

# TAKING CARE OF YOUR NEW BIRDHOUSE

## WHY DO IT?

Our cavity-nesting birds are in trouble. Dead trees and fence posts that once provided them with natural nesting holes are disappearing and their populations are in serious decline. You can help reverse the trend by providing housing for Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Oak Titmice, Wrens, or other backyard visitors. But we want to be sure you're inviting them to a safe neighborhood, so here are a few tips for new landlords.



4-5"; Year-round.  
Dark cap and throat;  
white cheeks, chestnut  
upper back and sides.

**Chestnut-backed Chickadee**

## PLACING THE BOX

Nest boxes may be mounted on posts, in trees, or even on the sides of buildings. Avoid sites near feeders, heavy traffic areas and places where cats can lie in wait. Choose sites that are near (but not in) shrubbery, and 5 feet or more above the ground. Remember that birds need water for drinking and bathing, and are especially attracted to native plants that provide nectar and berries.



4-5"; Year-round.  
Grayish body, jaunty  
crest, light gray throat  
and underparts

**Oak Titmouse**

## MONITORING AND CLEANING

Nest boxes should be checked before the nesting season begins (late February and early March) to be sure that they are clean and in good repair. Regular monitoring, usually not more than once a week or less than once every 2 weeks, should be done from late March to mid-August. If an adult bird is incubating or sitting with nestlings, close the box quietly, but if no adult is present, count eggs or nestlings, and check under the box for signs of insect infestation.

## COMMON PROBLEMS

**Competition:** Watch for aggressive non-native birds, such as House Sparrows and European Starlings.

**Predators:** Cats, raccoons, opossums and other predators are a threat to eggs and nestlings.

**Human Disturbance:** Heavy traffic and lawn sprinklers can discourage nesting.

**Poisons:** Many pesticides are toxic to birds and should not be used near nest boxes.

**Parasites:** Blow flies, ants, mites or other vermin may infest nests.

For advice about how to handle any of the above problems, contact the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society at the numbers listed below.

## REPORTING

Please share your results with us, using the form on the back of this sheet.

## THE JOYS

Enough about responsibilities and problems! There are also joys - the pleasure of watching and learning about these small, beautiful creatures and the thrill of seeing their young develop and venture out into the world. Don't be discouraged if you have no nesters this year. We may be well into the breeding season, and birds need time to check out new sites. They may use your box for winter roosting, and next year, your chances will only improve...

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** on how to help conserve cavity nesting birds, please contact the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society: Phone - (408) 252-3747; or E-mail - [scvas@scvas.org](mailto:scvas@scvas.org).

5-6"; Year-round.  
Black throat with large  
white cheeks; chestnut  
nape meets black eye  
line



**House Sparrow**

Non-native pest species.  
May harm eggs or young.

