

WINTER PROJECT

2021-22

HELP THE EASTERN BLUEBIRD



Photo by Stan Tekiela

Build an updated bluebird house design for 2022

Staff Report

Bluebirds suffered a tough year in 2021. An unseasonably cold winter storm across Texas in February destroyed food sources and likely killed thousands of the native thrushes wintering in the region. When spring arrived across the northern United States, many people who maintain nest box trails noticed bluebird activity in their yards and around nesting boxes down as much as 50%.

Bluebird associations across the country reported fewer birds this year, so 2022 might be an even more important spring to maintain healthy bluebird trails. There are three bluebird species, all found in North America: eastern, western and mountain. The eastern occurs in the Great Lakes region.

Discombobulated weather trends aside, two other problems facing these beautiful little cavity nesters remain. First, a sharp decrease in the number of available nesting sites, partially because civilization dislikes and chops down dead trees and snags that contain natural cavities. And second, two invasive birds that are rougher and tougher than bluebirds and take over natural sites and bird houses: starlings and house sparrows.

The Bluebird Recovery Program has thousands of members across the United States and Canada who monitor bluebird populations and establish "bluebird trails," which consist of many properly spaced bluebird houses. These trails typically fledge thousands of young bluebirds every year.

In the past, Outdoor News has printed plans for the Petersen nesting box, and while it remains a viable option, bluebird advocates increasingly are recommending the design shown to the right: the Gilbertson PVC box. The lightweight design of its PVC construction works better on skinny, more predator-proof rebar poles.

Seasoned nesting trail hobbyists also believe the design is less likely to prematurely fledge young birds.

Bluebird houses also attract tree swallows, house wrens, a few chickadees and white-breasted nuthatches, plus starlings and house sparrows.

Tree swallows, chickadees and nuthatches generally get along with bluebirds, but sparrows, starlings and even house wrens will destroy bluebird eggs, kill the young and adults, and often bury their victims beneath their own nests.

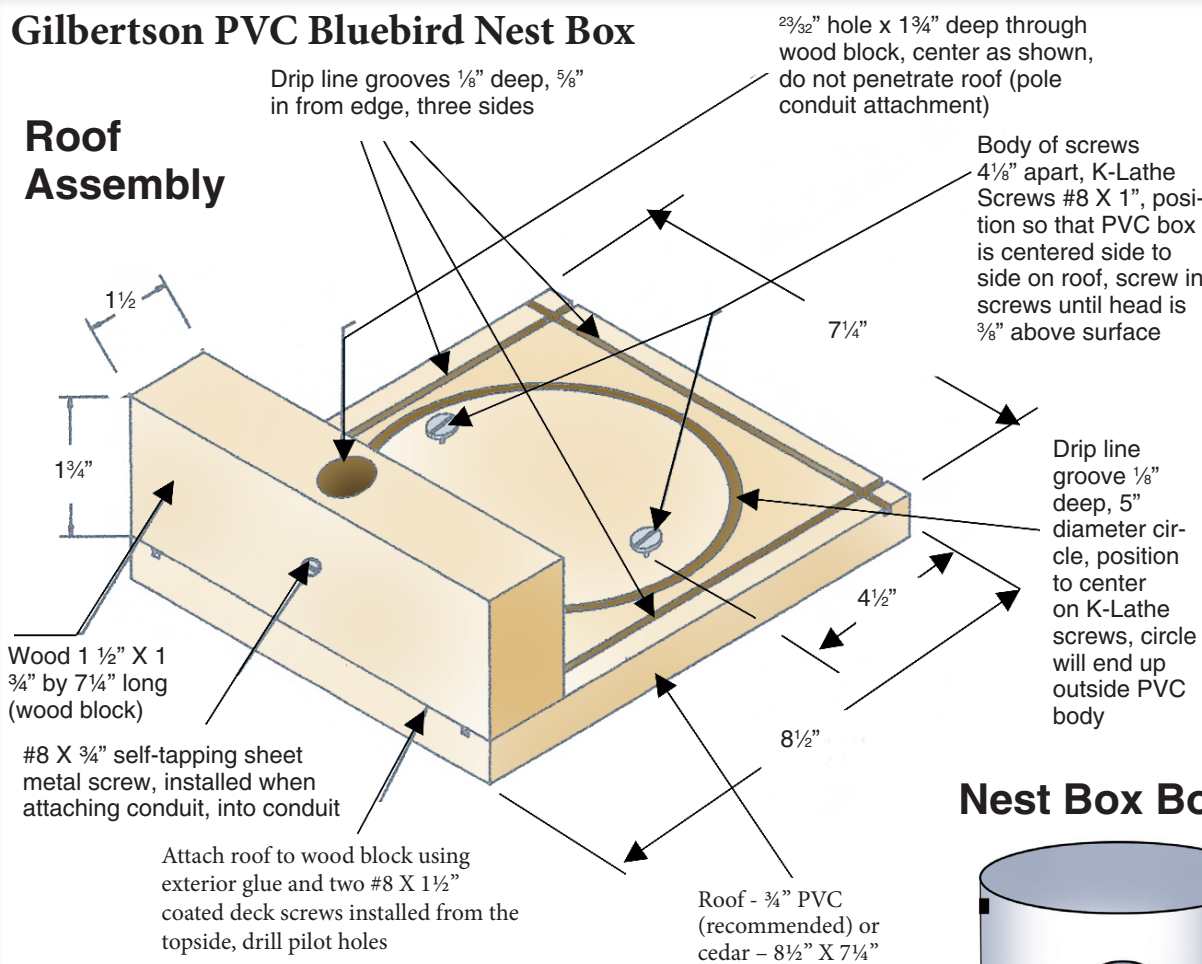
The best way to avoid wrens is to not place the houses near brushy areas wrens prefer. Bluebirds prefer open fields. House sparrows and starlings are not protected by law, so anyone can destroy their nests if they try to take over a box, and shoot the

adults of these aggressive, invasive birds.

