

Barn Owl Nestboxes For Inside Buildings



Do you have a suitable building?

Ideal buildings for Barn Owl nestboxes are:

- At least 4 metres (13ft) high.
- Open fronted or with an opening or hole at least 3 metres (10ft) above ground level which overlooks open countryside.
- Where the nestbox can be positioned 3+ metres (10+ ft) above the ground.
- Where the nestbox access hole is visible to an owl from the most likely entrance point.
- Ideally within 1 km (1/2 mile) of areas or strips of rough grassland.



It's worth bearing in mind that:

- It doesn't matter what the building is made of, or used for.
- Barn Owls can learn to tolerate noise and activity as long as they have something to hide in – such as a nestbox.
- When choosing the building and the owl box position, remember that Barn Owls are interested in openings and holes rather than buildings or boxes.



Most old barns are good places for nestboxes – only some will have a suitable cavity space without one.



Modern barns are very often perfect for nestboxes but without one, nearly all lack a cavity space for nesting.

Why an indoor owl box is better than fixing one on the outside of a building

- Inside the building, the owls will benefit from the additional shelter. Outside they are too exposed to the weather.
- An indoor Barn Owl nestbox is not suitable for outdoor use, and an outdoor nestbox is much better placed in a tree – because trees usually afford more shelter and owlets can sometimes climb a tree to re-enter the box.
- Nestboxes designed for indoor use are cheaper, and are quicker and easier to build.

Is your landscape suitable?

- Barn Owl nestboxes in the UK should be placed inside rural buildings that overlook open habitat.
- Avoid urban, suburban, dense forest and high mountain areas.
- Avoid sites within 1 km of a motorway or other fast, unscreened, major roads, due to the risk of road-deaths.
- Nestboxes do not need to be placed directly on patches or strips of rough grassland as the birds are perfectly capable of 'commuting' across unsuitable habitats before starting to hunt and have very large home ranges.

Barn Owl Trust Recommended Indoor Nestbox Plans



Figure 1. Diagram illustrating ply cutting plan, batten placement and corresponding dimensions.

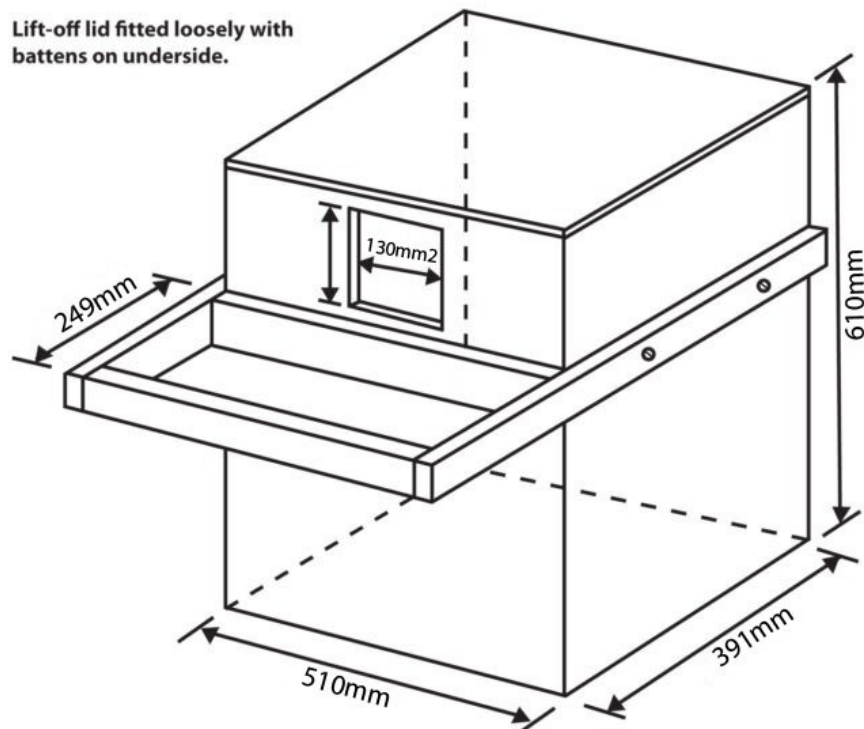


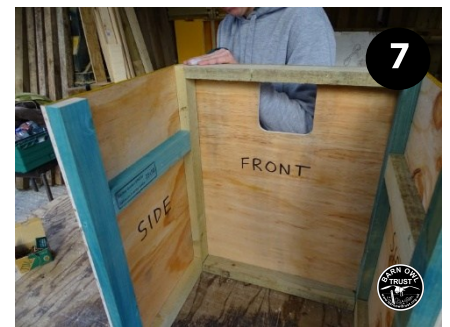
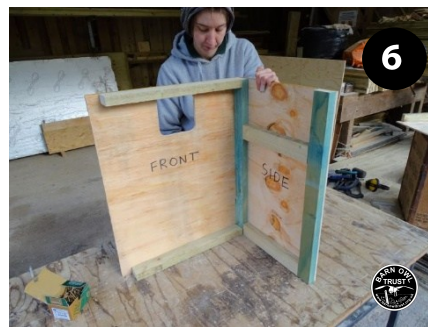
Figure 2. Completed indoor nestbox diagram

