

Pole-Mounted Baffles

Ron Kingston displays the stovepipe baffle he developed. Ron is the longtime chairman of the speakers bureau for the North American Bluebird Society.

Ron Kingston of Charlottesville, Virginia. Kingston's baffle is simple, lightweight, and low cost. It can be used on all types of small-diameter poles, including ones that telescope.

Metal air-conditioning duct can be substituted for the stovepipe. It comes in flat pieces, 60 inches long. The long edges are grooved to snap together and lock tight. If you fudge the numbers a little, you can cut three baffles, each 20 inches long, from one piece.

Tin snips (offset snips work best) are needed to construct and mount the baffles. Be careful to fold over any sharp corners that might be dangerous. The baffle isn't fastened to the mounting pole; it simply rests on a metal strap that Ron attaches to the mounting pole.

One reason this baffle is so effective against raccoons is because it is not bolted tightly to the mounting pole — it wobbles. The motion makes it impossible for a raccoon to hold a grip on the pipe.

The hardware-cloth plug used in Kingston's baffle is more effective against snakes than a solid top. The snake can see the nestbox and smell the scent of the birds from inside the baffle, but the hardware cloth stops it. It is likely to remain in

the baffle, the victim of its own limited reasoning power, rather than climb around the baffle on the outside — which a large snake can do. For added safety, a Krueger snake trap (p. 117) can be added above the stovepipe baffle to capture any snake that makes it that far.

Be careful to place the baffle high enough that cats can't leap to the top and use it as a platform for raiding the nestbox. Consider using a telescoping pole to raise the baffle and the nestbox out of a cat's leaping range.

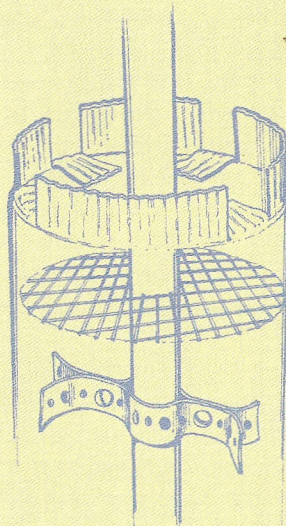
A coat of paint will make the baffle a little more presentable for use with a backyard nestbox. And the paint won't lessen the baffle's effectiveness.

A telescoping pole baffled with a stovepipe should deter any four-legged predator other than a bear. If you apply a thin ring of fresh grease on the mounting pipe under the baffle, climbing insects will be excluded as well. The grease will also reveal if snakes are trying to reach the box. When they slither over the grease, they'll smear it around.

A commercial snake guard similar to Kingston's is available but is only about 8 inches tall. This is not high enough to deter snakes, which can easily get over it.

Large versions of Ron Kingston's baffle can be made to fit over large-diameter poles, wooden posts, and even utility poles. Just snap together two or three sections of metal duct pipe. If the baffle can't be lifted over the top of the mounting pole, it can be built on the pole. Baffles 12 inches in diameter or more don't need to wobble; they can be attached rigidly. Raccoons can't hug a cylinder that large.

A wobbly section of large-diameter PVC pipe baffles raccoons as well as stovepipe does. Many nestbox monitors are now experimenting with

STOVEPIPE Baffle

Make the baffle by cutting $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch hardware cloth into a 9-inch circle. Make a small hole in the center so that the circle will slip over the mounting pole. Bend the edges of the circle down so that the hardware cloth fits snugly into a 24-inch-long section of 8-inch diameter stovepipe. Cut four tabs on the top end of the stovepipe and bend them over the hardware cloth.

To hang the baffle, bolt metal straps (plumber's tape) around the mounting pole for support. (Several wraps of duct tape around the pole below the metal straps will help keep them in place.) Slide the baffle down over the top of the mounting pole until it rests on the metal straps.