



## Frequently Asked Questions & Helpful Hints About Nest Box Monitoring

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### **Questions About Data Entry:**

Nest Location, Step 2, Entering the Nest Box Coordinates

[Q: On the "Nest Location" page of the data entry, Step 2, I selected "find coordinates here" to enter the Latitude and Longitude of our nest boxes but the map put me in central Ontario even though I entered my postal code. What should I do?](#)

Change of Species

[Q: The nest in our box started out as one species \(ie: Tree Swallow\) and now has a different bird in it \(ie: House Sparrow\). How do I fill out the online data sheets?](#)

[Q: I have other questions about the online monitoring system. Where can I go for answers related to the data entry?](#)

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**Frequently Asked Questions  
& Helpful Hints About  
Nest Box Monitoring**

**Q: In the monitoring instructions, you recommend a small mechanics mirror or bicycle mirror. What is the mirror used for?**

A: Use the mirror to help you to see inside the nest. This will help you to accurately count the number of eggs or baby birds.



**Q: Can I touch the eggs? I can't see all of the eggs. I am concerned that the eggs are cold.**

A: Yes, however, touch the eggs only if you need to. While we do not recommend that you pick up or handle the eggs, you may touch the eggs very gently to count them or if you are unsure if they are cold or warm. Gently touching the eggs will not deter the mother from caring for them. However, using the mirror is the recommended way to count the eggs and babies.

If you have been observing the nest box and have not seen any adults in the vicinity for some time and are concerned that the mother has not returned to the nest to care for the eggs, you may want to gently touch the eggs to check for warmth. If they are cold, leave the eggs in place and note on your monitoring sheet and online recording that the eggs were cold. You will discover on subsequent visits if they were truly cold as they will remain un-hatched for weeks and you will not see adult activity at or near the box. Still leave the eggs in the nest and remove them with the nest when you clean out the boxes in the Fall.

**Q: Can I touch the baby birds?**

A: No, we do not recommend that you touch the baby birds in the nest. Using the mirror is the recommended way to count the eggs and babies.



**Q: What should I do if the adult bird doesn't leave the nest when I open the box?**

A: Close the door, stand aside and give the bird a few minutes to see if she will leave on her own. If not, you may want to come back a bit later. (Don't forget to secure the box door with the locking screw before leaving the area.)

Before opening any box, remember to give a very gentle tap on the side of the boxes to give the bird a chance to leave before you open the boxes. Stand aside to give the adult room to fly out.



**Q: How often can I look in the nest box?**

A: As a general rule, check the boxes every other week until the eggs are laid, then, if you wish, you may check them weekly. **If you see the adults carrying nest material to the boxes, do not check the box that week.** You do not want to dissuade the birds from building the nest as they may abandon the box.



**Q: It has been unseasonably hot/cold. Can I still check the box?**

A: If the temperatures outside have changed dramatically over a short period of time (ie: cold snap in the spring or extreme heat wave in the summer) wait to check the boxes until the temperature become more seasonal. The adult birds will be working hard at maintaining a good temperature inside the box (incubating or cooling their young as required) and opening the box may affect their hard work. Also, **it is not recommended to open the boxes during strong winds.**

**Q: What should I do if I see a young bird fallen out of the nest? <sup>1</sup>**

A: Although this may be difficult to accept, the general rule in such a case is to refrain from doing anything and hope for the best. Most attempts to save the bird (especially a bird that may not need to be saved in the first place) will do more harm than good. Therefore, examine the situation carefully before attempting anything. It is not uncommon that birds will wander a short distance from the nest during the last days before fledging, and if parents are around, they will continue to care for them. Look at the feathers, especially the wing feathers to see if they are well opened. If so, it is best to leave the bird where you find it, unless there is an immediate risk such as a cat nearby, in which case you may try to find a secure place on a higher branch near where you found the bird.

If the bird is younger (e.g., feathers not completely opened and not covering the entire body), you should attempt to place the young back in its nest. If the nest is too high, you can try building a little improvised platform (e.g., a small plastic container lined with small twigs) and placing it on a branch. Then, leave the nest alone and if you want to observe the parents coming back, do so from a distance.

*What you should **not** do:*

- Wait around the nest to see if the parents will come back. If you are visible, they will not come back.
- Try to feed the bird yourself. A diet that is not perfectly adapted will kill the young. Moreover, young birds need to be fed several times every hour, all day long: you will not be able to keep up.
- Give water. Young birds do not drink in nature, but receive their water from the food they eat.

Remember that the longer you stay with the young, the smaller will be its chances of surviving.

<sup>1</sup> from Bird Studies Canada's FAQ page

<http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/pnw/index.jsp?targetpg=nwfaq&lang=EN#e>



**Q: How long do I need to monitor the boxes after the birds have left?**

A: Once the baby birds have left the nest, generally mid-July, you may stop monitoring the nest. Some birds, such as Eastern Bluebirds and House Wrens, can have two broods in a season, and House Sparrows can have up to three broods - the final broods in late July or August. If you can, continue to monitor these nests until the final brood has fledged.

## Questions About Data Entry

### Nest Location, Step 2, Entering the Nest Box Coordinates

**Q: On the “Nest Location” page of the data entry, Step 2, I selected “find coordinates here” to enter the Latitude and Longitude of our nest boxes but the map put me in central Ontario even though I entered my postal code. What should I do?**

A: The postal code does not affect the ‘Coordinates’ section of the data entry. The coordinates need to be entered separately. Bird Studies Canada has an online map which will easily help you determine the exact Latitude and Longitude of your nest boxes. These coordinates aid BSC with the accuracy of the data.

To find your exact Latitude and Longitude, click on “**find coordinates here**” located below your postal code. A map will pop-up. The red ‘you are here’ balloon defaults to central Ontario. Using your mouse, click and drag the map, moving the map until your location is in the center of the view. The red balloon will automatically move to the center of the screen. (You cannot drag and drop the balloon.) Use the ‘+’ sign on the left side of the map to zoom in as close as you can to your exact location, moving and centering the balloon as you go. (Click “Satellite” at the top right of the map to get a topographical view).

Once you have located the nearest to exact location of the nest box, jot down the Latitude and Longitude as indicated above the map (this is in case the next step doesn’t work). Then click the “Transfer” button at the top right of the map to transfer the coordinates to your page or alternately, transfer the coordinates to the page yourself in the spaces provided.



### Change of Species

**Q: The nest in our box started out as one species (ie: Tree Swallow) and now has a different bird in it (ie: House Sparrow). How do I fill out the online data sheets?**

A: You must fill out a separate sheet for each species that occupies each box. You started your first sheet by selecting the species (ie: Tree Swallow) from the drop-down list. You must finish that sheet by noting the outcome for that species.

In the “Nest outcome” section of the database (located at the bottom of the page in ‘Step 3: Visits’), finish the sheet by selecting the code for the stage “E: At egg stage”, “J: At young stage” or “X: At egg or young stage” combined with either “P: Predation” or “U: Usurped from nest by other bird species” (ie: your code combination may be “JP”). Then start a new sheet for second species (ie: House Sparrow).



**Q: I have other questions about the online monitoring system. Where can I go for answers related to the data entry?**

A: Bird Studies Canada (BSC) has help related to their data entry. Go to: <http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/pnw/> and click on “Instructions” or click the ‘Help’ tab while in the data entry pages.

Also see BSC’s Frequently Asked Questions accessed from the same link.