



## It's Bird Box Time of The Year - Winter

### When to put up?

Winter is the best time to put up bird nesting boxes. It gives the birds time to find and explore them and a chance for them to naturalise. Birds will also roost in them.

If you have a box that hasn't been used for a couple of years, then moving it to a different location in your garden could make the difference, now is the time to do it.

### Where to put up?

Enclosed boxes (with a hole) can be placed on a house wall, a free-standing post or on a fence or tree. They need to be about 2 metres off the ground to stop cats jumping up to them. Open boxes, need a site that *isn't* exposed, tuck it next to a shrub or within some Ivy. Avoid putting a box where green algae sits on a tree trunk, this is where water naturally trickles. If possible avoid facing any box to the south or south west, this is where the wind generally comes from and in summer the box could cook in the heat. Sparrow Terrace boxes can be mounted on the wall of a house, some people have several together. Swift boxes require a clear drop of at least 15 feet and a clear flight path, locate it under an eave.

### Do's and Don'ts

Don't, treat any wood with creosote, paint or other preservative, natural aging is best, replace rotten boxes. Don't hang bird feeders off a nest box. Don't put food inside a box. It is good to put in a new box a 'welcome pack' - use a small amount of dry grass, sawdust or leaves, to emulate a hole in a tree. Don't add a perch to an enclosed box, it will give a vantage point for a predator to hang onto and get inside the box. Secure boxes firmly; any movement may discourage a potential resident. Don't site more than one of the same type of box within a minimum of 50 metres, birds are territorial and will not tolerate the same species nesting close by.

You do *not* have to clean out nests from previous years, in the wild no one comes round tidying up. But we humans like to be tidy, so if you feel you want to, do it, but be warned they are often full of fleas that feed on humans - wear gloves, hold the old nest at arm's length and drop it into a plastic bag and tie it off quickly, as the fleas can jump onto you.

### **What to look for in a good bird box**

Don't buy novelty boxes; they are of no practical use for birds, look for good quality wood preferably  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch thick. Make sure there are drainage holes in the bottom. A box with a back plate is easier to mount. It is useful to look in on a nest to check progress (when a sitting bird has flown), so make sure you buy a box with a removable roof. Squirrels and Woodpeckers can attack and rip open boxes to get at the chicks, so heavy duty boxes are best. In particularly highly populated Squirrel and Woodpecker areas a metal plate should be fixed over the hole (with the correct sized hole).

### **Which bird in which box?**

**Blue tits** and **Coal tits**: entrance hole 25mm

**Great Tits** and **Tree Sparrows**: entrance hole 28mm

**House Sparrows**: 28-32mm in a Terrace box usually three entrance holes combined with three nest chambers next to each other.

**Swifts** require a specialist box to mount under the eaves (see where to put up). **Sparrows** and **Starlings** will use Swift boxes, to avoid this block the hole until the first week in May. However a Swift will oust a nesting bird.

**Starling** boxes require an entrance hole of 45mm.

**Robin**, **Wren**, **Blackbird** and **Song Thrush** will use an open box. Bigger volume boxes are needed for the Thrush family.

**Tree Creeper** requires a special thin wedge shaped box that mounts onto a tree trunk.

**Tawny Owl** require a specialist box, they are very long and heavy and need to be mounted on a big tree.

**Barn Owl** and **Kestrel** require special boxes and special knowledge to site correctly.

## Where to buy?

The RSPB, have an on line catalogue, but they are very expensive. Garden Centres usually have novelty type boxes and are not the best quality. Attenborough Nature Centre used to have a wide choice but presently (Covid) are not selling. Online generally you need to be able to see what you are getting, only buy if you can see the product. '**Freebird**' products are built in Beeston. They used to be on sale at Attenborough, but now can be purchased direct. I recommend Freebird products, see website [freebirdproducts.co.uk](http://freebirdproducts.co.uk)

And of course you can make your own, a lockdown project!

## Further Information

Any questions use [info@beestonwildlifegroup.org](mailto:info@beestonwildlifegroup.org)

**So, why not put up a couple of bird boxes now, you have nothing to lose and the pleasure you get from helping raise a family of birds is indescribable - just do it!**

