



10) An Introduction into Attracting Birds to your Garden

NEST BOXES:

As with feeders nest boxes are again a very good way to watch birds in gardens as they not only provide nesting sites during the breeding season, but also as roosting sites overnight during periods of wet, snow, severe cold and / or windy conditions during winter.

The type and size of the entrance hole in the nest box will determine the species that you wish to attract: 25 mm. hole for Coal, Marsh and Blue Tit; 28 mm. hole for Great Tit; 32 mm. hole for Swift, House Sparrow and Nuthatch and 45 mm hole for Starling. Open fronted nest boxes are used by Wrens, Robins and Pied Wagtail. Even by larger birds such as Tawny Owls, if you have the right habitat.

Site the nest boxes with an entrance hole between 2 to 3 Metre above the ground on a wall or on the trunk of a suitable tree, well out of reach of cats. The nest box entrance should face between East and North to prevent the box from becoming too hot, which can be fatal to chicks inside. Tilt the box slightly forward when mounting in position. Open fronted boxes can be placed lower down and should be well hidden in thick vegetation. Nest boxes can be purchased from shops, garden centres and Centres at Essex reserves. Alternatively, with care, you can make your own!

Never disturb a nest box or be tempted to look inside when it is in use as this can cause the parent birds to desert eggs and / or the chicks.

Between October and November remove all the old nesting material from the nest box and carefully clean with hot water and a mild disinfectant, then thoroughly rinse out. Check for infestations of wasps, ants, mice, flies, ticks or any other unwelcome 'guests' that might potentially harm future nestlings. This will also remove and destroy any unseen parasites that over winter in nest material and means that the nest box is ready for use the following spring. For your own safety and protection it is advisable to wear gloves and a dusk mask when cleaning as some fungi on nest material may cause respiration irritation.

Always clean nest boxes outside to avoid parasites getting into your home. If possible put all old nest material into your compost bin. Legally, any unhatched eggs must be destroyed promptly, and cannot be kept or sold. This is a great time to check for any damage or deterioration of nest boxes, and to put up more boxes as necessary.

If birds do not use a box during the first couple of year do not despondent or give up as it may take birds a little time to become accustomed to it. However, should this persist for a number of years consider moving the box to a different position with a little more protection or away from the house with fewer disturbances?

Make a list of your sightings (i.e. for each day, for each month, a year list and a 'life' list). If your nest box is fitted with a camera please remember to send in all your sightings to the Essex Birdwatching Society County Recorders such that your data can form a part of the trends and be included in the 'Essex Bird Report' produced annually by the Society. Details where to send your data can be found on the Society's Website – WWW.EBwS.ORG.UK or by contacting the Society's Secretary by e-mail – Info.EBwS@gmail.com