



Create a good home for the
Brown-headed
NUTHATCH

Make your community bird-friendly with a nest box for a nuthatch!

About the Brown-headed Nuthatch

The Brown-headed Nuthatch is a non-migratory songbird in Georgia. This small songbird—just under 4” long—has a brown cap, white neck, and gray body, and its call sounds just like a squeaky toy. A quintessential Southern bird, with a home range from Virginia to east Texas, the Brown-headed Nuthatch lives in pine woodlands or anywhere it can get its favorite food—pine seeds. These nuthatches live in family groups with their grown offspring (mostly male birds) sticking around to help out with the next brood. They sometimes use bark as a pantry door to cover a seed cache and have even been known to use it as a lever to pry up other bark to look for food.

Conservation Status

The Brown-headed Nuthatch is an indicator species for the health of southeastern pine woodlands. It is a high-priority species for conservation in the piedmont, with a 1.6% percent annual decline over forty years according to Breeding Bird Survey data. In addition, the National Audubon Climate Report predicts that the Brown-headed Nuthatch’s preferred breeding habitat may disappear under current climate trajectories. Humans have had a hand in this bird’s decline through urbanization, deforestation, and fire suppression, but we can also help reverse the trend.

90 Nest Boxes for Nuthatches

The Georgia Audubon Council has joined Audubon North Carolina in bringing plight of the Brown-headed Nuthatch to light and helping this common, yet declining species regain nesting opportunities in its native range. To lessen the threat to this species, the Georgia Audubon Council is installing 90 nest boxes across Georgia in 2015 with a grant from National Audubon Society.

How You Can Make a Little Room for Brown-headed Nuthatches

Ninety nest boxes alone will not curb the decline in Brown-headed Nuthatches. We need *your* help, too!

1. Build or purchase a nest box - Any nest box design approved by the North American Bluebird Society will work well for Brown-headed Nuthatches, but it is important to make the opening smaller—ideally 1” in diameter. Bird stores sell metal excluders that you can attach over the 1 ½” hole on a standard bluebird box



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to make it ready for nuthatches. You can also purchase a made-for-nuthatches nest box at bird stores or through Atlanta Audubon Society (www.atlantaaudubon.org). To invite both bluebirds and nuthatches to your yard (they make fine neighbors) you can put both a bluebird box (1 ½" hole) and a nuthatch box (1" hole) no less than 15 feet apart.

2. Install your nest box – Brown-headed nuthatches prefer semi-open habitat, but they are willing to nest in wooded and open areas—as long as there are pine trees nearby. You can put up your nest boxes near the edge of woods, on existing trees, or mounted on pipes. Brown-headed Nuthatches begin building nests as early as December and usually lay 5-6 white-speckled-with-brown eggs once a year from mid-March to mid-May. These birds roost in boxes all winter, so putting up boxes any time helps our squeaky friends.

Predator guards - Predators will raid boxes mounted on trees or fence posts about 30% of the time so putting up a predator guard can really help keep snakes and mammals away from the eggs and babies. Predator guards are simple to make. A 2 foot piece of stovepipe, an inverted 2 foot wide funnel, or a purchased 2 foot wide predator guard disc will all work. Look at a bird store or online to find reasonably priced solutions and do-it-yourself instructions.

Poles - Pipes make great nest box poles and all materials are easy to get at home improvement stores. To put up two nest boxes, purchase:

- One 10 foot length of ½" diameter RIGID conduit (galvanized pipe);
- One 10 foot length of 1" EMT (electrical conduit) pipe;
- Four 1" two-hole pipe straps;
- Two 1" hose clamps.

Ask the store to cut the ½" pipe into 40" lengths and the 1" pipe into 5' lengths. At home, pound the ½" pipe into the ground; this will be your base. When it feels steady enough to stand up to rain and wind, slip the 1" pipe over it. Then attach your nuthatch box with the pipe straps and put the hose clamp at the bottom to keep the box in place. Your box will stand at about 5' high.

3. Register your nest box - Register your box with NestWatch.org and monitor the activity throughout the year. Monitoring the nest boxes is key to understanding how successful they are in supporting the birds.

4. Send a photo - Let us know you installed a box by emailing a photo to us for us to share with the community at home4nuthatches@atlantaaudubon.org. We also encourage you to share your photo on social media and challenge your family and friends to join the flock:

- Upload photos to your local Audubon chapter's Facebook page;
- Tweet your photo with hashtag #Home4Nuthatches;
- Upload to Instagram with hashtag #Home4Nuthatches.

Nest Box Maintenance

Brown-headed Nuthatches will use the same home year after year. Clean out your nest box in the fall so that it is ready to be a protected winter roosting spot.

Resources

- Nest box plans and local vendor list: www.atlantaaudubon.org/bhnu
- More about Georgia's Brown-headed Nuthatches: georgiawildlife.com/node/281
- Potential effects of climate change: climate.audubon.org/birds/bnhnut/brown-headed-nuthatch



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