

Erecting your Nestbox

LEAFLET No 45



Reg. Charity No 299 835

This leaflet provides information on how and where to place Barn Owl nestboxes, including advice on trees, buildings and safety.

Good Barn Owl habitat

Nestboxes are best placed close to areas of good habitat. Food supply and therefore habitat is one of the main factors governing Barn Owl numbers. The best habitat for Barn Owls is rough grassland supporting a high Field Vole population. Damp, tussocky grassland in fallow or lightly grazed pasture is ideal. Ditch sides, hedge banks, young tree plantations, forest rides and (unfortunately) roadside verges and railway embankments are often good hunting grounds. Some areas are good at certain times of year, such as hay meadows in summer.

The creation of new woodlands is beneficial to Barn Owls in the short term due to the rough grass which develops between the new plantings. However, some benefit is lost as the trees grow. The Barn Owl is not a woodland bird, so don't put your box in a wood.

Where do Barn Owls roost and breed?

Barn Owls will use both isolated buildings and barns in busy yards. The ideal building will have access high above the ground, a level place for egg-laying and afford good shelter. Most modern barns are suitable for Barn Owls once a nestbox has been installed. Surprisingly, many traditional barns are far from ideal and can also be improved by the installation of a good nestbox.

Tree hollows are also used by Barn Owls. Boxes can be placed in trees, but outdoor boxes are more likely to be used by other species than those in buildings. Barn Owls look for holes not boxes - when making an entry into a building or positioning a nestbox in a tree, make sure the hole is visible to any passing owl.

Privacy

Barn Owls like to roost out of sight of humans and are much less inclined to be flushed from a building if they have a box to hide in (it is amazing how much "disturbance" Barn Owls will tolerate at sites with a suitable nestbox). Almost any tall rural building can become an ideal roosting and nesting site when a nestbox is provided.

PLEASE NOTE that it is illegal to disturb wild Barn Owls whilst they are breeding. It is not even permitted for the provider of the nestbox or the site owner to look in a nest unless they have a current nest inspection licence (see *Safeguarding Wild Sites* leaflet no 28).

Positioning an indoor nestbox

1. Fix it up as high as possible; however, remember that fully enclosed modern barns with little ventilation can become very hot in fine weather - in this type of building the box should be placed below the apex but at least 3 metres above ground level. Bear in mind that you also need to place the box to allow removal of the lid.
2. Position the box so that an owl coming into the building using the most likely entrance will see the entrance hole and have an easy flight path to it.
3. If possible, position the box so that emerging nestlings can walk on beams or other flat surfaces.
4. Consider your own safety (for which you are responsible). Try to position the box where it can be easily and safely inspected at a later date.
5. The box must stay totally dry if it is to last for years.
6. It is generally best to avoid placing boxes within 1km (½ mile) of a motorway, dual-carriageway or other modern A road with rough grass verges (due to the high risk of road mortality).
7. Avoid buildings subject to irregular loud disturbance, for example sheds used for night-time lambing in January/February are less favoured. Bales stores, covered yards, silage stores are normally OK.
8. For hygiene reasons avoid buildings used for grain storage.

There is no need to line the nestbox. The eggs are normally laid on a layer of the birds' own pellet debris which is a wonderfully absorbent material - much better than anything people can provide!

Permanent access into the building for the owls is obviously essential. If there is no hole you can create one using the following guidelines:

1. Make the entrance hole about 12cm (5") wide x 25cm (10") high (minimum 4" x 6").
2. The hole should be at least 3 metres (10 feet) up and as visible as possible to any passing owl rather than screened by trees or other buildings.
3. When making access into an attic of an occupied dwelling or barn undergoing conversion please refer to *Barn Conversions* (leaflet no. 22) or our publication *Barn Owls and Rural Planning Applications*
4. In the case of an occupied house, converted barn or busy farmyard, the entrance hole into the building should, if possible, be situated on the side of the building with the least disturbance, with direct access to an open area of good habitat. Avoid facing the entrance hole into the prevailing wind.