For more information on bluebird boxes and more complete tips on building and properly mounting them, visit the Bluebird Recovery Project Facebook page or www.bbrp.org/

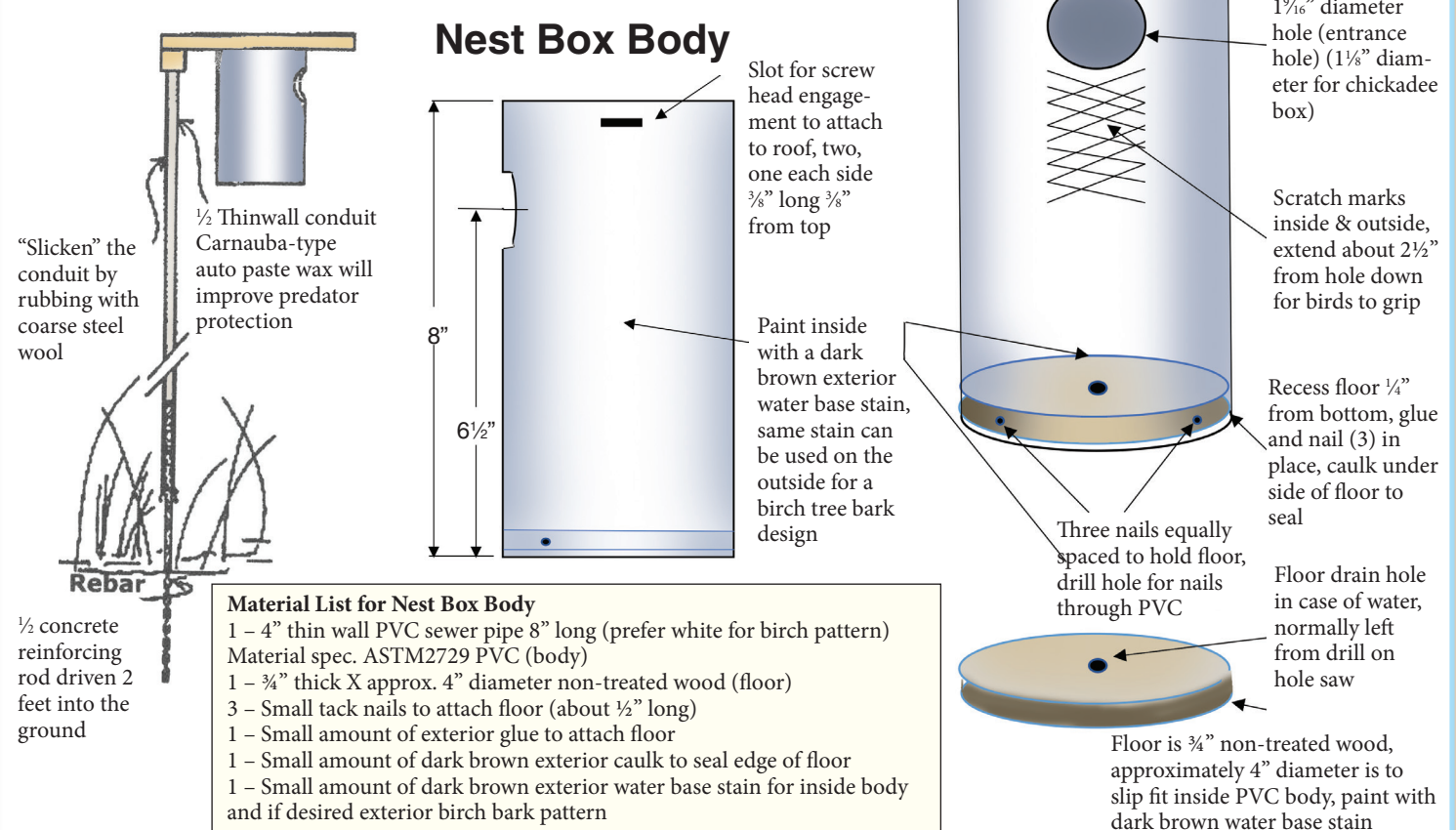
Gilbertson PVC Bluebird Nest Box

Roof Assembly



- Material List for Roof**
- 1 - 8 1/2" x 7 1/4" x 3/4" cedar or PVC (PVC is recommended) PVC house trim works well (roof)
 - 1 - 1 1/2" x 1 3/4" x 7 1/4" Cedar or other wood (a 2X 4 cut in half works well), paint if not cedar (wood block)
 - 2 - K-Lathe screws #8 X 1" (for PVC nest body attachment)
 - 2 - Coated deck screws #8 x 1 1/2" (attach roof to wood block)
 - 1 - Self-tapping sheet metal screw #8 x 3/4" (for pole attachment)
 - 1 - Small amount of exterior glue (roof to wood block)
 - 1 - Pole assembly

Nest Box Body



- Material List for Nest Box Body**
- 1 - 4" thin wall PVC sewer pipe 8" long (prefer white for birch pattern) Material spec. ASTM2729 PVC (body)
 - 1 - 3/4" thick X approx. 4" diameter non-treated wood (floor)
 - 3 - Small tack nails to attach floor (about 1/2" long)
 - 1 - Small amount of exterior glue to attach floor
 - 1 - Small amount of dark brown exterior caulk to seal edge of floor
 - 1 - Small amount of dark brown exterior water base stain for inside body and if desired exterior birch bark pattern