

House Wrens and Carolina Wrens

House Wren

Natural History

House Wrens live in forests with thick underbrush, forest edges, and clearings like backyards that contain trees or tall shrubs. They hunt in brushy areas. House Wrens will destroy eggs of other cavity nesters, so place the box at least 100' away from other nest boxes. Males will make mock nests inside all the boxes available in a given territory, and the female then chooses the one to use.

Nesting Habitat

Nests are generally made of twigs and hold 6 to 8 finely speckled eggs. Clean out the nest box after the young have fledged, and the birds may choose to raise another brood in the box that same season.

Box Location

Place the nest box within 100' of woodlands. Attach the box to a building under an eave, on a living or dead tree, or on a pole with open space in front of the box. House Wrens are the one species of wren that will use a free-hanging house that swings in the wind. Other wren species' boxes must be firmly mounted.

Box Installation

Hang the box 5'-10' above the ground, and space House Wren boxes at least 100' apart.

Nest Box Dimensions

Box height is 8". The entrance hole can be between 1" to 1- 1/8" round diameter. The hole should be placed 4"- 6" above the floor. The floor area is 4" by 5 1/2". Fill the nest box half full with dried grasses.

Modifications

A 1-1/8" slot or rectangular opening makes it easier for the wren to maneuver sticks inside to create the nest. Instead of creating a round entrance hole, cut the front of the box to a height of 6-1/2" and install the front wall so a 1-1/8" slot is left at the top where the roof comes over the front wall. The 1-1/8" gap left between the top of the front wall and the roof is the "door" to the box.

Additional Notes

A 1-1/8" hole also allows chickadees and nuthatches to use the box while the 1- 1/8" size helps to exclude House Sparrows.

Carolina Wren

Natural History

Carolina wrens frequently hold their tails in an upwardly cocked position. The male's "tea-kettle, tea-kettle" call is a joy of summer. Insects and spiders make up the majority of the Carolina Wren's diet. In addition to spring and summer nesting, Carolina Wrens may use the nest box for winter roosting, so leave the box up leave up year round.

Nesting Habitat

The nest is a large dome constructed out of a great variety of materials which holds the 3-7 eggs. Carolina Wrens live in forests with thick underbrush, forest edges, clearings and backyards with mature trees or tall shrubs, and open woodland and ravines choked with rhododendron.

Box Location

Carolina Wrens prefer nesting areas in partial shade. The box can be attached to a building with the entrance facing in any direction. Carolina Wrens will nest in hanging baskets, propane tank covers and many other areas close to residences or within outbuildings.

Box Installation

Hang the box 3'-10' off the ground and space Carolina Wren boxes 330' apart from each other.

Nest Box Dimensions

The box is 8" tall with a 1-1/8" round entrance hole that is placed 4"- 6" above the floor. The floor area is 4" by 5 1/2".

Modifications

For Carolina Wrens a slot entrance is ***preferred*** to allow the wren to easily bring sticks inside the box to line the nest. Instead of creating a round entrance hole, cut the front of the box to a height of 6-1/2" and install the front wall so a 1-1/8" slot is left at the top where the roof comes over the front wall. The 1-1/8" gap left between the top of the front wall and the roof is the "door" to the box.

Primary Sources

http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Carolina_Wren/lifehistory

<http://nestwatch.org/learn/all-about-birdhouses/birds/carolina-wren/>

<http://nestboxbuilder.com/nestbox-plans.html>

For:

