



Bird Boxes and Habitat Homes

Why do we need to make man made homes for wildlife?

According to the [British Trust for Ornithology](#), natural nesting sites for birds are on the decline across the country. As more people begin to tidy their gardens and repair old buildings, previous nesting sites for birds such as holes in trees and nooks in old buildings are being destroyed.

Birds like the [common swift](#) have been relying on man-made structures for safety and shelter since Roman times. However, due to modern designs and renovations, sightings of them have declined by 47 per cent in Britain alone between 1995 and 2014.

With naturally occurring spaces on the decline, bird houses - or nest boxes as they are also known - are crucial to the survival of birds, providing them with a place to rest and raise their young.

Bird houses are usually made from wood or a mixture of wood and concrete, though certain species of birds will nest metal. They typically have an overhanging and sloped roof, drainage of ventilation holes, and either have an entrance hole or an open-front entirely.

How to make a bird box

The plans on the attached sheet are for a small and a large box. Only use the first or second figure throughout. For starlings and great spotted woodpecker, use the dimensions for the larger box, all the others need the small one.

The bottom of the entrance hole must be at least 125mm from the floor of the nestbox. If it's less, young birds might fall out or be scooped out by a cat. The inside wall below the entrance hole should be rough to help the young birds to clamber up when it's time for them to leave.



Putting it together

Drill drainage holes to the base of the box and use galvanised nails or screws to assemble. It's always best to leave the box untreated. As it weathers, it will blend into its surroundings.

Softwood boxes can be treated with selected, water-based preservatives, which are known to be safe for animals. Apply it only to the outside of the box and not around the entrance hole. Make sure the box dries and airs thoroughly before you put it up.

A woodpecker box should be filled with a block of balsa wood, rotting log or woodchips – woodpeckers like to excavate their own nesting cavities.

Please note that if the box is going to be placed in a location where it will be exposed to heavy rain, it would be useful to cover the top of the lid with recycled leather or rubber. This will provide further weatherproofing and extend the life of the box.

How big does the hole need to be?

The entrance hole size depends on the species you hope to attract.

25mm for blue, coal and marsh tits

28mm for great tits, tree sparrows and pied flycatchers

32mm for house sparrows and nuthatches

45mm for starlings

The small box with 100mm high open front may attract robins or pied wagtails. A wren would need a 140mm high front panel, while spotted flycatchers prefer a low 60mm front to the box.

Choosing the location

Boxes for tits, sparrows or starlings should be fitted 2 – 4 m up a tree or wall

Unless there are trees or buildings which shade the box during the day, face the box between north and east, thus avoiding strong sunlight and the wettest winds

Make sure the birds have a clear flight path to the nest without any clutter directly in front of the entrance. Tilt the box forward slightly so that any driving rain will hit the roof and bounce clear.



House sparrows and starlings will readily use nestboxes place high up under eaves. Since these birds' nest in loose colonies, two or three can be sited spaced out on the same side of the house. Keep there away from areas where house martins normally nest.

