

Nest box information sheet No. 2

Kestrel *(falco tinnunculus)*

Length: 32 – 35cm (12 – 14ins)

Wingspan: 71 – 80cm (28 – 32ins)

Weight: 0.14 – 0.31kg (5 – 11oz)

Habitat: Kestrels do not build their own nests but use holes and forks in trees, scrapes on the ground, ledges on cliffs and buildings and the old nests of other birds. Because of this flexibility, kestrels are able to exploit a wide range of habitat.

Although the kestrel is a true falcon, its flight-style, prey and method of hunting are far from typical. It feeds mainly on small mammals– principally the short-tailed field vole – which it hunts by hovering, head into wind, or which it spots from a perch.

Despite being persecuted during the 19th century when gamekeepers virtually eliminated it from some parts of the British Isles, the kestrel has made a remarkable comeback and despite a recent 29% reduction in the population it still numbers about 35,000 pairs.

One of the reasons for this recovery is its remarkable adaptability. It has learned to take advantage of new hunting areas such as roadsides and even town centres. It is also able to switch to different prey during occasional slumps in the vole population.

Mature males are easily distinguished from females. The male is a warm red-brown colour with a grey head and tail. The female is slightly larger with a wingspan of over 31ins and is mainly brown with darker speckles and bars.

Nesting & Breeding Habits

Kestrels, like many other birds of prey, don't build their own nests but tend to use ready-made sites such as forks in trees, holes in cliffs and buildings and the abandoned nests of other birds. They readily accept artificial nest sites and will often use them year after year.

Courtship displays start in early spring and can be quite spectacular with the birds chasing each other and with the male sometimes mounting mock attacks, the female flipping over in mid air to present her talons. The pair bond is usually formed between birds of the same age and they may stay together for many years. The majority of clutches, usually 4– 6 eggs, are laid during April and May but this tends to vary according to the weather. Incubation takes between 26 and 34 days and is undertaken almost entirely by the female during which time the male hunts for himself and his mate.

The young grow at a phenomenal rate and are intensively brooded by the female for the first two weeks. They fledge at between 27 – 32 days but remain dependent on their parents for up to a further 4 weeks whilst they learn to hunt for themselves.



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
Or e-mail: nestbox@theraptortrust.org.uk

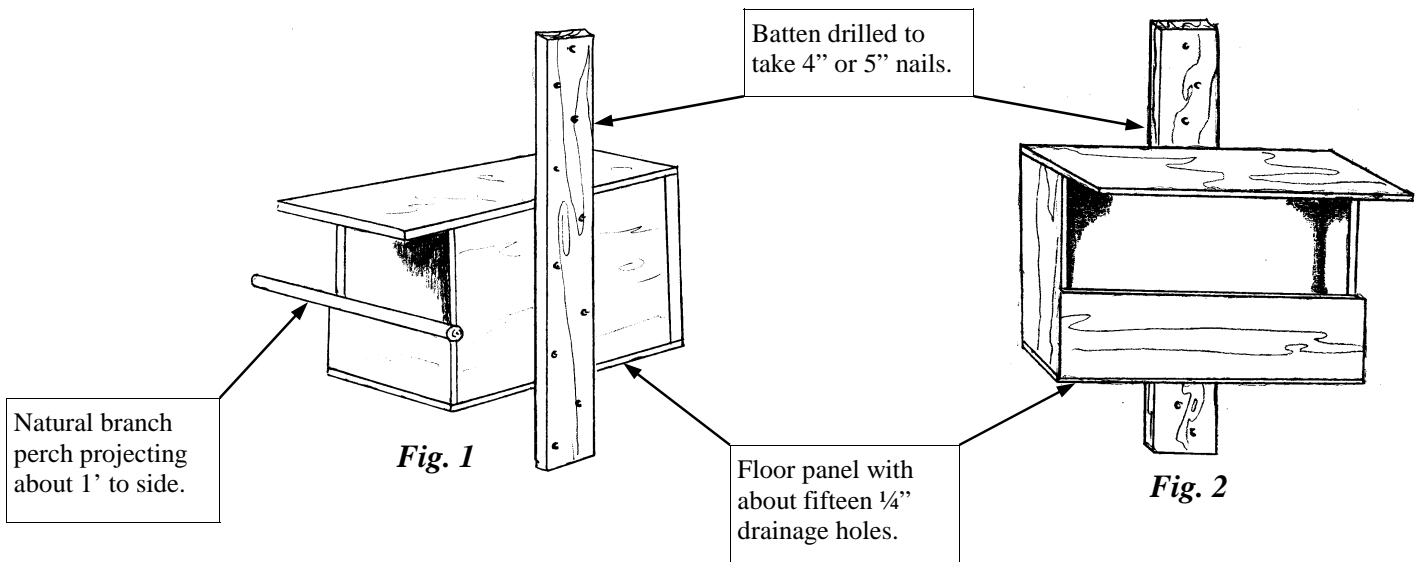


Fig. 1 – Side batten type

2 side panels	21" x 12" x 1/2"
1 roof panel	27" x 14" x 1/2"
1 floor panel	22 1/2" x 14" x 1/2"
1 rear panel	14" x 14" x 1/2"
1 front panel	4 1/2" x 14" x 1/2"
1 batten	4" x 1"
1 natural branch	1 1/4" x 25"

Fig. 2 – Back batten type

2 side panels	12" x 14" x 1/2"
1 roof panel	18" x 21" x 1/2"
1 floor panel	15 1/2" x 21" x 1/2"
1 rear panel	12" x 21" x 1/2"
1 front panel	4 1/2" x 21" x 1/2"
1 batten	4" x 1"

The long front panel allows space for the young birds to perch. A natural branch may also be added.

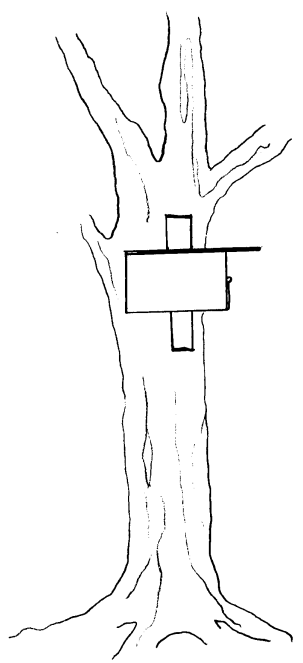


Fig. 3

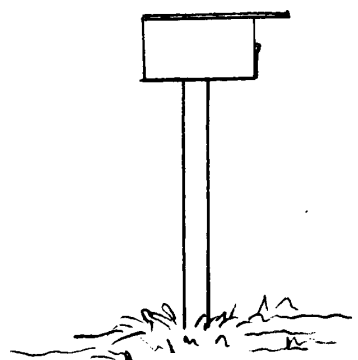


Fig. 4

Boxes should be made from exterior quality ply.

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

Position: Exterior nest boxes should be sited in quiet locations at least 5m above ground level (on trees) or 3m (on poles). The entrance should face south or south-east with a clear flight-path in and out but the entrance should not face directly into the local prevailing wind.

Fixing methods: Either type can be nailed to a tree trunk by means of the batten (Fig. 3).

In open, treeless areas, boxes can be mounted on posts as shown in Fig. 4. If this option is taken, please ensure that the post is securely "planted". The wind pressure on a box of this size is considerable!

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.