Positioning an outdoor nestbox

1. Carefully select the best tree. A large, old and isolated tree near an area of good habitat is ideal. Choose a tree that has little or no foliage in the lower part so that the box entrance is very likely to be noticed by any passing owl (rather than screened by foliage).
2. Try to avoid facing the box west or southwest (avoiding the prevailing wind and rain).
3. Place the box so as to deter interference by inquisitive passers-by. A height of 4.5-7 metres (14'-24') may be achieved depending on the tree.
4. Ensure that, when erected, the box is slightly lower at the front. This will help prevent rain water running or splashing in through the entrance hole.
5. It is preferable for the nestbox to be within the body of a rough-barked tree so that any nestlings that fall down have a better chance of being able to climb up and get back inside. Bear in mind that the box may need to be inspected or cleaned out in future so position the box so that this can be done safely.
6. Avoid placing boxes within 1km (½ mile) of a motorway, dual-carriageway or other modern A road.
7. Tanalised 50mm x 50mm (2" x 2") timber and galvanised nails can be used to secure the box. If you don't wish to nail into the tree you can try lashing timber onto the tree using rot-proof cord and nailing the box to that. Alternatively, you can drill holes and use nylon bolts or use ratchet straps.

What are the chances of my box being used?

This depends upon what is limiting the species in your area. If there is an ample food supply but a shortage of suitable roosting and breeding sites then your box could be occupied very quickly. Conversely, if there are plenty of potential sites but a severe shortage of food then your box may never be used. Providing that habitat in your area is reasonably good or there is potential for improvement in the future it is always worth erecting a box. If you own land, think about creating Barn Owl habitat yourself. Habitat in any area may well improve in years to come as public demand leads to more wildlife-friendly food production.

Clearing out the box

As the box fills up with nest debris, its effective depth is reduced. So it gradually becomes less safe for emerging young. After four or five broods of young have been produced (normally after about four years) the nest debris should be removed. Boxes used by Jackdaws will fill rapidly with sticks and should be cleared out every year. When clearing out nest debris it is advisable to wear gloves and a dust mask. It's usually best to clear out nestboxes in November, December or January (but please try to avoid flushing birds out during severe weather conditions). Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, it is an offence to disturb breeding Barn Owls.

Safety

Before you erect your nestbox take time to consider the hazards you might face and what steps you could take

to minimise them. Hazards might include an injury at a remote location, falling from a ladder, masonry falling from unsound buildings, injury from heavy lifting, dropping a nestbox onto another person or poor positioning of a box causing additional hazards for others using the building or monitoring the box later.

The following are examples of precautions you should take to reduce the risk of accident:

1. If possible take a companion. However if erecting your nestbox at an isolated site on your own, let someone know where you are going and when you expect to be back before you set off. Carry a mobile phone if you have one.
2. Time spent in preparation is seldom wasted. Never carry a box up into position until all necessary preparatory work is complete. Double-check your measuring to confirm that the box will fit.
3. Ensure that your ladder is secure before climbing it. If possible tie it off at the bottom and always tie the top before ascending with your nestbox.
4. Avoid over-reaching - never attempt to carry out any task up a ladder if you cannot reach comfortably.
5. When planning how to position, support and fix a nestbox, try to create a situation where the box can rest in position without being held. This will allow you to have both hands free to fix it safely.
6. When carrying a nestbox up a ladder, ensure that it is kept low relative to your body (ideally not above waist height). This will keep your centre of gravity down. Try to keep the box in front of both you and the ladder so that it pulls you towards the ladder - never hold a nestbox behind or above you.
7. You are responsible for your own safety - assess the risks and be careful.

For information on pole-boxes, please refer to our leaflet '*Pole-box Design. An outdoor Barn Owl nestbox suitable for erection on a large pole*' (leaflet no. 50).

