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The Problem With Birdhouses

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My father hates it when birds build nests on top of the lights on our porch. They've been doing it for years, and year after year, my father has to evict the bird families and sweep out the bits of straw and sticks that have gotten everywhere.

This year, he told me, he bought a birdhouse and put it in the big sycamore tree in front of the house. "That'll solve the problem once and for all!" he boasted.

For months, the birdhouse sat, empty, among the branches.

And for months, my father found himself chasing birds away from the porch as they attempted to construct a home.

What is a birdhouse, really? A glorified box, that's what. We build a box, cut a hole in it, and stick a roof on top.

Why on earth would a bird want to live in a manmade box? Do you think, if some giant, well-meaning robin made a great big "humannest" and placed it on the corner, people would want to live in it? Of course not. Humans don't live in nests. Birds do. And humans live in houses. Birds don't.

You never turn on an episode of *House Hunters* to find Mr. and Mrs. Bird arguing because there isn't a birdhouse that has both the swimming pool and large kitchen Mrs. Bird wants *and* is a short commute from Mr. Bird's favorite crabapple tree.

Birds just want a nice, safe spot in a tree where they can build a cozy nest for their family to thrive in. There's plenty of fresh air, and it's easy for them to fly in and out of.

And yet we keep occupying the best nesting spots with dark, claustrophobic boxes where the only mode of egress is a tiny hole in the side (which, by the way, definitely violates fire codes). Just try flying out of that, birds.

If humankind were to be defined by a single thing, I would argue that it is our unending urge to gentrify everything they can get their hands on. Old factories are turned into lavish studio apartments, unused parking lots are transformed into verdant public parks, bankrupted family-owned businesses are reimagined as Starbucks shops.

Even nature isn't safe from this global-scale Manifest Destiny. Unbelievably beautiful mountain ranges have become littered with tourist towns, African savannahs are overrun by safari-goers and have practically become zoos, and, perhaps most egregious, the lovely tree-lined streets of my hometown have become infested with birdhouses.

And why even put up birdhouses? What do we get out of them? The birds don't love us like our pets do. They don't even get near us. Birdhouses just sit in our yards and allow us the pleasure of going, "Bird!" whenever we see one fly to or from the birdhouse. That's it. That's all they do.

I explained this all to my father after he told me about his birdhouse's failure. "Dad, it's not worth it, just let the birds be." I urged him. Better to sweep out the porch every once in a while than to contribute to mankind's gentrification of the planet.

But he shook his head. "It was just too small, that's all. I just need something bigger that they'll like more."

The birds were disinterested in his bigger birdhouse. That didn't stop dad, though. He just kept buying birdhouses. Now, to walk through our backyard is like driving through an old Midwest steel town--lots of structures with nobody in them.

Because birds don't live in houses. They never have, and they never will. Birds live in nests.