Wrens: Carolina, House, Bewick's Wrens

Chickadees: Black-capped, Carolina, Mountain, Boreal, Chestnut-backed Chickadees

Titmice: Tufted, Juniper, Black-crested, Oak and Bridled Titmice

Nuthatches: White-breasted, Red-breasted, Pygmy and Brown-headed Nuthatches

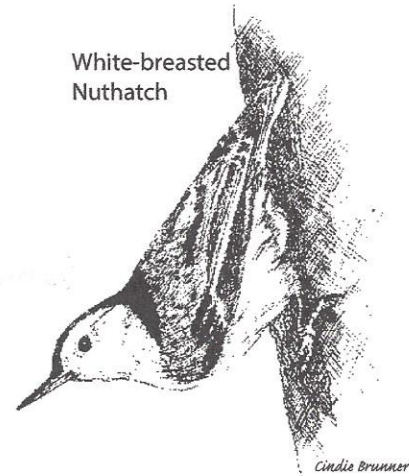
Warbler: Lucy's and Prothonotary Warblers

Entrance Hole Sizes:

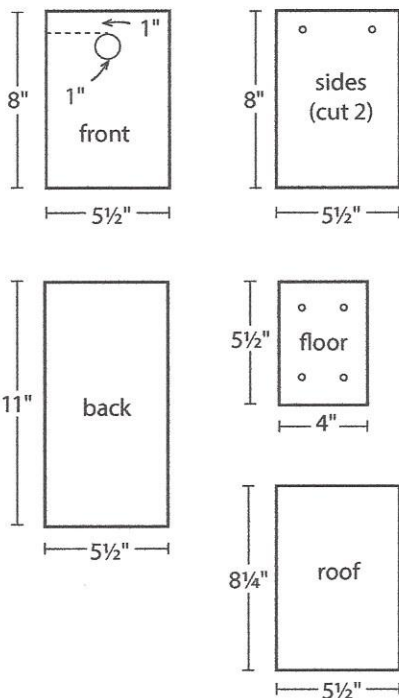
1" for House Wren, Lucy's Warbler, Pygmy and Brown-headed Nuthatch

1-1/8" for all chickadees and Bewick's Wren

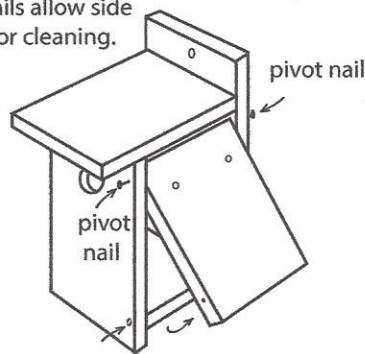
1-1/4" for all other species listed above. Use 1-1/4" boxes in heavily wooded areas with few House Sparrows



White-breasted Nuthatch

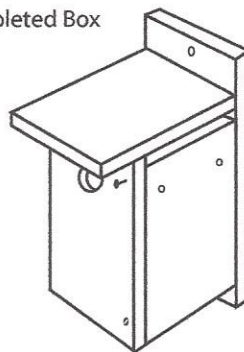


Two "pivot" nails allow side to swing out for cleaning.



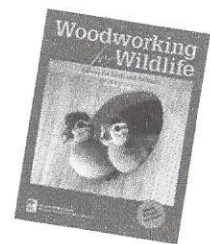
Use a nail or screw at bottom to keep side closed.

Completed Box



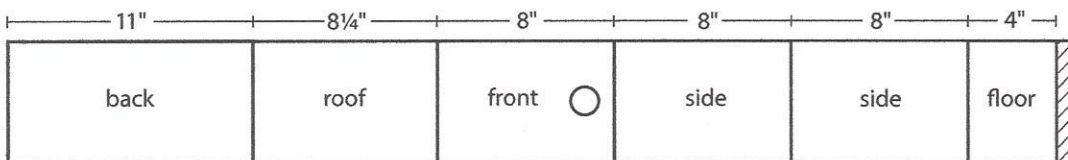
Increase Your Chances of Nest Box Success!

Information on natural history, habitat, nest box placement, and management for Midwestern birds is available in *Woodworking for Wildlife*. Order at minnesotasbookstore.com



Note: these dimensions are for 3/4" thick board. Some cedar boards are 5/8" thick. If so, the floor must be 3 3/4" wide, not 4".

