

# Little Owl Nestboxes



Little Owls are a cavity-nesting species, with nests recorded in rock crags, rabbit warrens and haystacks as well as in buildings, wall cavities and tree holes.

A wide variety of nestbox designs have been used by Little Owls. The essential design requirements are:

- a very small entrance hole (70mm)
- a narrow tunnel or baffle arrangement
- a dark nesting chamber.

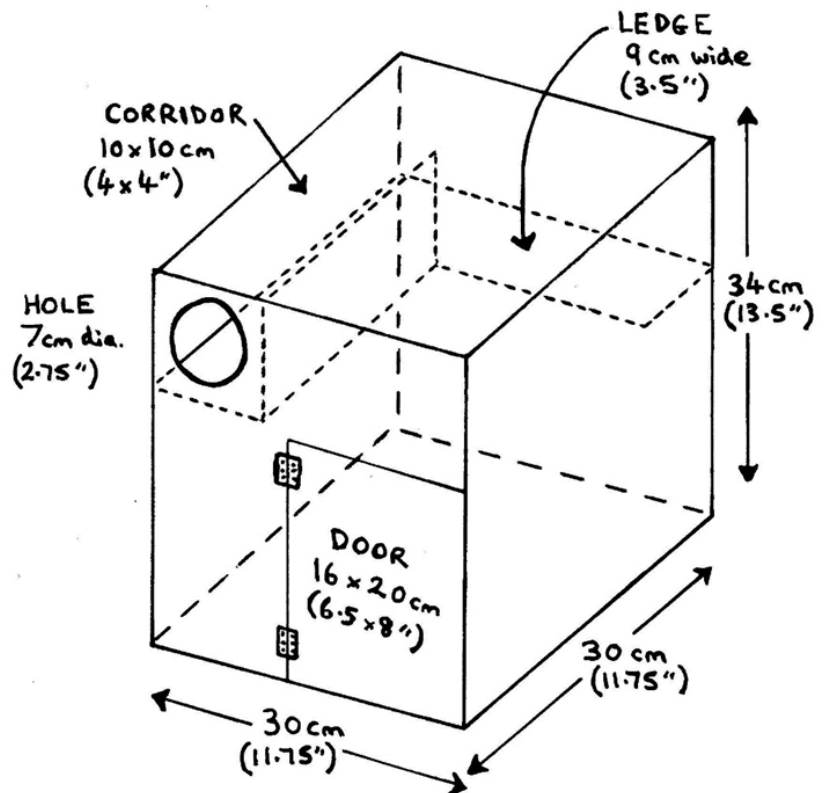


**Indoor Little Owl nestbox**



**Outdoor Little Owl nestbox**

Note: We have adapted Bob Sheppard's design by also adding a tray.



**Figure 1.** Little Owl nestbox diagram

The Barn Owl Trust is grateful to Bob Sheppard for providing the design details.

## Materials to use

Indoor nestbox:

- 12mm tanalised softwood plywood
- 40mm screws

Outdoor nestbox:

- 12 mm pressure treated plywood\*
- 'all-weather' sealant
- thick, torch-on roofing felt
- 40mm rust-proof screws
- A 'Nestbox Hanging Kit' (included with all Barn Owl Trust Little Owl nestboxes or can be purchased separately if you have made your own box.)



\*Please avoid using hardwood ply unless stamped 'FSC Approved'.

## **Construction**

- Consider the proposed location of the box when deciding on the position of the access hole and internal baffles. Wherever possible the box should be positioned in such a way as to allow the owls to walk out onto a branch or wall top.
- Construct the sides first and then cut the floor to fit within the sides .
- Drill a 10mm (½”) drainage hole in each corner of the floor.
- Cut removable panel that allows access to the main chamber, secure with hinges if necessary.

If constructing an outdoor box:

- Torch or tack on thick roofing felt on top of the box
- Seal all joints with good quality sealant such as ‘Ever Build – Weather Mate’.

A small ‘exercise platform’ can be added immediately below the entrance hole and above the inspection hatch.

## **Placement**

The owl box should:

- Be erected a minimum of 3 metres (10ft) above the ground.
- On a wall top, beam or tree branch so that owlets can walk in and out prior to fledging.



Little Owls seem to prefer nestboxes placed in open-sided or open fronted buildings rather than enclosed types.



## **Clearing out**

After 2 -3 years of occupation, the box should be cleared out during autumn or winter to reduce the risk of a build up of debris and therefore the young owls getting out prematurely. Any depth of debris more than about 1” (25mm) should be removed. Little Owl nestboxes are usually small enough to deter use by species such as Stock Dove and Jackdaw, but any evidence of these species (sticks, bits of straw, etc.) should also be removed.

## **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.



# Little Owl Habitat Advice



When managing habitat for Little Owls try to create a mixture of patches under different land-use, as this will support the wide variety of prey species that the Little Owl feeds on. Here are some key recommendations:

- In grassland, encourage a herb-rich mix of species and an open structure to the sward, ideally with some patches of bare ground.
- Create variation in grassland sward height, for example, by cutting some blocks in May/June and others in September/October.
- In fields of arable crops, allow winter stubble, include beetle banks, and leave corners un-harvested where possible.
- Sow wild-bird food crop.
- Create rough grassland field margins next to pasture or crops.
- Install perches over 1.5 m high, particularly at the boundary between field margins and fields, and at the edges of arable fields.
- Conserve traditional orchards and enhance these by allowing areas of rough grassland to develop and leaving fallen fruit.
- In paddocks, allow patches of bare ground to develop and leave dung to attract invertebrates.



The Little Owl's home range usually lies within 300 m of the nest site, although most of their activity will take place within 150 m. Therefore, improving habitat within 150 m of a nest site can make a real difference to how successful they are at breeding. Little Owls depend on small mammals, earthworms, beetles and many other invertebrate species for their food. Therefore, avoiding rodenticide or insecticide is very important to reduce the risk of poisoning.



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