

## Installing a Wild Owl Barn Owl Nest Box



Erecting a barn owl nesting box is a valuable contribution to barn owl conservation. Installed in a suitable tree or building near un-managed rough grassland, the box will provide a valuable nest site or roost.

Here are some tips on installing a Wild Owl barn owl box, including maintenance and monitoring.\*

\* This advice is relevant to boxes put up for barn owls - boxes for other species may have other requirements.

### Installation

*Nb. Please ensure that all relevant safety precautions are taken to avoid injury when climbing ladders and using tools - safety helmets should be worn at all times.*

- Ideal fixing point for this type of box is on a single tree in field (oak, ash etc), a large tree in hedgerow, a pole or on the side of a building, ideally close to un-cut grass meadows or margins
- Do not install within 1 mile of major roads or motorways, to minimise risk of road casualties.
- Height of box should be approximately 10 -16 ft
- Ensure entrance hole is not obstructed and bird has a clear flight path into box
- Box should face approximately East / N.E. / S.E.
- Placing box near branches will give young owlets extra exercise areas. In barns, additional natural wood perches can be installed for this purpose.
- Do not put any nest material inside the box - pellets from the owls will gradually build up and when trodden down by the birds will provide a 'scrape' for any egg laying.
- Fix box using steel M10 Hexagon headed bolts - one bolt at top and one at bottom on fixing points. Ensure bolts are tightened securely to avoid the box moving, but make allowance for the natural bend in the tree trunk and do not over-tighten against the bend, as this may result in damage to the box and/or fixing point. If necessary, brace box using additional fixings to ensure that it is firmly fixed.
- Male barn owls often roost in a separate place in the breeding season, so a second box can be installed nearby (approx. within 100ft) to offer him a 'bachelor pad' roost.
- Avoid placing box above water-filled ditches, which may present a hazard to chicks if they fall from the box.
- If box is being installed inside a building, ensure that there are at least two means of entry/exit for the owls and that cats or other ground predators do not have easy access to the box.

## Disturbance

- Barn owls will tolerate a certain amount of regular human activity around the box and will usually sit tight, as long as there is no contact with the box or tree itself. However, any disturbance should be minimised in the first year, when there is the greatest risk of desertion.
- Barn owls are a schedule 1 bird (W&C Act 1981) and so a license is required to disturb them or photograph them at the nest in the breeding season. Therefore, maintenance and inspection should only be carried out in the autumn and box should not be disturbed in spring and summer.

## Signs of Occupancy & Monitoring

- Pellets and/or whitewash below box or on box itself are signs of potential occupancy.
- Watch for owls flying to and from the box at nightfall (keep your distance).
- A bird bringing prey to the box, or lots of hissing from the box is a good indication of breeding activity - if an owl coming to the box with food sees you, it may hold back, so ensure you keep your distance when watching, as young may be waiting for valuable meals!
- Barn owls will sometimes breed twice in a year, and sometimes even three times.
- Egg-laying usually begins approximately April - May - eggs are white and round and barn owls can lay between 4 and 8 (average 5 or 6) with 2 - 3 days between eggs, meaning the young are all different sizes.
- Barn owl boxes are sometimes used by little owls, kestrels and even tawny owls. Unfortunately, squirrels, jackdaws, stock doves and others also like them!

## Maintenance (if in doubt please contact Wild Owl)

- Annual inspection is recommended to ensure box is clean and ready for the new season.
- Inspections should be carried out in the autumn (Sept - Dec) and it is best to do this work an hour before dark, so that if an owl is flushed from the box, it will have minimal time in daylight, where it may have to endure mobbing from other birds. A licence is not required to inspect your box for maintenance at this time, but monitoring is advised in case you have a late breeding pair.
- 75% of old pellets and/or all nest material from other species should be removed when cleaning out boxes, leaving some pellets in for a scrape for the new breeding year.
- Wild Owl boxes are treated with an eco-friendly water based preservative. It should not require any additional coatings due to the quality of the timber used.
- All Wild Owl owl boxes come supplied with a camera clip, so an optional camera can be installed to assist in monitoring - please ring for details.



Barn Owl



Barn Owllet

*The chances of a barn owl using this box will be greatly increased if rough grass field vole habitats and/or margins are created and managed in the local area, providing valuable food for the owls.*

**If you require free advice on habitat creation, box installation or similar please visit the Wild Owl web site at [www.wildowl.co.uk](http://www.wildowl.co.uk)**