Lumber: 1" x 6" x 4'



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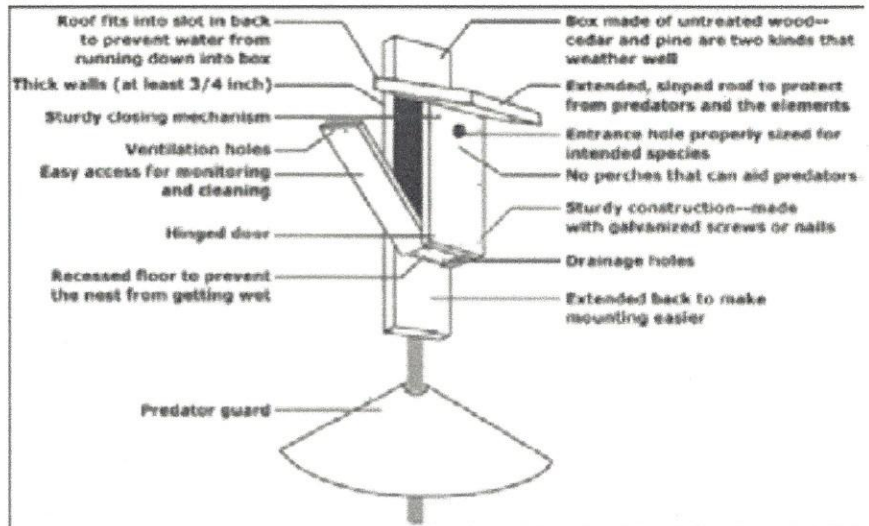
The **Cornell Lab** 
NestWatch

Report your nesting birds to NestWatch.org

General Hints for All Nest Boxes

Local habitat is the primary factor determining which animals will utilize backyard nest boxes. Nest boxes can be substitute homes for cavity dwelling species that typically build their nests in tree trunk-like woodpeckers, squirrels, raccoons, some songbirds, and owls.

Materials: Nest boxes of untreated and unpainted wood are more attractive to birds and mammals and less toxic. Cedar, cypress, redwood, or pine are good choices. Nails, woodscrews and hinges must be rust-proof. Painting boxes decreases the camouflage of the box, drawing in predators.



Perches: Perches on songbird houses create problems for our native species. Perches make it easier for predators to enter the box. Only non-native species of birds use perches, so boxes without perches are preferred.

Ease of exit: By adding rough or grooved interior walls to the nest box, fledglings and young animals can exit more easily when it is time.

Warm nest: By using lumber that is at least 3/4 of an inch thick, you provide insulation for young mammals and birds. Box should open from the side or top for maintenance and cleaning.

Dry nest: The interior of a nest box needs to be dry in order to keep young animals warm. A slightly slanted roof that overhangs the entrance hole keeps rain from entering the box. By constructing boxes with the floor recessed at least 1/4 inch up into the walls, water will not seep into the box floor. Drainage holes drilled in the floor allow animal waste and any other moisture to drain from the box. By cleaning out the box every year in fall, you prevent the bottom from rotting.

Critical nest box features: Make sure that your box incorporates features preferred by the particular species you hope to attract. These features include the double thick entrance hole size and extended roof to deter predators like squirrels. The height at which the box is posted, and the type of habitat surrounding the box need to match the desired species. Invest in a functional, rather than ornamental, nest box.

Tree care: Aluminum nails and screws are less damaging to trees when installing boxes on trees. Wiring boxes to trees can girdle and kill the tree.

Other nest box plans are available from:

- 1) Cornell Lab of Ornithology's website <http://nestwatch.org/> or <http://allaboutbirds.org>.
- 2) <http://www.wildlifehc.org/new/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Artificial-Nesting-Structures.pdf>
- 3) <http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/projects/index.html>
- 4) <http://www.tnwatchablewildlife.org/woodworkingforwildlife.cfm>
- 5) <http://www.csu.edu/cerc/researchreports/documents/WoodProjectsforIllinoisWildlife.pdf>