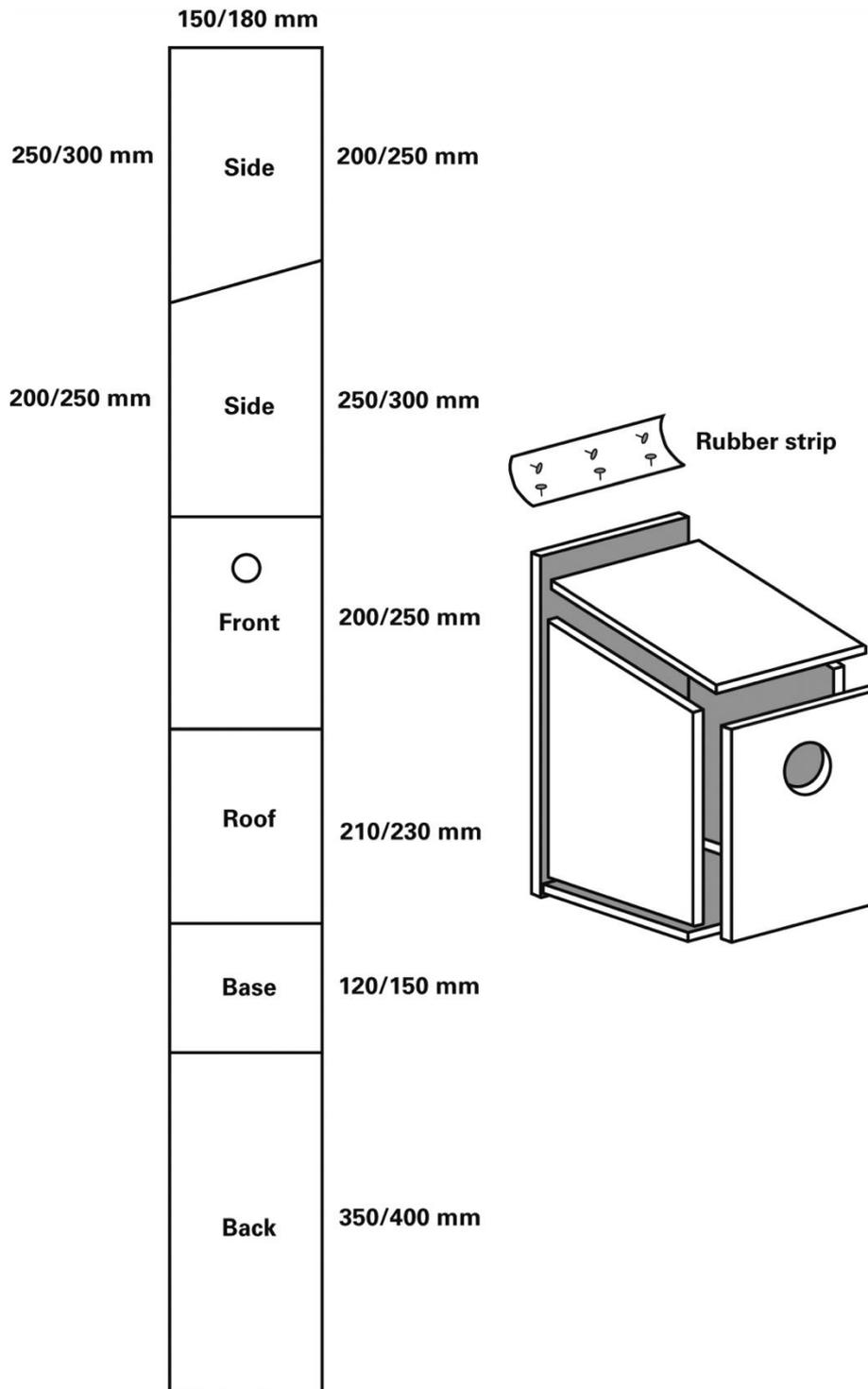
Two boxes close together may be occupied by the same species if they are at the edge of adjoining territories and there is plenty of natural food. While this readily happens in the countryside, it is rare in gardens, where you normally can only expect one nesting pair of any one species. The exceptions to this are house and tree sparrows and house martins, which are colonial nesters. By putting up different boxes, several species can be attracted.

Attaching your nestbox

Before you put up your nestbox, remember to keep in mind the following:

- Fixing your nestbox with nails may damage the tree. It is better to attach it either with a nylon bolt or with wire around the trunk or branch. Use a piece of hose or section of car tyre around the wire to prevent damage to the tree. Remember that trees grow in girth as well as height and check the fixing every two or three years.
- Open-fronted boxes for robins and wrens need to be low down, below 2m, well hidden in vegetation. Those for spotted flycatchers need to be 2-4m high, sheltered by vegetation but with a clear outlook. Woodpecker boxes need to be 3-5m high on a tree trunk with a clear flight path and away from disturbance.
- Nestboxes are best put up during the autumn. Many birds will enter nestboxes during the autumn and winter, looking for a suitable place to roost or perhaps to feed. They often use the same boxes for nesting the following spring. Tits will not seriously investigate nesting sites until February or March.

Bird Box Plans - Rectangular





Bird Box Plans - Diamond

