

Plexiglass Sparrow Reducer fails

By Gary Gaard

"I'm accused of failing 1000 times. I don't feel I've been wrong 1000 times – because now I know 1000 things that don't work". — Thomas Edison

Introduction

Last issue of *Wisconsin Bluebird* (Vol. 24, No.2) I proposed a Plexiglass House Sparrow reducer at the entrance hole of wooden bluebird houses. The House Sparrow use of wooden houses was not reduced to the point that this idea is worth pursuing. It's not totally the talon grip on one-fourth inch plastic that reduces use of PVC house by House Sparrows.

Why not trap and kill House Sparrows?

Killing anything is never a long term solution, and no knowledge is gained. Killing any bird is a task that many potential bluebird house monitors would be unable to do. For them it would be unethical. The casual bluebird house owner may not have the necessary interest, time or skills.

A better and more permanent solution is to understand the basic biology of the bluebird and sparrow, and then use this knowledge to fledge bluebirds, discourage sparrows.

Results: Plexi sparrow reducer house University of Wisconsin Golf Course. One of the Plexi wooden houses I placed was at a location I could observe 3-4 times a week. The site was unsuccessful for bluebirds, 2003 and 2004.

A Tree Swallow claimed the site and had three eggs 5/15. The Tree Swallow nest failed. 5/16 a male House Sparrow was noted setting on the house: the male House Sparrow sang his love song for a month and 6/16 I destroyed 2 sparrow eggs and nest, and 6/22 I destroyed 2 sparrow eggs and nest. 6/23 the wooden house was removed and PVC was placed at the site. The sparrow left, but the PVC house remains unused 7/27.

Here's the kicker. The Plexi wooden house was placed at a new site 6/23 –excellent bluebird habitat selected on a south facing slope, sparse vegetation. 7/9 it had four bluebird eggs.



7/27 four robust bluebird nestlings were in the house, predicted fledge 8/2.

Certainly there's no scientific evidence here. The sequence of events provides anecdotal and testimonial support for two arguments. It's the habitat, not the house that attracts bluebirds. A male bluebird can and will defend an excellent bluebird nesting site from House Sparrow takeover of the (proper) nest box.

Can you reduce House Sparrows and fledge bluebirds if you use PVC houses?

I'm routinely fledging bluebirds from high House Sparrow habitats.

Part of the reason, I think, is the small inside capacity of the wooden houses I use. And I'm replacing some of the wooden houses with PVC houses.

Editor's note: *Several of us from the BRAW Board gave this idea a try and found similar results. Kent Hall, Leif Marking, Ellen Lafouge and myself tried it where House Sparrows were a nuisance. In most cases the sparrows acclimated to the plastic gizmo. Kent went a step further and used a plastic piece that covered the entire front of the NABS style boxes. In 10 of 12 boxes it still didn't stop sparrows from nesting. His conclusion, "Something inside the PVC nest box prevents sparrows from nesting in them".*

You have to commend Gary for his "thinking outside the box" when it comes to dealing with House Sparrows. If we don't try different ideas and put them to the test we won't learn methods that improve conditions for bluebirds.