



Barn Owls prefer nest sites close to rough grass rich in prey



- 1) Give the owls plenty of habitat
- 2) Use the right box design
- 3) Choose the right place

Barn Owls have lost many traditional nest sites to building development or the demise of old hollow trees. Now more than ever they rely on artificial sites. So make your box count!

Habitat

A nest box will only help a pair of Barn Owls to breed where there is enough food for them to rear a family. That means having the right type of habitat. Voles, their favourite prey, thrive best in tall, rough grass that has grown thick and tussocky. So please encourage as much rough grass as you can within about 1 mile's radius of the nest site. Networks of joined-up habitat are ideal to an owl hunting for food, and for young owls seeking out a new home.

Think wild! Keep unmown grass at verges, field margins, ditch banks or young plantations of trees. Voles and other small mammals need the tall matted structure of grass that has been seldom cut. Mow to control weeds where needed, but never cut the grass below 6 inches height.

Box design

Use the tried and tested nest box designs of The Hawk and Owl Trust indoors and outdoors. We can tell you where to buy them or how to make these boxes yourself. Contact us for further details.

Guidelines to a successful nest box

- 1) Place where good habitat is nearby and plentiful.
- 2) Pairs of boxes help owls raise 2nd broods and give the male a place to roost when the chicks hatch.
- 3) Indoor boxes can go anywhere sheltered, like in barns and outbuildings. Place out of danger, on rafters or high in the roof space, and away from drafts and sunlight.
- 4) Perches near the entrance help inexperienced, young fledgelings return to the box. This is where all their food is delivered, and they will starve unless they get back into the box after flying practice.
- 5) A high box entrance helps keep the owlets inside until they are more agile and close to flying age.
- 6) Outdoor sites are usually trees, but poles or exterior walls are fine if large trees are lacking. Owls need to find the box, so make it prominent and visible to them, but ensure it is safe from interference.
- 7) Use large, prominent trees in a hedge, a field or on the edge of a wood. Barn Owls tend not to go into woodland, where Tawny Owls dominate.
- 8) Do not put an owl box too high - about 3m (10ft) is fine. Make it safe for owls and for you. Consider future ladder access. Never put a box close to power lines.
- 9) Point the entrance away from prevailing winds, and avoid exposing it to full midday sun.
- 10) Line a new box floor with an inch of wood shavings as a soft bed for eggs. (*Never sawdust or straw.*)

Contact the Barn Owl Conservation Network

A project of The Hawk and Owl Trust, the BOCN is a network of specialist voluntary advisors who can help you to conserve the UK's Barn Owls. Please contact us at any time for further advice.