

A Great Day For Trapping English Sparrows

By Leif Marking

The introduced English Sparrow, commonly called the house sparrow, is a serious predator of bluebird eggs, nestlings, and even adult bluebirds. In addition, the sparrows are perhaps the most important competitors in agricultural settings for the artificial bluebird nest boxes as well as for natural cavities in the environment. Sparrows are the most numerous of bird species in North America, and they depend mostly on farm structures and feed lots for existence, however they have adopted well to city and residential areas.

When these sparrows invade bluebird trails and territories and threaten to take over nest boxes that are planned for or occupied by bluebirds, there is immediate urgency to get rid of them. The Van Ert sparrow trap is fairly new, but its structure, durability, and efficiency are remarkable for live-trapping sparrows attempting to occupy a bluebird box.

On July 8, 2010, I monitored about 75 of my bluebird boxes, and I was very disgusted to find five bluebird eggs missing in box number 42 and a sparrow nest with eggs already. So I removed the sparrow nest and placed a Van Ert sparrow trap in the box at 9:00 AM. Then box number 52 had signs of sparrow roosting-- the bottom was whitewashed with fecal material and a male sparrow was guarding the site. I placed my second Van Ert trap in that box at 9:40 AM.

Sparrows occupied box number 66, along a creek pasture fence, so I removed the nest/eggs and set my third and last trap at 10:23 AM. I proceeded to check three more boxes on that pasture site and returned to box 66 location upon leaving when I noticed the bright red bulls eye circle showing in the box entry (Figure 1). I placed a clear garbage bag over the box, opened the side panel, and dispatched a male sparrow at 10:40 AM and took the trap and sparrow with me. That was satisfying to me because the sparrows destroyed a

7-egg bluebird nest here on May 3rd. This site is about a half mile from an active farm site and clearly belongs to bluebirds.

Then box number 83 had a new sparrow nest over an existing bluebird nest so I removed that material and again set my third and last Van Ert trap in the box at 12:00 noon (Figure 2). I returned at 12:55 PM and dispatched another male sparrow. On my way home that afternoon I dispatched male sparrows in the boxes containing the first and second Van Ert



Figure 1-- The visible red bulls eye invariably suggests a trapped sparrow.



Figure 2-- Installation is quick and simple provided there is a screw intact.

traps. That single trip accumulated four male sparrows that we provide to a raptor center for their birds, thereby recycling an undesirable resource into needy raptor food.

All my bluebird boxes are in bluebird habitat, but that doesn't prevent sparrows from invading the bluebird territories. Trapping is effective for eliminating sparrows on a bluebird trail. I removed about 30 sparrows from my trails this past nesting season, and most often bluebirds reclaimed the vacated boxes. The male sparrow claims the nesting cavity and builds a nest to entice a female partner. Therefore, elimination of the male generally allows the bluebirds to regain control of the territory and nest successfully. Traps should be checked every few hours in the event a protected songbird enters, and they are released unharmed.

Sparrow trapping can continue after the bluebird-nesting season and in early spring before the bluebirds return. I placed a Van Ert trap in my purple martin apartment house and dispatched dozens of sparrows in March before spring bird migration. The aluminum box is lowered to about five to six feet for easy access, and all entry holes are plugged except the one that contains the trap. Sparrows are anxious to claim a cavity for early nesting and generally sacrifice a raptor carcass daily.

Installation of the Van Ert trap in an existing NABS style box requires a stubby screwdriver to place the top mounting screw inside and under the entry in the front panel. The bottom screw is optional and not necessary in these boxes. It's easier to install the mounting screw during construction so each new box is equipped to accommodate a Van Ert sparrow trap. I recommend the use of Van Ert traps to eliminate sparrows nesting or roosting in bluebird boxes.

Van Ert sparrow traps are available on line from the manufacturer (fvanert@grm.net); BRAW purchased 100 at a discount and will pass the savings on to potential sparrow eliminators (contact Mike Helgren 920-885-4050). Instructions accompany the purchase.