

## Protection from Predators

Nesting birds are extremely vulnerable to cats, as are fledglings and birds roosting for the night. Bell collars on cats offer birds little protection. Nailing a sheet metal guard or cone to a tree trunk is unsightly, but may deter less agile felines. Houses mounted on metal poles are the most difficult for predators to reach, especially if you smear the poles with a petroleum jelly and hot pepper mixture. The best deterrent is for owners to keep their cats inside whenever possible.

### *Cats*



### *Dogs*

Pet dogs are a hazard to nestlings in the spring and summer. Don't let your dog run loose during nesting time.

### *Squirrels*

Red squirrels, and sometimes gray squirrels, can become a serious menace to bird houses and the birds themselves. If you find your nest hole enlarged, chances are a red squirrel is the culprit. Once inside the box, squirrels make a meal of the eggs and young. Adding a predator guard made of sheet metal to the entrance hole is usually enough to keep squirrels out.

### *Raccoons and Opossums*

Raccoons and opossums will stick their arms inside nest boxes and try to pull out the adult, young, and eggs. Adding a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch thick predator guard to the bird house or an inverted cone to its pole support is a simple solution.

### *Snakes*

Snakes play an important part in the balance of nature. If you find one in your bird house, don't kill it. Snake-proof your house by putting it on a metal pole lathered with petroleum jelly or red cayenne pepper.

### *House Sparrows and Starlings*

If you don't discourage them, these two nuisance species introduced from Europe will harass or kill cavity-nesting birds. Since house sparrows and starlings are not protected by law, you may destroy their nests. But remember, other birds are protected by law.

### *House Wrens*

House wrens sometimes interfere with the nesting success of other birds by puncturing their eggs. But, unlike the house sparrow and starling, these birds are native to North America and are protected by law. Don't be tempted to intervene when wrens appear at your backyard birdhouse.

### *Insects*

Many insects lay their eggs and pupate in bird houses. Inspect your bird houses for signs of gypsy moths, blow flies, wasps, ants, gnats and bees. Keep bees and wasps from attaching their nests by coating the inside of the roof with bar soap. In areas where gypsy moths abound, avoid placing boxes in oak trees, which the gypsy moths favor.

Pyrethrin and rotenone insecticides are recommended for killing fly larvae, bird lice and mites after birds have finished nesting for the season.

### **Attracting Birds**

As people learn to enjoy the beauty of birds around their home, they may wish to improve the "habitat" in their yard so that more birds will visit their property. You can attract birds by placing bird feeders, nest boxes and bird baths in your yard, and by planting a variety of trees, shrubs, and flowers. These can provide good nesting sites, winter shelter, places to hide from predators and natural food supplies that are available year-round.