

Holiday Gift Idea: Nest Box Donations

Construction of nest boxes boost wild bird population numbers.

By Angela Pham

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The Fuertes parrot breeds exclusively in the nest box donations.
Photos courtesy of Paul Salaman.
Parrots explore the nest boxes within 15 to 20 minutes.

Wild parrot population numbers of many bird species worldwide are suffering, but it takes something as simple as a nest box to boost breeding and help restore their numbers back to normal.

The cost of constructing, installing and maintaining a bird nest box is minimal. Giving one as a holiday gift helps wild parrot species prosper and raises awareness among gift recipients that the wild parrots of the world need help.

At the ProAves Foundation, the Fuerte's parrot, Santa Marta parakeet and the yellow-eared parrot of Colombia are three species that have all successfully used man-made nest boxes to breed in. Because such wild parrots have trouble finding suitable nest sites, these nest boxes are an alternative to their having to compete with more aggressive bird species for coveted nesting sites, said Paul Salaman, who's on the U.S. advisory board for ProAves.

As soon as a nest box goes up, Salaman said, the wild parrots can be seen inspecting them within 15 to 20 minutes, even outside of the bird breeding season. Now, the Fuerte's parrot breeds exclusively in nest boxes, and the yellow-eared parrots have had a record breeding season with more than 200 young raised, thanks in part to the nest boxes donated through the year.

According to the Foundation, a nest box can be built, installed and maintained for a full year for \$85, and the purchaser of the box receives a certificate and regular updates on the progress of each nest, such as how many chicks have been born in the nest. Because the price of a nest box is relatively low compared to other conservation means, Salaman said it makes an excellent and effective gift for any wild bird lover, and he said they can never have enough donations.

"We typically get around 15 to 20 boxes per year, but we can do many more," he said. "The nest is cheaper to do in bulk. They are clearly effective."

At the Bird Endowment's Nido Adoptivo program, the gift of nest boxes go toward the wild blue-throated macaws. By becoming an "El Beni-Factor" through making a \$250 donation, a nest box can be built, customized with the benefactor's initials, and installed in Bolivia, where flocks of blue-throated macaws can use the nest boxes for breeding. According to the Bird Endowment, the money also goes toward maintenance, monitoring of population and other field work that the organization regularly performs.

For the 2009 to 10 breeding season, nest box donations are now being accepted at the Bird Endowment, said Laney Rickman, president and executive director.

"A Nido Adoptivo gift is nothing less than giving the real spirit of the holiday: the gift of hope itself," Rickman said. "Hope that just one supplemental nesting box could build on the good will of other El Beni-Factors and together, fulfill a promise of life eternal for the [blue-throated macaw] in their home in the wild."