

Living in harmony with House Wrens

Pamela Routte 07/10/2024

In NE Ohio, the House Wrens return from their winter migration in the southern US and Mexico, in early to mid-April. Their return is a time of mayhem for other native cavity nesters because the House Wrens are scoping out cavities to call their own. If they enter a nest box with eggs, they will pierce the eggs and if there are young nestlings (younger than day 7), they will also get pierced and tossed from the nest. This is not to say that House Wrens are evil, it is simply how they have evolved. With a fine bill, not made for excavating holes, like a woodpecker, for instance, House Wrens must search for and snag cavities to nest in, regardless of another bird already using it. Not to be confused with the House Sparrow, House Wrens are native and protected.

So how do we protect Bluebirds, Chickadees and Nuthatches from their marauding ways? In addition to not placing our nest boxes in preferred House Wren territory (edge of tree lines or scrubby foliage), we install homemade wren guards on the nest boxes, in hopes of blocking the sight lines to the hole. I like to block the front hole(s) and the periphery as well. A wren guard can be made from any material. Some use cardboard, some use wood. I use Vinyl gutters and gutter caps, (available at any home improvement store) measured to fit the face of my nestbox and then some, and attached with small "L" brackets. I make sure that there are 2.5-3" of space between the wren guard and the hole. Like the Sparrow Spooker, the wren guard should not be applied until the first egg has been laid and unlike the Sparrow Spooker, should be removed around day 8 for Bluebirds and day 11 for Chickadees and Nuthatches. It can be used in conjunction with the Sparrow Spooker. The wren guard does make it more difficult to visually monitor the nest box and it's more of a challenge for the adults to feed the nestlings. Its presence would also impair fledge, so it is of critical importance that the wren guard be removed in a timely manner. Please visually make sure the parents will accept the guard after installation. Also know that Wren guards may not work once a wren has discovered the nest box hole or may not even work at all. It is a layer of nest box protection from House Wrens, but to say it is 100% effective would be an exaggeration. Knock wood, I've had good luck using them, but collective knowledge says that once House Wrens have "discovered" a hole, the wren guard will no longer act as a deterrent. In addition to using a wren guard, I have about 6 wren houses strategically placed around the property to give them nesting options other than my nest boxes.

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Vinyl Wren Guard for Bluebird House

Parts List (Home Depot)



[5 in. x 10 ft. White Vinyl K-Style Gutter](#)



[5 in. White Vinyl K-Style End Cap Set](#)



[3/4 in. Satin Brass Corner Braces \(4-Pack\)](#)



[#8 x 1/2 in. Phillips Pan Head Zinc Plated Sheet Metal Screw \(4-Pack\)](#)

Step 1



Cut a section of gutter 1 1/2 inch wider than your bird box

Step 2



Measure 3/4" from each end cut out the back of the gutter (leaving 3/4" of gutter on the ends)

Step 3



Step 4



Attach the corner brace with screw 1" from the top of the box and flush with the face of the bird box. Repeat for other side.

Note: You can use the screws that come with the corner brace, but predrilling will be required.

Install the end caps to complete the guard assembly.

Step 5



Center the guard on the bird box and attach the corner brace to the guard with screw. Repeat for other side.

Storage



When the guard is not in use, simply remove corner brace screws attached to bird box. Replace screws in bird box for easy screw storage.

Multiple Guard Notes: Measurements can be off slightly for each box. If you make multiple guards, it's a good idea to write the location of each guard mount on the inside with a sharpie.