

## Nest box information sheet No. 1

# Barn Owl *(tyto alba)*

**Length:** 33 – 35cm (13 – 14ins)

**Wingspan:** 85 – 93cm (33 – 37ins)

**Weight:** 0.24 – 0.36kg (8 – 13oz)

**Habitat:** The greatest concentrations are found in low-lying arable areas near coasts where prey is abundant. The Norfolk & Suffolk coastal areas are ideal. The barn owl nests in hollow trees, buildings and crevices in rocks.

The barn owl was once a familiar sight in the British countryside and, as its name suggests, was frequently found in and near farm buildings where it was welcomed by farmers because of its usefulness in pest control.

Unfortunately, as modern farming methods have led to the destruction of hedgerows, meadowlands and field headlands with the consequential loss of habitat for prey species and as old farm buildings are either demolished or converted to other uses, the barn owl population crashed to a dangerously low level. Thankfully, and due mainly to the recent provision of many artificial nest boxes, the population is now starting to recover and current estimates put the population at about 4,000 pairs.

Prey consists mainly of small mammals and, in particular, short-tailed field voles, mice and common shrews which it either still-hunts from a perch or by quartering over meadowland, often hovering with a moth-like silent fluttering flight, relying on its superb hearing to locate prey.

It is estimated that a pair of barn owls and their young may eat about 1,000 rodents during the 3 month breeding season.

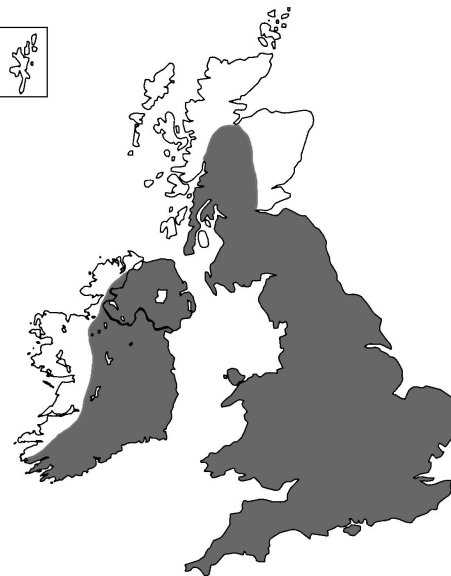
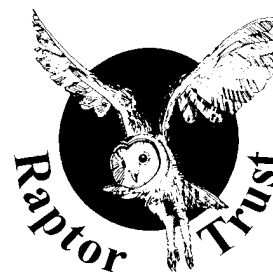
## Nesting & Breeding Habits

Preferred “natural” nest sites include hollow trees, buildings (old and new), rock crevices and holes in cliff faces. In all cases the predominant requirement is shelter from rain, due largely to the barn owl’s lightly oiled plumage which makes them more prone to soaking than other species. In East Anglia, which tends to be drier than other parts of the country, there is a higher reliance on hollow trees but, following the spread of Dutch Elm disease, the number of suitable sites has fallen dramatically. Also, the widespread demolition of old farm buildings and the conversion of barns for human habitation has led to a serious loss of nest sites (although this problem could be eased if architects and their clients were to make provision for the owls in their plans).

Courtship usually begins in late February when the male spends more time hunting during daylight to catch food for his mate. At this time he becomes quite vocal, screeching as he flies to proclaim his territory and to attract a female. Egg laying can take place at any time between late February and early July although most are laid in April, May or June.

An average of 5 eggs are laid at 2 or 3 day intervals and each is incubated from the moment of laying. The eggs hatch after 30 or 31 days at the same intervals with the result that there can be a spread of 10 to 15 days in the ages of the chicks. In times of hardship the younger chicks often do not survive as they are unable to compete for food. However, in times of plenty, the older chicks have been known to feed their younger brothers and sisters.

Barn owl chicks take a long time to fledge, about 8 weeks on average and, once fledged, remain dependent on their parents for a further 3 to 5 weeks.



### Safety Notice

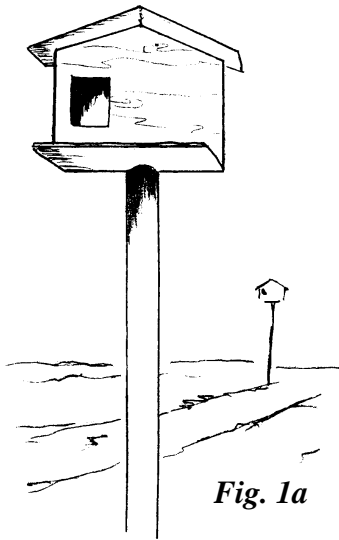
#### Please remember that nest boxes are heavy!

