

# Barn Owl Nestboxes for Trees



## Do you have a suitable tree?

An ideal tree for a Barn Owl nestbox would be:

- A mature tree with a thick trunk
- Isolated, in a hedgerow or on the woodland edge
- With a high canopy and minimal low branches
- Where a nestbox can be placed at least 3 metres above ground level
- Where the nestbox access hole would be visible to a passing owl, even when the tree is in full leaf and seen from a distance
- Quite close to strips or patches of rough grassland

## Top Tips:

- Barn Owls are interested in holes rather than boxes so make sure the hole is easily visible!
- Face the access hole towards open ground but avoid the prevailing weather if possible.
- Trees with low branches or those screened by other trees/buildings are not suitable because the access hole will be hidden.
- Tree boxes within woodland are very unlikely to attract Barn Owls.



## Is your landscape suitable?

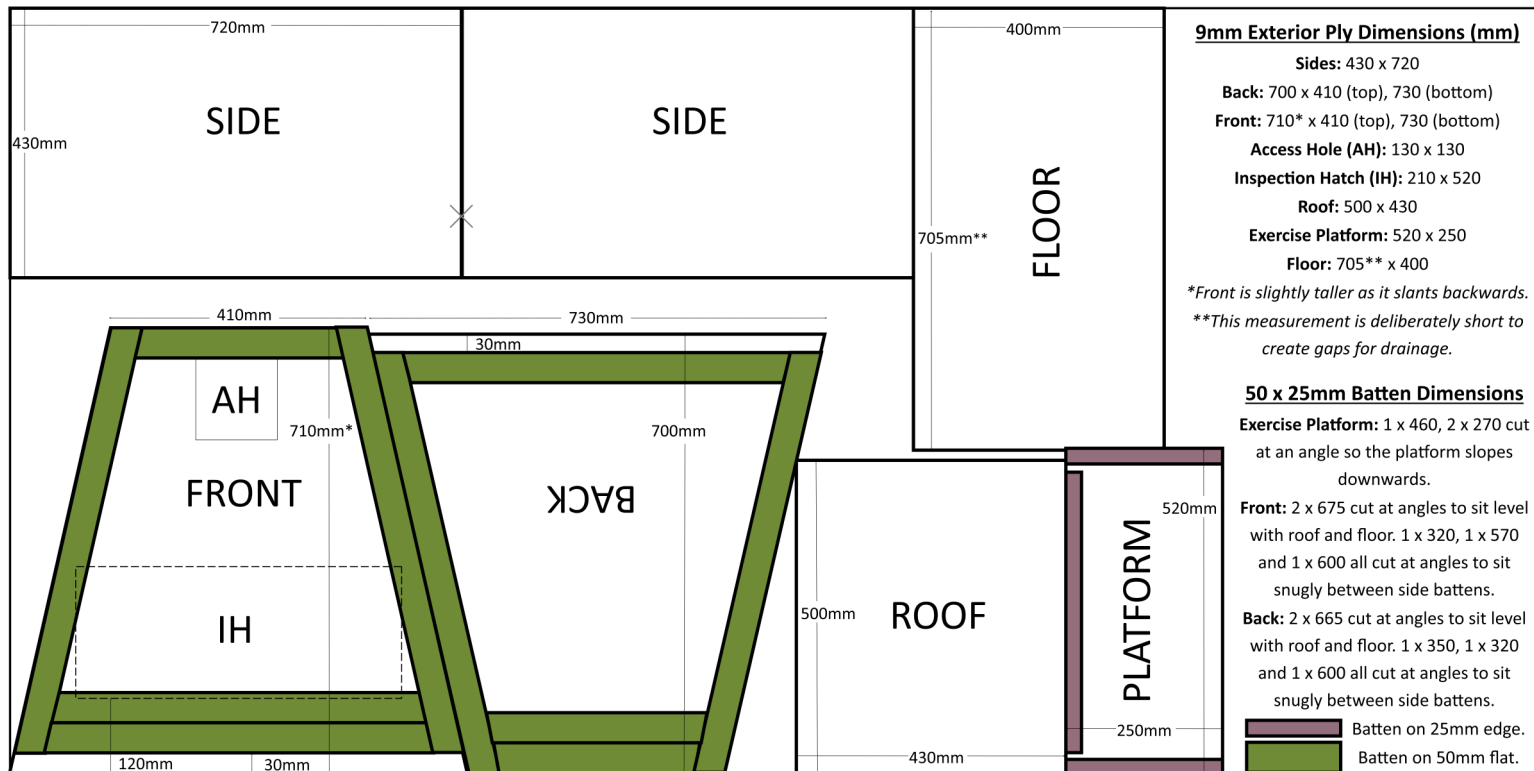
- Barn Owl nestboxes in the UK should be placed on trees that overlook open habitat.
- Avoid urban, suburban, dense forest and high mountain areas.
- Avoid sites within 1 km of a motorway or other fast, unscreened, major roads, due to the risk of road-deaths.
- Nestboxes do not need to be placed directly 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.



