

Owl nest boxes

Why attract owls to one's garden?

There are several advantages of attracting owls to your garden or homestead:

1. Importantly, they can assist with the control of rodents and insects.
2. The presence of owls means that no pesticides need to be used, resulting in financial savings.
3. It is extremely gratifying to listen to the lovely calls of owls at night.



Which species?

Barn Owls will frequently make use of owl nest boxes, indicating perhaps that they are limited by suitable nest sites.

Artificial nest boxes will also be used by Spotted Eagle-Owls, African Wood-Owls, Pearl-spotted Owlets and African Scops-Owls. Barn Owls and Spotted Eagle-Owls in particular live in close association with humans and they therefore often accept artificial nest boxes attached to the walls of buildings and to trees.

Some important aspects about attracting owls to one's garden

1. Obviously only species that occur in the surrounding area will adopt a nest box in your garden. It is also important that nest boxes, and the place that they are erected, imitate the species' requirements in the natural environment.
2. Nest boxes should be firmly attached to a wall or tree trunk, in a quiet position, such as a seldom-used outbuilding away from human disturbance and where it is inaccessible to predators. It is perhaps better not to attach the boxes to walls of houses, as the owls may make a noise and mess and attack people and pets when defending their chicks.
3. The boxes should be erected on the shady side of a building or tree.
4. The boxes, especially the roof, must be waterproof.

5. A piece of wood just below the box's entrance is useful for the birds to perch on when arriving at the nest.
6. Barn Owls may make regular use of a perch site, which can then result in an accumulation of white wash on the floor. The only way to prevent this is to remove anything that may provide a perch for the owls, or make the perches unattractive to them, or prevent access to these perch sites.
7. Do not use harmful pesticides in your garden and buildings and, if necessary, seek environmentally-friendly methods to control insects and rodents.
8. Swarms of bees may pose a hazard to Barn Owls as they sometimes take over their nest boxes, causing the birds to abandon their eggs or chicks. A swarm of bees can be discouraged from settling in by burning a mosquito coil at the entrance to the box. Do not use harmful poisons, as this will harm the owls and their chicks. An alternative is to paint the owl box with three coats of Boiled Linseed Oil and, once dry, spray the outside of the box with Baythroid (Cyfluthrin).

Nest box designs

There are two simple nest box designs for Barn Owls and Spotted Eagle-owls (see below). There are also various people in South Africa who construct owl nest boxes and their contact details can be obtained from BoPWG.

Spotted Eagle-Owl nest box

Scrap wood can be used to build a simple, open nest box with a roof. The base should be 45 cm² and the roof supported by four pieces of wood about 45 cm in



length. Attach sides, 10-15 cm high, around the base and to the roof supports (this will reduce wind chill and help keep the eggs and chicks safely in the box). To help prevent the eggs from rolling around, place a layer of sawdust on the base of the box. Seal the wood with a good quality exterior varnish.

Barn Owl nest box

The Barn Owl prefers a large, enclosed box, in which to lay its eggs and rear its chicks.

Materials:

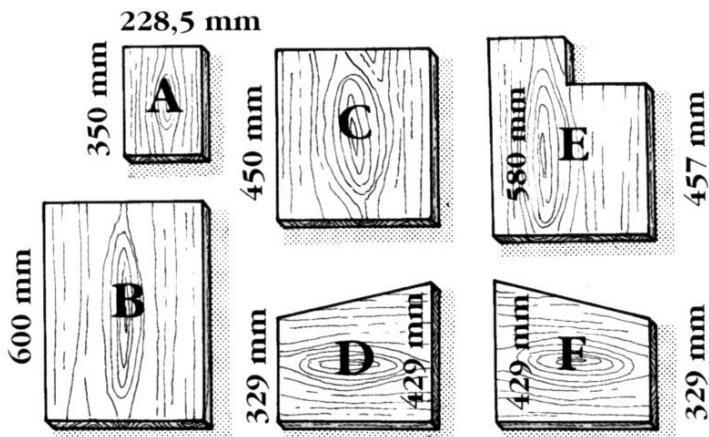
1 x 2700 mm x 457 mm x 21 mm length of pine

