



## How to build an interior 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. A good indication of whether a site is suitable is to look for signs of barn owls – such as the ‘whitewash’ like droppings either splashed on the floor or as vertical lines running down roof timbers, pellets and feathers.

The building in which you wish to place the barn owl box should have clear fly-in access, overlook open barn owl hunting habitat that is clear from obstructions, and should face away from hazards such as busy roads



Barn owl - Credit Andrew Mason

and water troughs. There must be parallel beams high up to fix the box to. It is absolutely vital that there is a permanent opening so that the owls are not trapped in the building or outside away from their young.

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 interior box can be made out of a packing case or tea chest, or built out of sustainably sourced plywood.

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

1. Box ideally measures 600mm (depth) x 500mm (width) x 400mm (length). The box should not be any smaller than 450mm x 450mm x 600mm
2. Entrance hole, in one of the top corners, measures 130mm x 130mm. The entrance hole should be no smaller than 100mm x 100mm. There should be at least



Owlet - Credit Steve Edwards



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

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

5. The box must be light enough to handle and put into position safely. Use wooden batons to help secure the box in place to prevent any movement

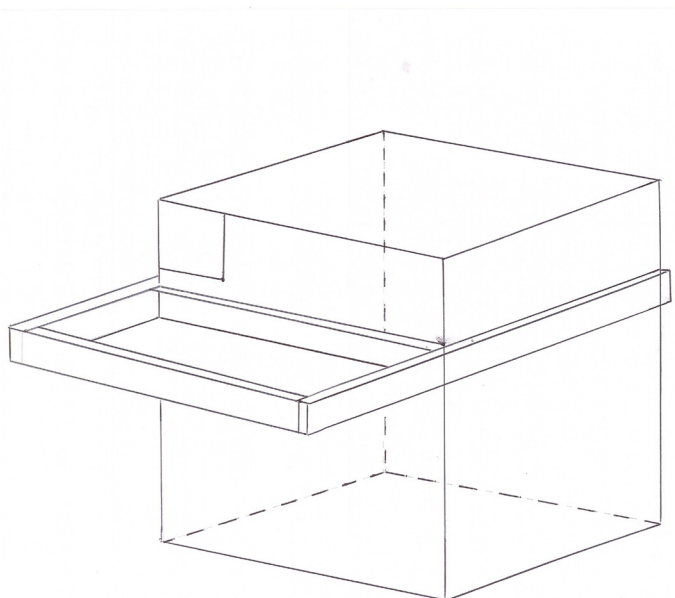
6. The box must be fixed in a position where it will remain dry for many years and be at least 3m off the ground. The location of the entrance hole is important – barn owls will not use the box unless the entrance hole is clearly visible.

## 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



Barn owl - Credit Elliott Neep (elliottneep.com)



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](mailto:info@ywt.org.uk)



@YorksWildlife



YorkshireWildlifeTrust