage when I am banding bluebird nestlings.

In summary, I do not feel that raccoon predation could ever be a problem with properly mounted PVC boxes.--Dorene H. Scriven, Minneapolis, MN

More on the Gilbertson nest box

I have purchased over 250 Gilbertson nest box systems from Steve Gilbertson. I have installed over 750 bluebird houses (Peterson and Gilbertson) during the last four years and monitor the majority of them myself, with associates monitoring the remainder. The first 150 Gilbertson boxes were set up in the summer of 1992, with 50 more added during each of the last two summers. I have fledged over 1,200 bluebirds and 2,000 tree swallow. The hatching and fledgling success rate of the two boxes is comparable, except predation by raccoon.

If I wax the electrical conduit post as Steve suggests (Sialia, Gilbertson, Autumn 1993), I have yet to have the Gilbertson box predated by raccoon. During the summer of 1994, I did have Gilbertson nest boxes predated by raccoon only because I hadn't waxed those posts in two years.

Also, in the last three years, I have had mice in only two Gilbertson houses and they were paired boxes (a Super Mouse!). I don't recall having ants and have had wasps in only two of the Gilbertson houses.

In my opinion, the Gilbertson box is equal to the Peterson box as far as nesting acceptance is concerned, but the Gilbertson post (consisting of a five-foot reinforcing rod support) and a waxed electrical conduit (mounting pipe) makes it superior. In 1992 with 150 Gilbertson boxes and in 1993 with 200 Gilbertson boxes I had absolutely no raccoon predation.

I will donate five Gilbertson nest boxes to four (BRAW) county coordinators (20 boxes total) who can meet me between Hudson and Eau Claire before April 1, 1995 if they will promise to give them a fair try.--Craig Andresen, 2013 Walnut Avenue, New Brighton, MN 55112, telephone 612/636-3462

Likes hinged roof on tree branch box

Some time ago in Sialia, the publication of the North American Bluebird Society, it was advised to install a piano hinged top (on the Zuern tree branch bluebird nest box) along with a hook-and-screw eye roof lock. This I did and it became the easiest box to observe, monitor and clean. It is so simple an improvement and inexpensive for the volume builder. In my case, I have been given discounted prices when buying 100 or more hinges, hooks and eyes at one time.