Wood glue

20 brass screws (4.5 mm x 30 mm)

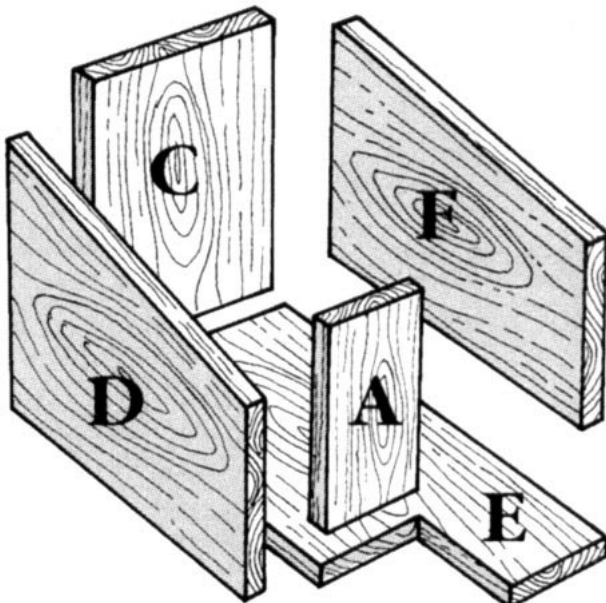
3 mm wood drill bit

Yacht varnish

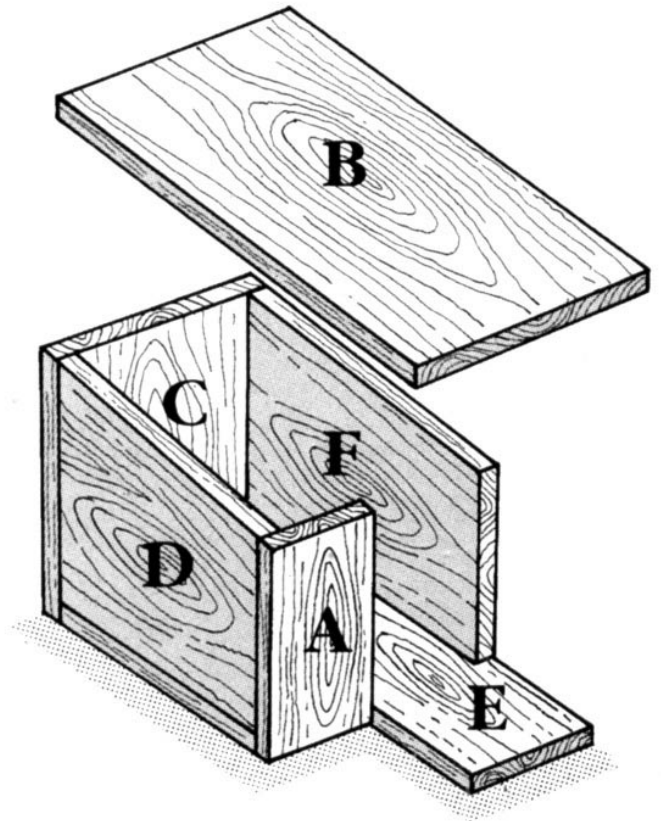


Cut the 2700 mm length of pine into six pieces (A-F), as illustrated.

Assemble the box, joining the sides (D & F), front (A) and back (C) to the base (E) using glue and screws.



Attach the roof (B) to the structure in the same way, using glue and screws.



Varnish the exterior of the box three times, sanding lightly between each coat. Place the nest under the eaves of a roof or in the fork of a tree where it is shaded and secluded.

Source of information

Much of the information (and sketches) in this leaflet was obtained from:

Tarboton, W. & Erasmus, R. 1998. Owls and owling in southern Africa. Struik, Cape Town.

Trendler, R. & Hes, L. 1994. Attracting birds to your garden in southern Africa. Struik, Cape Town.

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