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Factsheet Number 1

Nest Boxes for Wildlife

This factsheet gives practical instructions for building nest boxes for tits and robins. There are many other types of nest box for both birds and mammals such as hedgehogs and designs for these can be obtained from the Trust.

Why put up a nest box?

For much of our wildlife the ability to survive and increase in numbers is not limited by food supply but is restricted by the availability of suitable roosting and nesting sites. Birds and animals normally living in woodlands are particularly short of suitable roosting and nesting sites. This is not only because much of our once extensive woodland has been felled but also because in some managed woodlands many of the old, dying and rotten trees, which contain most nest holes, are cut down and removed. Certain species threatened in this way, such as owls, woodpeckers and bats are of definite benefit to us all in that they consume animals and insects which we often consider as pests.

A suitably sited nest box may help you in a very direct way. For example, simple boxes under the eaves of your house may be used by house sparrows in preference to your loft. Also, a single pair of great tits nesting in your garden will eat more than 10,000 insects and bats catch night flying moths and beetles. With the right wildlife in your garden you need never use any pesticides again!

How to start

Even if you have only a small garden, it will still be worthwhile putting up boxes for small birds such as tits and robins. Of course, with a larger area of land you may put up boxes for kestrels or tawny owls and an old disused building can easily be made suitable for barn owls. It is very important in all cases not to position boxes where they can be attacked by predators such as cats or by other people. If you do not have a suitable site in your garden you could always try asking a local farmer or landowner if you can put up a box somewhere on their land, out of public view. It is also important not to disturb your boxes once nesting has started. Wait until the youngsters are safely away from the nest.

When to put up your nest box

Nestboxes should be put up well before the nesting season, which generally starts around the middle of March. Early siting of the box increases the likelihood of success as many small birds such as blue tits may be seen prospecting for suitable breeding sites on fine days well before they build a nest.

The materials to use

Buy softwood for your boxes, re-using is even better! Cedar is particularly good as it lasts well, but ordinary pine is cheaper. Hardwoods are expensive and are more difficult to work with. If you want your nestbox to last for several seasons and you have used softwood, you can treat it with wood preservative - on the outside only. However, for bat boxes you must never use preservative as this is harmful to the bats. Now you can begin to work. Once you have put up a nest box you might like to keep a diary of its use.

Great Tit and Blue Tit Boxes

This box may also be used by nuthatches and tree sparrows.

Siting your box

Try and position your nestbox where predators cannot reach it easily, eg high up on a tree trunk or wall.

Materials

A 15cm (6") x 2cm ($\frac{3}{4}$ ") unplanned board, approximately 142cm (4' 9") long. Two dozen oval 3.8cm ($1\frac{1}{2}$ ") nails, two brass hooks and eyes, a few copper tacks and a 15cm (6") x 5cm (2") strip of rubber, waterproof canvas or leather.

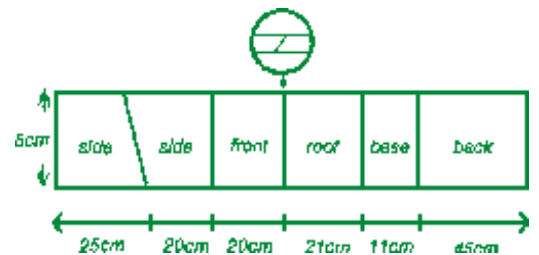
Tools

A saw, a hammer, a G clamp, a brace and 2.8cm bit.

Assembly

Cut the board in lengths as shown in the diagram below. The slopes of the two sides are formed by the one diagonal cut. The width of the base is 11cm for exactly 2cm thick wood (ie 15cm minus the two thicknesses of wood). Adjust the width of the base accordingly if you use wood of a different thickness. The exact length of the back does not matter as the projections at the top and bottom are simply used to attach the box to a tree or post. If you tilt the saw sideways slightly when making the cut between the front and the roof, you will neatly provide yourself with a sloping top edge for the front and a sloping back edge for the roof. This angled cut should be made so that the front of the front is about 6mm less than the 20cm. But if this seems difficult, just make the cut straight - it does not really matter. The hole sizes vary in diameter as described with its top about 30mm from the top edge of the front.

Entry hole sizes: Blue tit 25mm / Great tit 27mm
Tree sparrow 28mm / House sparrow 29mm / Nuthatch 28-30mm



Robin Box

This box may also be used by pied wagtails and spotted flycatchers.

Siting your box

It is worth taking some trouble over the positioning of your nestbox. Robins prefer boxes placed in concealed positions among vegetation on the side of tree trunks, garden walls etc. Be careful not to place it where cats or other predators can get to it. Spotted flycatchers and pied wagtails will use the box in more exposed conditions. Try to put it where there is a shortage of natural nest holes such as conifer plantations or deciduous woodland that has been cleared of dead or dying timber.

Materials

A 15cm (6") x 2cm ($\frac{3}{4}$ ") plank, 131cm (3' 9") long. Two dozen 4cm ($1\frac{1}{2}$ ") oval nails. A length of rubber and a few tacks.

Assembly

Make cuts in your plank as per the tit box described earlier. You will find that the front piece you have left is approximately 9cm rather than the 20cm you had before.