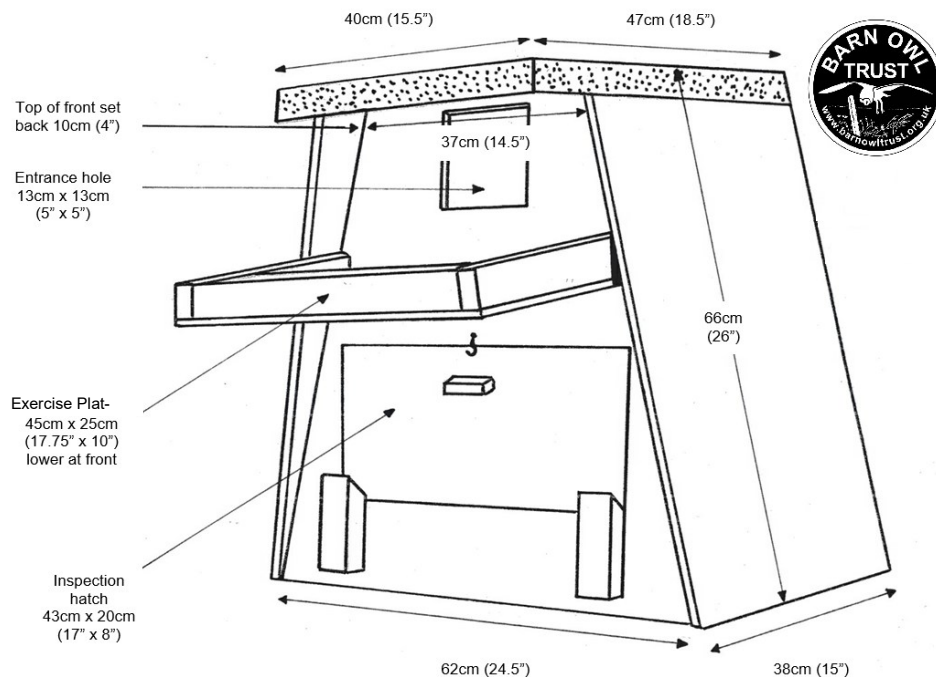
## We DO NOT recommend fixing a tree box to the outside wall of a building on onto a pole because:

- On a live tree, owls benefit from additional shelter from the canopy. On a pole they are far more exposed.
- A tree box with an internal depth of 450mm reduces the chance of owlets falling (before they are ready to fly) but it does not eliminate the danger entirely. With a tree-mounted box, a fallen owlet might be able to scramble up the tree trunk and re-enter the box. In the case of a tree box mounted on a pole, this is impossible.
- A well designed pole box is much bigger and much deeper than one designed for fixing to a tree. This eliminates the danger of owlets falling because they cannot get out until they are able to fly.
- Rather than erect a tree box on an outside wall, it's much better to create an entrance hole and erect a modified interior nestbox on the inside (up against that hole) if owls cannot be given access to the building interior.

## Barn Owl Trust Recommended Tree Nestbox Plan



**Figure 1.** Diagram illustrating ply cutting plan, batten placement and corresponding dimensions. Our deep nest box design is much safer for owlets due to a 450mm drop from the entrance hole to the floor and exercise platform with raised edge.



