

SPARROW SPOOKERS

In an emergency, when house sparrows are plaguing the active nest of a native bird, using a sparrow spooker can save the lives of adult and nestling cavity-nesters.

A sparrow spooker is a device made from dowel rods and reflective mylar or bird-scare tape which, when affixed to a nestbox in such a way, can “scare” house sparrows and help to keep them from doing harm to the adults and young native birds inside the nestbox.



Emergencies require immediate action, so improvising is often needed if the situation is critical and the life of birds are in danger. Use materials that you have on hand until you can make other arrangements. You can use paint stirrers or rulers if you have nothing else and attach tinfoil in long, thin strips. Attach the device to the nestbox so that the strips hang down at the front of the roof, close to the entrance hole. Keep in mind that foil will not blow around and move as freely as scare tape or mylar, so this is a temporary fix while you make other arrangements. Use duct tape, thumb tacks or whatever fastening materials you have on hand in order to avert loss of life. You can make adjustments after the situation is resolved.

Unfortunately, the only sure way to remove the threat of house sparrow attack is to trap and humanely dispatch the house sparrows. Placing a second nestbox in the vicinity of where your native birds are nesting and equipping it with a Van Ert in-box trap is a strategy that works. It is imperative that the male house sparrow be captured, however, as he has most likely bonded to the original nestbox and will not leave on his own.

Sparrow spookers can be homemade or can be purchased as kits and many bluebirders install a sparrow spooker as a matter of routine once their bluebirds have begun nesting. However, the following suggestions should be adhered to for best results:

- A sparrow spooker should be installed only after the host bird nest has its first egg. Once an egg is laid, the nesting birds are more strongly bonded to the nestbox and are less likely to abandon their nest.
- After the spooker is installed, the nestbox should be observed (from a distance) to be certain that the nesting pair, especially the female, accepts the change and re-enters the nestbox. This can take several minutes to more than an hour. If the change is not accepted, the spooker should be removed. Repeat attempts may be made until the change is accepted. If the birds are reluctant to accept the device, removing the streamers and replacing them one by one, over

a period of time, can help the birds adapt. Clipping the streamers together and releasing a few at a time is another option if the nesting pair is having trouble accepting the spooker. Streamers should be adjusted to hang so that ends brush the top of the nestbox as close to the entrance hole as possible.

- Nestboxes should be checked after storms or high winds to be certain that the spooker is still correctly positioned to protect the nesting birds.
- Spookers should be removed as soon as fledging occurs so that house sparrows do not become desensitized to them. Spookers should never be permanently installed on a nestbox for this reason.

NABS advocates the active management of house sparrow populations in order to protect the population of native cavity-nesting birds.

For information on purchasing ready-made spooker kits, visit <https://sparrowtraps.net/>

For more information on sparrow spookers, visit <http://www.sialis.org/sparrowspooker.htm>