

## Nest box information sheet No. 3

# Little Owl (*athene noctua*)

**Length:** 21 - 23cm (8 - 9 ins)

**Wingspan:** 54 - 58cm (21 - 23 ins)

**Weight:** 0.15 - 0.23kg (5 - 8 oz)

**Habitat:** Little Owls prefer open country and avoid dense woodland. In Britain they favour agricultural land with plenty of hedgerows.

Nests include holes in trees, walls and in the ground including rabbit burrows.

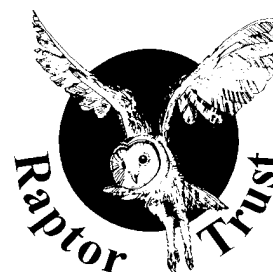
The aptly named little owl is Britain's smallest owl with a wingspan of less than 2 ft and weighing only up to 8 oz but its aggressive expression, accentuated by pronounced eye ridges and a relatively undeveloped facial disk, makes this tiny predator appear fierce out of all proportion to its size.

For most of the year the little owl's diet consists mainly of large insects, earthworms and a few small mammals. However, during the breeding season, this is supplemented with small birds such as sparrows and thrushes.

Whilst this bird is now native to this country, it is a recent arrival having been introduced by man in the late nineteenth century. The first breeding success was recorded in Rutland in 1891 following the importation by Lord Lilford of a great many owls from Holland.

The population grew rapidly, reaching a peak in about 1930 but has since declined due largely to loss of habitat, pesticide poisoning and, because of its largely diurnal habits, persecution and collisions with road traffic.

Current estimates put the population at up to 12,000 pairs.



## Nesting & Breeding Habits

Like most other owls, little owls don't build nests but rely on ready made natural sites including hollow branches and rabbit burrows. They will also nest in holes in buildings, cliffs and even haystacks.

Little owls start to assert ownership of territory at the beginning of February when the males start singing their familiar "koooeek" calls day and night. Courtship proper starts in March when the females start to respond to the males' calls and eggs, usually 3 - 5, are laid in late April. Incubation takes about 4 weeks and is undertaken by the female alone although some males will remain in the breeding chamber whilst the eggs are being laid.

During incubation and for about two weeks after hatching, the male does all the hunting, providing for himself, his mate and the young. After about two weeks the young are able to tear food for themselves and the female is then free to help with the hunt at the time when the youngsters' growth rate is at its highest. The young begin to leave the nest site at about 3 weeks and hide in the surrounding vegetation and branches to minimise the risk of the entire clutch being taken by a predator. The young fledge at about 5 weeks but the parents continue to feed them for another month at which point they are independent and leave to establish their own territories.

### Safety Notice

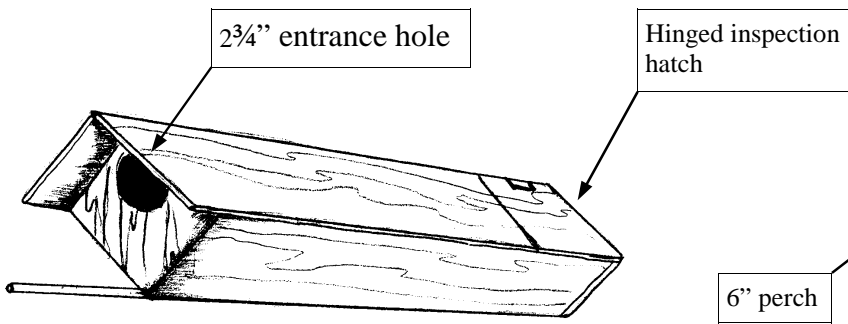
Please remember that nest boxes are heavy!

