



*NORTHERN CALIFORNIA*

## **NEST BOX PROJECT**

JOIN US IN HELPING OUR LOCAL NATIVE CAVITY-NESTING BIRDS THRIVE!

[StreamlinePlanning.net/NestBoxProject](https://StreamlinePlanning.net/NestBoxProject)

# **Monitoring Packet**



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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*Presented by:*



# MONITORING GUIDELINES

## CODE OF CONDUCT

Please exercise extreme caution and responsibility when monitoring nests to ensure the safety of birds, nests, and nest contents; observations of nests should never jeopardize the well-being of birds. The NestWatch Code of Conduct will help you minimize the three potential risks that all nest monitors must be careful to avoid:

- Accidental harm to a nest
- Parental desertion of a nest
- Attracting predators to a nest

## PLAN AND PREPARE

Make a plan to conduct observations of nests every 3-4 days following the NestWatch protocol. Most successful songbird nests last about 30 days, so you may need to visit each nest 7-10 times. The first time you encounter an active nest, accurately record its location in your field notes and draw a picture of its location to avoid long searches on subsequent visits. Prepare materials, such as datasheets, notebooks, GPS units, etc., before your nest visits to minimize time spent in the immediate vicinity of the nest. Nest visits should last no longer than 1 minute. Clipboards are an excellent way to keep your datasheets organized.

## COLLECT DATA CAREFULLY

In order for your data to be added to the NestWatch database, it must be accurate and precise. You will need to report the location of the nest, the species, and the contents of the nest each time that you visit. You can also record a summary of the nesting attempt once it is complete. The more details that you provide, the better your observations can help researchers understand threats facing breeding birds.

## CHOOSE AN APPROPRIATE TIME TO VISIT NESTS

- Generally you should AVOID visiting nests under the following conditions:
- Do not check in the early morning. Most birds lay their eggs in the morning so plan on visiting nests in the afternoon. Also, most adults will temporarily leave the nest when you are near, and eggs and young nestlings can become cold quickly if left alone in the morning.
- Avoid nests during the first few days of incubation. If necessary, observe nests from a distance and approach only when the female leaves the nest.
- Do not approach nests when young are close to fledging. When the young are disturbed during this stage, they may leave the nest prematurely. Young that fledge prematurely usually do not stay in the nest despite attempts to return them, and their survival rates away from or outside the nest are low. When young birds are fully feathered and very alert, only observe the nest from a distance.
- Avoid nests during bad weather. If it is cold, damp, or rainy, postpone checking nests until another day. Checking nests during this time can be very stressful for birds.
- Do not check nests at or after dusk, when females may be returning to the nest for the night. The exception to this would be owls, which typically leave the nest at dusk.

## BE WARY OF NEST PREDATORS

Avoid leaving tracks that can direct predators to nests. Nest predators are everywhere—on the ground, in vegetation, and in the air—and many are smart enough to watch you! Be careful that predators such as cats, crows, and jays are not following you. Minimize damaging or trampling vegetation that could expose nests.

## MINIMIZE DISTURBANCE AT THE NEST

It is important not to startle a bird as you approach the nest; this may cause it to accidentally knock out eggs or young when it flies off. Before approaching the nest, try to see if a parent is sitting on it. Whenever possible, wait a few minutes to see if the bird leaves on its own. If they do, this is the ideal time to check the nest. If the bird is to be flushed, give it ample time to slip off quietly by rustling branches or making noise during your approach. Nest boxes should be tapped first, then tapped again when open to allow the parent to slip away before you stare directly into the box. If a sitting bird does not leave on its own, do not force it off the nest. In this case, you will need to come back later. Remember to keep each visit brief, and wait until you are well away from the nest before recording your field notes.

## DO NOT HANDLE BIRDS OR EGGS WITHOUT PROPER PERMITS

Do not handle young birds or eggs. Eggs can be easily cracked or small nestlings injured. Small nestlings are remarkably helpless and may not be able to crawl back into the nest cup if displaced, even inside of a nest box. Children monitoring nests should always be under the supervision of an adult. If you wish to band birds or handle nest contents, you need to possess the proper federal and/or state or provincial permits.

## DON'T LEAVE A DEAD-END TRAIL

Whenever possible, take a different route away from the nest site than the route you took to reach it. Walking to the nest and back along the same path leaves a dead-end trail that can lead predators directly to the nest.

## UNDERSTAND THE MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY ACT AND OTHER CONSERVATION LAWS

Under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act it is illegal to take, possess, import, export, transport, sell, purchase, barter, or offer for sale, any migratory bird, or the parts, nests, or eggs of such a bird except under the terms of a valid permit issued by federal and, in some cases, state agencies. Additionally, many species are protected by other state and local laws. Therefore, in most instances it is illegal for you to touch or otherwise physically disturb an active nest or its contents.

## NEST BOX PROTOCOL

There is always some risk of disturbing birds when monitoring their nests. By following the NestWatch protocol, which is based on the nationally recognized Breeding Biology Research and Monitoring Database (BBIRD) Field Protocol\* and input from professional biologists, you will minimize this risk and ensure that your data achieves a high quality standard and will be comparable with data collected by other NestWatchers.

- 1. Find a nest.** Putting up a nest box is an easy way to start.
- 2. Remember where the nest is located.** It may be helpful to write a short description or draw a picture of the nest site in a field notebook. Do not use flagging unless absolutely necessary because this can attract predators. If you must use flagging to relocate a nest, use a small strip, place it at least 30 feet away, and take accurate notes on how to locate the nest from the flag.
- 3. Check the nest every 3-4 days.** Record the number of eggs and young observed during each visit, as well as other relevant observations such as the behavior of adult birds. Longer intervals between checks make it harder to determine the outcome of the nest, while shorter intervals increase risk of disturbance. Whenever possible, wait for the female to leave the nest on her own rather than scaring her off. Use a mirror attached to the end of a pole to see into nests that are higher than your head, or use binoculars to monitor nests at a distance.
- 4. Visit the nest one last time** after you are certain that it is empty to determine if any unhatched eggs or dead young remain.