Materials to use

The basic box should be built using 9mm FSC approved plywood and 50 x 25mm batten. Softwood ply (usually Scandinavian or Canadian) is perfectly adequate, cheaper, and better for the environment than hardwood. Where the nestbox will be completely dry, then untreated wood is suitable. We use 30, 40 and 50mm screws but nailing and/or gluing is also acceptable.

Indoor Nestbox Construction Instructions

- 1) Cut ply and batten following dimensions and cutting plan shown in Figure 1.
- 2) We use 30mm screws for fixing into the 'flat' side of a batten
- 3) We use 40mm screws for fixing into the 'edge' of a batten.
- 4) Next screw through ply into batten, corresponding with the orientations shown in Figure 1. All battens should be flush with the edge of the ply. The only exception is the batten attached to the lid, where it should be inset by ~10mm to allow the lid to lift on and off easily.
- 5) For the exercise platform, first create a batten frame with 4, 50mm screws, then attach the ply with 30mm screws.
- 6) Screw the box front to one of the sides ensuring the side is the right way up (four or five screws along each edge should suffice).
- 7) Now fit the second side, checking that both sides are the right way up.
- 8) Now fit the back in the same way.
- 9) Now fit the bottom. Be careful not to miss the batten. We don't want any sharp ends sticking through. Screw on all 4 sides.
- 10) Now attach the exercise platform using 40mm screws into the sides. Make sure to line the platform up level with the base of the access hole (see figure 2).
- 11) Screw a few 30mm screws through the inside front of the box into the batten of the exercise platform to prevent any gap forming that could result in an owl getting its talon caught.
- 12) Now fit the lid. It does not need to be secured with screws unless it is in a location vulnerable to strong winds.





Your Safety

Before erecting a box, please ensure that you have properly assessed the risks involved, particularly with regard to working at height.

A nestbox is quite heavy to lift single-handed and using ladders is potentially dangerous.

Please do not work alone and consider using two ladders or safer methods, such as a pulley system.

Alternative design criteria for indoor nestboxes

Entrance hole: Optimum size 130 x 130mm; minimum 100 x 100mm; maximum 150 x 150mm.

Floor area of nest chamber: Good size range 0.2 to 0.4 m². Absolute minimum 0.16m². The floor of the box featured on our plans measures 409x510mm giving a floor area of 0.2m².

Depth: From bottom of entrance hole to nest floor must be not less than 450mm.

For any Barn Owl nestbox less than 700mm deep, an exercise/landing platform below the entrance hole is vital for the safety of young fledglings. Climbing/jumping young birds can then get from the platform onto the roof of the box and (ideally) onto other nearby perching places. The platform must have a generous raised edge suitable for Barn Owls to grip easily.

Weight: Should be substantially constructed yet light enough to permit safe erection using basic equipment. Normal indoor-box weight range is 10-15 kg. Total weight for erection by hand should not exceed 18 kg and an indoor-box under 8 kg is probably not substantial enough.

Materials: Should not be constructed from tropical hardwood unless the timber is certified as sustainably grown.

Ideal nestbox: The dimensions given on the owl box diagram are the **minimum** required size. An ideal nesting box would be much bigger: a full 1 metre from the bottom of the entrance hole to the bottom of the box and with a floor area of at least 1 x 1 metre. However, owl boxes that big would be very difficult to erect and more expensive to build.

Human access and clearing out

- Maintaining the internal depth of the nesting box reduces the chances of a nestling Barn Owl falling from the box and dying as a result of neglect or predation. Therefore it's important to clear it out if there's more than about 75mm of nest debris.
- **Always wear gloves and a mask when clearing out the nestbox.**
- Boxes only used by Barn Owls and/or Stock Doves will need clearing out every 2 or 3 years at most (unless the owls have very large broods of young or breed more than once a year in which case they should be cleaned out every 1 or 2 years). If Jackdaws use the box it must be cleaned out every year
- It's usually best to clean out nestboxes between November and January so as not to disturb breeding Barn Owls which is illegal.
- It's best to wait until the weather is dry with little wind, to avoid flushing any owls out into bad weather. (Barn Owl feathers are not waterproof and they can get waterlogged and chilled in wind and rain.)



Charity No: 1201419
www.barnowltrust.org.uk

Email: info@barnowltrust.org.uk
Tel: 01364255256
Ashburton, Devon