



THE LEWIS 'MARK 7' NESTBOX



Above: Major Nigel Lewis with his 'mark 7' nestbox design.

An award-winning wildlife conservationist, Nigel Lewis recently developed his 'mark 7' nestbox, which has evolved over the decades from his first designs made from converted army ammunition boxes. This seventh generation nestbox aims to deter competitive interference from Jackdaw who will often fill a Barn Owl box with twigs for themselves to nest on, rendering it useless to owls. Nigel has also occasionally found dead female owls that were buried alive beneath a mass of twigs, such is the speed of these small corvids, who can work as a team.

Nigel explained, "The lower entrance leads into a corridor running along the front face of the box, but this is actually a dead end and if Jackdaws decide to fill it with twigs it does not stop the Barn Owls nesting. Alternatively it acts as a roost for the male owl, who is not normally tolerated by the female when the chicks hatch. Otherwise it is a convenient refuge for maturing owlets when they venture onto the platform."

"Only the top entrance leads to the main chamber, along a tight corridor along the front face of the box. This is tricky for any Jackdaw trying to take twigs in. Material dropped into the large box should not prevent owls escaping if they need to."

The corridor acts as a barrier to the weather and keeps the nesting chamber dark. The male Barn Owl may even be able to wait in the corridor and challenge intruders. The very large nesting space allows for a large number of offspring in good prey years, and a certain amount of wing exercise, while owlets prepare to fledge. Then when they do fledge, rounded perches help them to use the landing platform, and a small gap at the front sheds rainwater and debris.

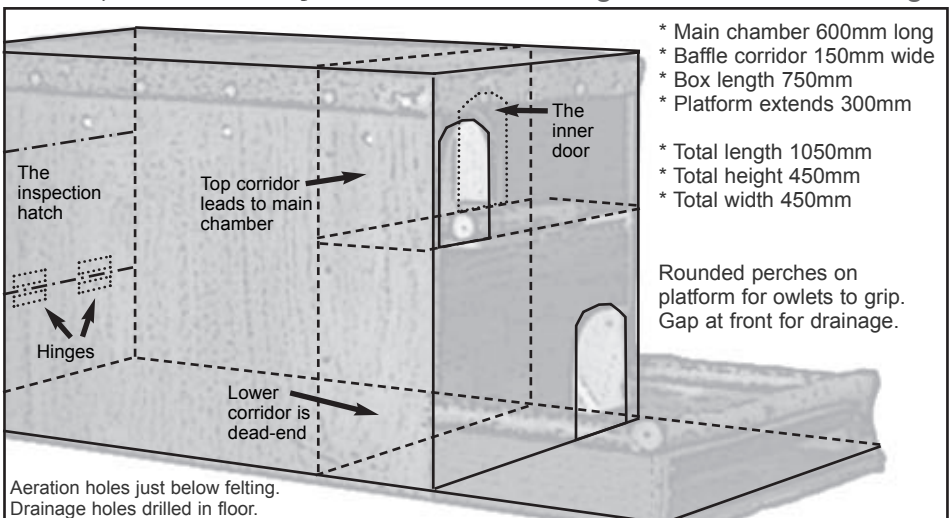
The rugged box is built to last, using thick 18mm marine or tanalised plywood, stained with a good outdoor wood preservative. The roof is felted to keep off the rain. A large section of the rear panel makes a hinged door to allow easy access when the box is monitored or cleaned out.

A job for experienced installers

Take note - this very weighty box is not easy to install. To get each *mark 7* into a tree Nigel works with at least two strong assistants armed with proper lifting gear.

Nigel has financed the construction of a whole set of mark-sevens and has also been able to secure funds for another set, which is great news. These heavy-duty nestboxes will be a lasting legacy from Nigel, solid homes for Barn Owls across Salisbury Plain and Wiltshire.

Looking into the mark 7 design



Details kindly provided by Nigel Lewis and made available free from www.bocn.org