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Birding Briefs

Experimental nest tubes discourage starlings

Why new artificial nests made of foot-long sections of PVC pipe welcome Eastern Bluebirds, House Wrens, and Tree Swallows but repel European Starlings.
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Researchers looking for a way to prevent European Starlings from getting into nest boxes meant for native birds appear to have invented a new style of artificial nest cavity that starlings avoid altogether.

Laura Tyson, Bradley Blackwell, and Thomas Seamans of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services division constructed 100 experimental cavities out of one-foot-long sections of PVC drainage pipe and placed them about nine feet up on utility poles on a NASA-owned property in northwest Ohio. During the breeding seasons in 2009 and 2010, while starlings investigated but did not nest in the tubes, Eastern Bluebirds, House Wrens, and Tree Swallows nested in them successfully. In 2010, the native birds built nests in 85 tubes and fledged young from nearly all of them, according to a report in the December 2011 issue of *The Wilson Journal of Ornithology*.

Non-native House Sparrows located and nested in two tubes that were near houses and maintenance buildings and not far from a source of bird seed. Their young also fledged successfully.

The tubes had an inside diameter of only 3¾ inches (9.5 cm), allowing less head room than traditional nest boxes. Still, Tyson says she was surprised that starlings didn't use the tubes. "Starlings are known to utilize structures for nesting so readily and therefore have become a nuisance," she says. "The combination of depth and length seem to be the discouraging factors."

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