Please let us know when your box is occupied.

Good luck!

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The Barn Owl Trust is a registered charity dedicated to the conservation of the Barn Owl and its environment. You can become a **Friend of the Barn Owl Trust** and support our work by making a regular donation. **Friends** receive our bi-annual magazine *Feedback*, our Annual Report and an enamel badge.

The Trust provides a wide range of free leaflets on Barn Owl related matters. For details of these and further information about the Trust and its work, please write including a large SAE to:

Barn Owl Trust
Waterleat
Ashburton
Devon
TQ13 7HU

Tel: 01364 653026
Email: info@barnowltrust.org.uk
Web: www.barnowltrust.org.uk

Restoring the Balance

We've lived side-by-side with Barn Owls for centuries. But in modern times wild Barn Owls have become increasingly rare - and the reasons are all man-made. The Barn Owl is a symbol of our relationship with the countryside: the decline of this beautiful bird reflects our attitude towards the environment. No species can prosper in isolation - not even human beings. All things are connected and if we lived in balance with nature then Barn Owls, and so much other wildlife, could thrive.

How you can help

You can help to conserve the Barn Owl by **Becoming a Friend** of the Trust and making an annual or monthly donation to support our work. If you are a UK tax payer and complete a simple **Gift Aid** declaration the Trust can reclaim the tax paid on your donation and significantly increase the value of your gift at no extra cost to you. Standing order and Gift Aid forms are provided below. Please consider paying by **Standing Order** as this greatly reduces our administration time and costs.

BECOMING A FRIEND

UK Friends: Individual £20; Family (same address) £25

Overseas Friends: Individual £25 (sterling); Family (same address) £30 (sterling)

Owlets: UK £20; Overseas £25. Owlets are Junior Friends. They receive a personal ID card, Feedback and goody bag. (If children are under 16, please state ages. One or more children from the same family at one address can be Owlets.)

Name(s) _____

Address _____ Postcode _____

Daytime telephone no _____ Email address _____

I would like to become a Friend of the Trust and receive my Friend's pack - I enclose £ _____ * (see above)

I am pleased to enclose a donation of £ _____ *

*UK taxpayers please complete Gift Aid declaration below.

Sorry, donations of under £5 are not acknowledged without an SAE.

The contact details you submit on this form will be held by the Barn Owl Trust on a secure computer system and may be used by the Trust in pursuit of its aims. Please let us know if you object to this.

GIFT AID DECLARATION

If you are a UK tax payer completing this Gift Aid form will enable the Trust to reclaim the tax paid on your donation, thereby increasing the value of your gift at no extra cost to yourself.

Full name _____

Address _____ Postcode _____

I want the Barn Owl Trust to treat all donations I make on or after the date of this declaration as Gift Aid donations until I notify you otherwise

My signature _____ Date _____

Note: Please remember to tell us if you no longer pay an amount of income or capital gains tax equal to the tax we reclaim on your donations. Please contact our office if you have any queries.

STANDING ORDER FORM

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____ Postcode _____

Please pay £ _____ on the first day of each **month*/year*** (* delete one) starting in the month of _____

and a like sum on the same date each **month*/year*** until further notice to the account of

the Barn Owl Trust (a/c no. 1027812) at Lloyds Bank (sort code 30-98-69) 31 Fore Street, Totnes, Devon, TQ9 5HH

My signature _____ Account Number _____

To the manager _____ Bank _____

Bank Address _____ Postcode _____

THIS STANDING ORDER REPLACES ANY EXISTING STANDING ORDERS FROM THIS ACCOUNT TO THE BARN OWL TRUST

Please fill in and sign the appropriate parts of this form and post it to:

Barn Owl Trust, Waterleat, Ashburton, Devon, TQ13 7HU

If you'd like to receive information by post, please tick the boxes below and enclose a large stamped addressed envelope:

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