

Tawny Owl Nestboxes



Tawny Owls are a cavity-nesting species, preferring tree holes when available. Rarely, they use other natural sites like the forks of tree trunks or squirrel drays. They take readily to artificial sites such as purpose-built nestboxes. However, it's very unusual to find Tawny Owls roosting or nesting in a building. Tawny Owls are sedentary and highly territorial breeding species, which will often return to the same nest site each year. The commonest owl in the UK (50,000 pairs), they are responsible for the familiar 'twit twoo' call.



The size of the territory ranges between 12 and 20 hectares depending on the amount of suitable habitat available. Due to their character, installing more than two boxes in an area of this size is unlikely to attract more pairs to nest. Primarily a woodland species, they can live anywhere with lots of large trees. This includes suburban gardens, farmland copses and urban city parks. The densest numbers are in extensive deciduous woodland, where there are some old trees with natural cavities. Other species like Stock Dove, Mandarin Duck, Jackdaw, Squirrels or even Great tits can use these nestboxes.

Tawny Owl Identification

- About 430mm tall with a wing span of 950mm.
- Brown or grey underparts and upperparts. More rounded brown or grey face with dark eyes.
- Overall impression in flight of a large brown bird (but can look pale in car headlights).
- One clutch of 2 to 3 eggs is laid, from March to April. Females incubate for 30 days, with chicks fledging between 35—39 days.
- Largely nocturnal and rarely seen at other times, unless at roost. Often heard and can be very vocal.
- A broad diet, they eat small and medium sized mammals, small birds, amphibians, insects and even fish.



Tawny Owl nestbox plans, materials and monitoring

Design

The most common Tawny Owl nestbox is an upright design, shown in Fig. 1. It is normally strapped or nailed to the side of a vertical tree trunk or major branch, using the hanging kit provided. These can be purchased separately as well, if building the box yourself.

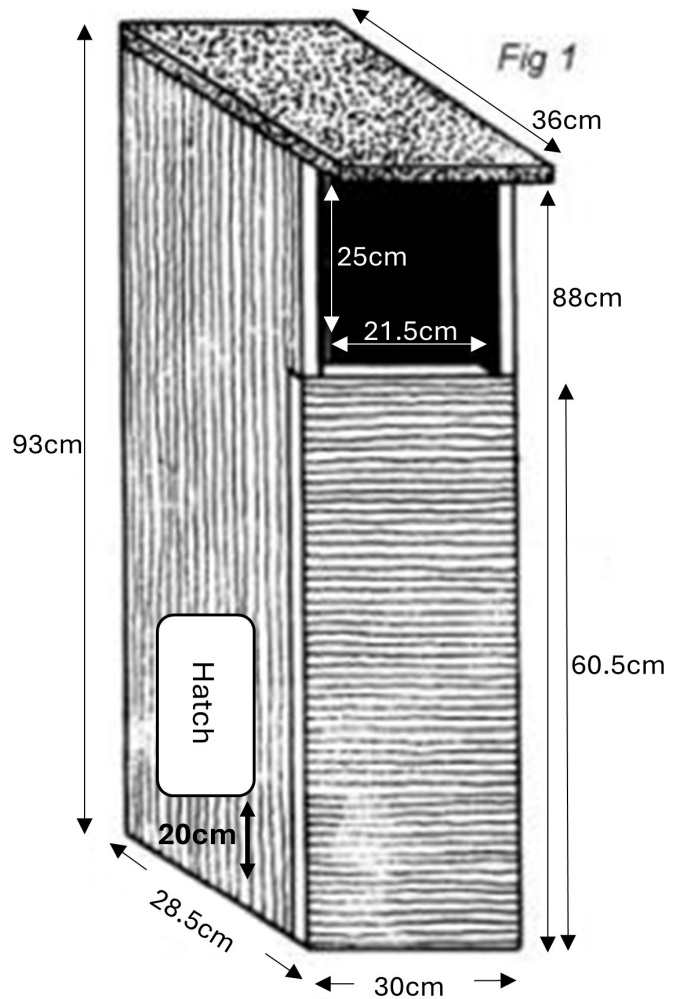
Exact dimensions are not too critical, provided the floor is 27.5cm² or more, with an entrance hole not less than 20cm². It should be fitted with a thick roofing felt on top. Make several large drainage holes in the bottom, not less than 1.2cm. The dimensions of the hatch are 18cm wide x 25cm tall and it should be centralised with 6mm spacing either side.

Materials to use

'Use pressure treated (tanalised) planks or softwood ply (known in the building trade as CDX). Both are 18mm. Avoid using hardwood ply unless it is 'FSC Approved'. If pressure treated timber is not available, use a brush-on preservative and ensure that all the edges are treated before assembly. Use All-weather' sealant along the edges and thick, torch-on roofing felt for the top. Both are held together with 40mm rust-proof screws. You will need 2 lengths of 2.5 cm x 5cm of batten to join together the individual panels inside.

Placement

On a large mature tree within a woodland or well wooded garden. Select trees where the trunk or main branch is exposed and not covered by the low hanging canopy. Ideally, there would be side branches above and/or below the box to help chicks branch after they fledge. No less than 4m off the ground, but higher is preferable. Face the entrance away from any prevailing wind if exposed.



Inspection and Clearance

Clean out the nestbox every 2 years, leaving a 10 cm layer of loose debris at the bottom. This should be done between September and early December. Always wear eye and head protection when inspecting a Tawny Owl box as they can be aggressive. If Jackdaws or Squirrels have used the box, remove all twigs as this will prevent the owls accessing it. Inspection during the breeding season should be restricted to late April— early May and always around sunset. Use a smartphone to video the inside of the box before further inspection.



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