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

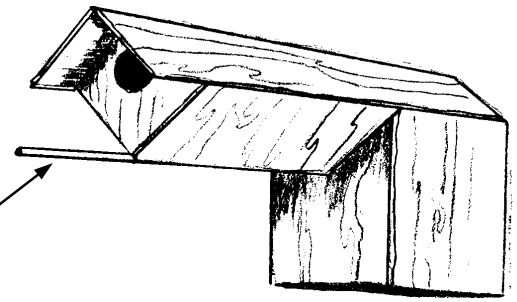
Or e-mail:



**Fig. 1a**

**Fig. 1a – Tube type**

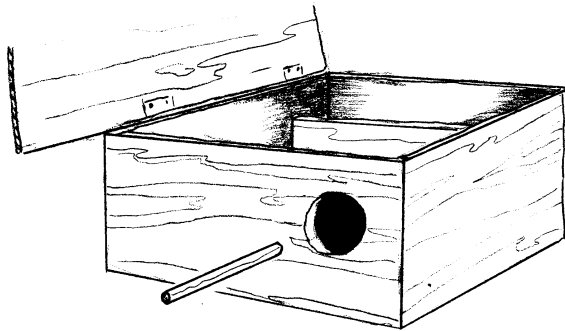
2 lower panels	8" x 24" x 1/2"
2 upper panels	8" x 28" x 1/2"
2 end panels	8" x 8" x 1/2"



**Fig. 1b**

**Fig. 1b – Tube & chamber type**

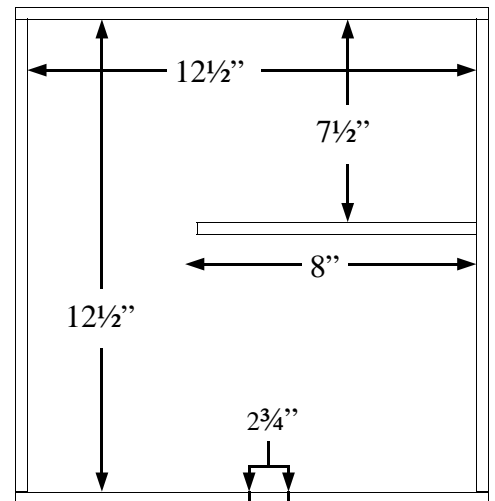
As 1a but with lower nest chamber 12" x 12" x 12" drilled with eight 1/4" drainage holes.



**Fig. 2a**

**Figs. 2a & 2b – Compact box type**

Shown with hinged roof open, this box is 8" high with a 4" roof projection over a 6" perch. A baffle plate screens the nest chamber from the entrance hole.



**Fig. 2b**

Boxes should be made from exterior quality ply.

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

The size of the entrance hole is critical. A 2 3/4" (70mm) hole allows the little owl easy access but prevents the much larger tawny owl from entering.

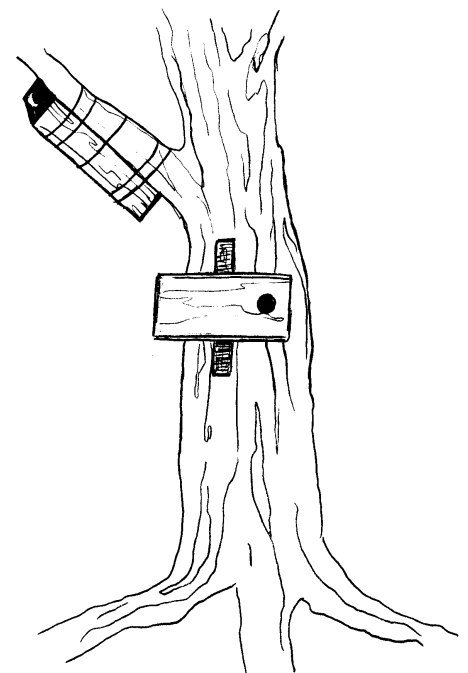
Place enough wood chips inside the box to ensure a level internal surface irrespective of the angle of the box.

**Position:** Nest boxes should be sited in quiet locations with the entrance facing south or south-east. The entrance should not face directly into the local prevailing wind.

**Fixing methods:** Compact types can be nailed to a tree by means of the batten as shown in Fig 3.

Tube type boxes can be wired to the underside of branches. If this method is adopted, please staple the wire to the side of the box. This will prevent the box from slipping free.

**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.



**Fig 3**