



How to build an exterior barn owl nest box

As the number of natural nesting sites (hollow trees/ inside old barns) have declined, an artificial nest box provides a valuable place for barn owls to roost and to breed. As barn owls are particularly susceptible to wet conditions, one of the most important requirements for breeding is a site which remains secure and well sheltered from the elements.

Selecting a site

There must be sufficient barn owl hunting habitat nearby if the nest box is going to be beneficial to barn owls. The best habitat is rough grassland.

Exterior nest boxes should not be installed during the breeding season (March – September) to avoid the disturbance of other bird nests. They should be placed facing towards grassland with a reasonably conspicuous flight path between the grassland and entrance hole. They should not face into the prevailing wind – the best direction for boxes to face is either towards the east or the north.



A nest box is unlikely to be used for breeding in the year it is put up. Barn owls are more likely to use new nest boxes for roosting. It can take a couple of years for barn owls to breed in the nest box.

How to build your box

An exterior nest box must be built out of waterproofed timber. There are no set instructions for building a nest box but the following is recommended:

There is no set design for the barn owl nest box but the following is recommended:

1. The nest box should have a floor area of no less than 0.2m².
2. There should be an entrance hole in one of the top corners, which measures 130mm x 130mm. The entrance hole should be no smaller than 100mm x 100mm. There should be at least 460mm between the bottom of the nest box and the bottom of the entrance hole to prevent young falling out.





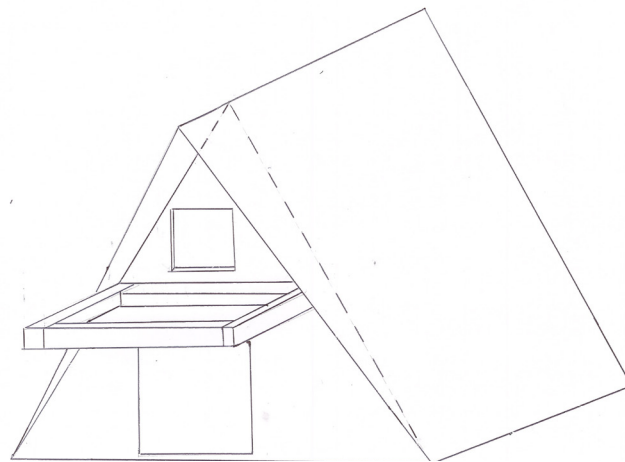
3. There must be an exercise/landing platform below the entrance hole. This must have a raised edge to allow barn owls to grip easily. The landing platform should be placed higher up than the floor of the nest box to prevent the accumulation of a continuous layer of pellet debris on both sides of the box, which soaks up rainwater (this would cause the box to rot and chill the nest contents).

4. There must be access to the box to allow it to be cleaned out.

5. An inch or two layer of wood chippings or shavings should be sprinkled on the inside of the box floor – this encourages nesting and stops the eggs from rolling about.

6. All sides should overhang the floor and the floor should have adequate drainage. The roof should be covered in roofing felt – very steeply sloping roofs may not need a covering but the apex join must be waterproofed. All screws/nails should be rust proof.

7. The box should be installed 3m – 5m up the tree and should be mounted on a level platform of two bearers (2 x 4" wooden batons).



Why are barn owls in trouble?

The barn owl is one of the most wide-ranging birds in the world, found in Europe, Africa, Asia, the Americas and Australasia. However, from the middle of the 19th Century, the beautiful barn owl began to decline in Britain. The original decline in the 19th Century is thought to have been the result of an increase in persecution. The decline continued between the 1930s and 1990s as a result of agricultural intensification, poor winter weather, traffic deaths, pesticide use and a loss of hunting and nesting sites. In the early 2000s barn owl numbers did seem to be improving, but the bad winters of the late 2000s has seemingly wiped out any increase in the numbers. 2013 was one of the worst breeding seasons for barn owls due to the heavy snowfall of March 2013, just before the breeding season.

Find out more

Find out more about Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and how to become a member, plus more about the work we do for barn owls by contacting us in the following ways:

A: 1 St George's Place, York, YO24 1GN

T: 01904 659570

E: info@ywt.org.uk



@YorksWildlife



YorkshireWildlifeTrust



Barn owl - Credit Les Binns