**Figure 2.** Completed tree nestbox diagram

### Materials to use and notes of waterproofing

The basic owl box should be built using rot-resistant or Tanalith E treated sheet material manufactured using a waterproof adhesive. We use 9mm exterior grade tanalised softwood ply (or structural exterior grade ply complying with EN314-2 Class 3, CE2+ or C+/C), 25 x 50mm tanalised batten and 30mm rust-resistant screws. Please avoid using hardwood ply, unless it is stamped "FSC Approved".

Where tanalised plywood is not available, any type of wood preservative may be used provided that the box is dry before erection. It is essential that the edges and ends of all parts are treated before assembly.

The top of the owl box should be covered with heavy duty roofing felt. A waterproof sealant should be used in all the wood joints to prevent water seeping in. 20mm diameter ventilation/drainage holes can also be drilled in the floor of the box. The front, back and sides must overhang the floor of the box.

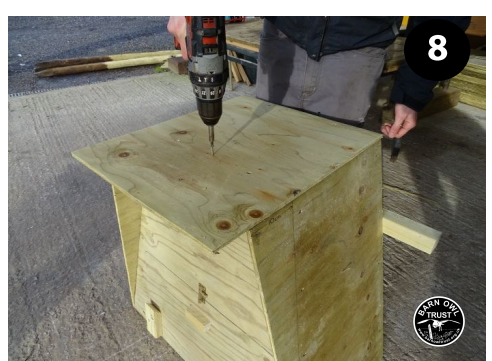
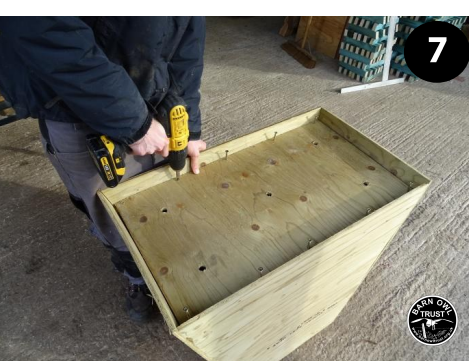


## Tree Nestbox Construction Instructions

Cut ply and batten following dimensions shown in figure 1.

- 1) Internal battens are first attached to the back and front.
- 2) Screw positions for the side sections. Note that the front will be inset by 100mm at the top. 30mm screws are used.
- 3) An 'all weather' sealant is applied immediately before the surfaces come together. Get the sealant close to the edge so the plywood pieces are sealed to each other.
- 4) Attach the side leaving the overhang at the bottom.
- 5) Apply sealant to the ply edges of the front section, before screwing into place. Remember that the front is inset by 100mm at the top.
- 6) The second side goes on after another line of sealant is applied.
- 7) The floor is screwed into place. Use larger 50mm screws – 5 along the front and back edges.
- 8) Now the lid goes on.
- 9) The Exercise Platform is fixed on a downwards slope. Note that the sides of the platform are angled inwards. Just 2 x 30mm screws in each side should suffice. Check that the Inspection Hatch opens easily.
- 10) We use torch-on roofing felt that is guaranteed for 10 years. Hot felt can be 'moulded' nicely around corners. You may prefer to use a thinner polyester felt and roofing tacks.

Job done—you can check the box is fully waterproof with a hose or by leaving it under a sprinkler for a few hours.







### Installation and safety

Nestboxes can either be screwed or nailed into the tree with hangers (hanging kits available for sale on the Barn Owl Trust website), or by a piece of batten attached to the box and the tree.

If keen to avoid screws/nails then UV-stable ratchet straps (polyester not polypropylene) can be used and we suggest 25mm / 800kg.

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

A nestbox is 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.



### Human access and clearing out

- The front of the owl box should have an access panel to enable nest debris to be cleared out periodically.
- Maintaining the internal depth of the nest 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.



### Other species which may occupy a Barn Owl Tree nestbox include:

Tawny Owl, Little Owl, Kestrel, Stock Dove, Jackdaw, Feral Pigeon, Great Tit, Duck species (Mandarin, Mallard, Goldeneye & Goosander), Red & Grey Squirrel, Pine Marten, Honey Bees, Wasps and Hornets.

### If you choose to use a different design for your tree nestbox, ensure it meets these design criteria:

- 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 m<sup>2</sup>. Absolute minimum 0.16m<sup>2</sup>.
- 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 with a raised edge below the entrance hole is vital for the safety of young fledglings.
- Interior must remain dry during prolonged heavy rain coming from any direction.



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