Always take care when lifting them, especially on ladders or in trees. It’s always a good idea to have someone to help you.

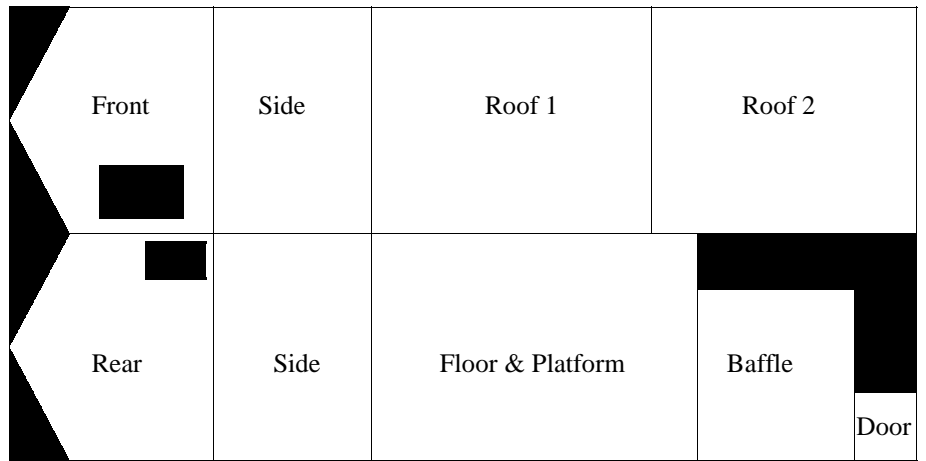
### If you build a nest box, please tell us

Send details to: The Raptor Trust  
2, Pevensey House  
The Street  
Hempnall  
Norfolk NR15 2LS  
nestbox@theraptortrust.org.uk

Or e-mail:



**Fig. 1a**

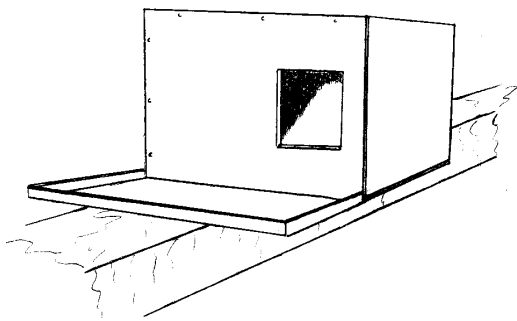


**Fig. 1b**

**Figs. 1a & 1b - Exterior pole-mounted box (to cut from 8' x 4' sheet)**

- Front 7 Rear                    24" x 18" x 27" (at apex) x 1/2"
- 2 Side Panels                24" x 18" x 1/2"
- 2 Roof Panels                24" x 27" x 1/2"
- 1 Floor/Platform Panel      24" x 30" x 1/2"
- 1 Baffle                        18" x 18" x 1/2"
- 1 Door                         7" x 6" x 1/2"

The front entrance hole is 6" x 8". The baffle is mounted 10" behind the entrance hole but does not extend higher than 18" to allow for ventilation. The bottom edge of the entrance should be about 6" above the platform which extends 6" forward from the box. The rear panel incorporates a 5" x 6" inspection hatch covered by a hinged or sliding door slightly larger than the hole.



**Fig. 2**

**Fig. 2 Interior Type**

Converted tea chest placed on its side and mounted on a sheet of ply extending at least 6" forward from the entrance. The entrance panel, made from the tea chest's lid, incorporates a 6" x 8" entrance hole and should be fitted only after the box has been put into position.

This type of box does not require an interior baffle.

Boxes should be made from exterior quality ply.

Boxes should be positioned in late Autumn to allow time to weather into their surroundings.

Either type of box should be lined with wood chips and should only be cleaned out when access becomes difficult for the owls. When re-lining, please leave a layer of old casts on top of the wood chips.

**Position:**

Exterior nest boxes should be sited in quiet locations at least 2m above ground level. Ideally, they should be sited along woodland edges or hedgerows. The entrance should face south or south-east but the entrance should not face directly into the local prevailing wind.

Interior boxes can be used in any well sheltered building provided that there is little disturbance and a permanent means of access for the birds.

**Fixing methods:**

Exterior boxes can be mounted in trees or, where no suitable trees are available although the general habitat is good, can be mounted on poles. However, these boxes are heavy and great care must be taken to ensure that they are made secure.

Interior boxes should be nailed securely to a beam or beams.

**Important:**

Please ensure that any timber treatment applied to the box is non-toxic to birds (most water-based preservatives are OK) and that no nails, screws or other sharp edges or points are left to protrude into the box or any part on which the birds may perch.