

Hawk  
and  
Owl Trust



**ARTIFICIAL  
NEST SITES**  
for Birds of Prey

No.3: LITTLE OWL



The Little Owl was introduced into Britain during the late 19th Century. Though there have been periodic decreases, especially after severe winters, its range has expanded to cover most of England and Wales, though it is patchily distributed in the west. In Scotland it is mainly confined to the Borders, and it is absent from Ireland. With piercing yellow eyes and a frowning expression, Little Owls are often to be seen in daylight, perched on trees or fence posts. At just 8½" tall, this is Britain's smallest owl, its size permitting it to use much smaller hollows and tunnels than other owl species. Like other owls, it uses no nest material, but seeks ready made natural sites. These may include hollow limbs of trees, rabbit burrows, crevices in farm buildings or many other types of tortuous holes. Consequently, the Little Owl can find a variety of natural sites in most areas. Nevertheless, Little Owls will use well-designed nesting boxes, though not as readily as either Tawny or Barn owls. Little Owls can suffer harassment from the larger Tawny owl, but seem to coexist successfully with Barn Owls and Kestrels. Favouring low altitude grassland areas, Little Owls feed mainly on invertebrates such as dor-beetles and earthworms, small mammals and occasional small birds. The far carrying, "gooeek" calls of territorial males are a familiar farmland sound in late winter and early spring, and they are uttered by day as well as night. Eggs are usually laid in late April. The female incubates them for 24-25 days and the young fledge when 3-4 weeks old, generally in mid- to late June.

FIG. 1: ✓

COMPONENTS:

- 2 lower panels 8" x 24" x ½"
- 2 upper panels 9" x 28" x ½"
- 2 end panels 8" x 8" x ½"

? baffle

Figures after Juillard, 1984  
(see general leaflet for details)

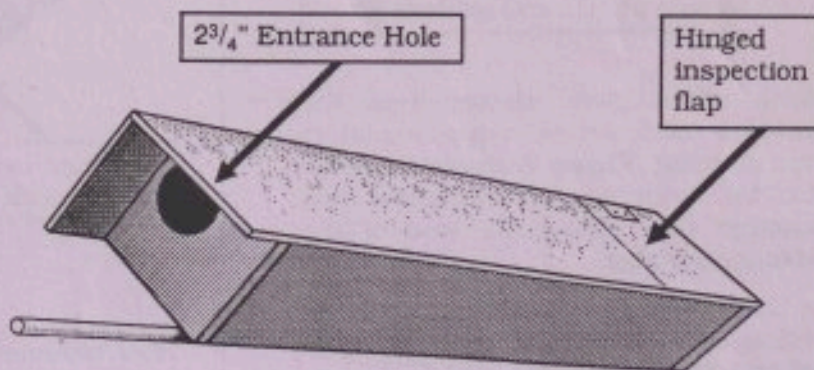
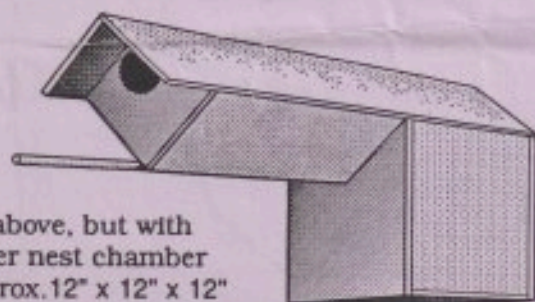


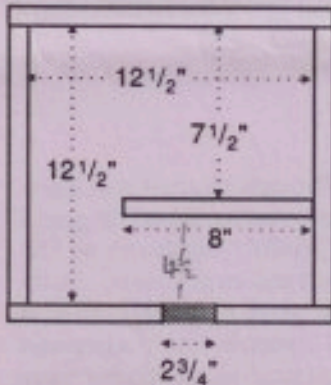
FIG. 2: Better



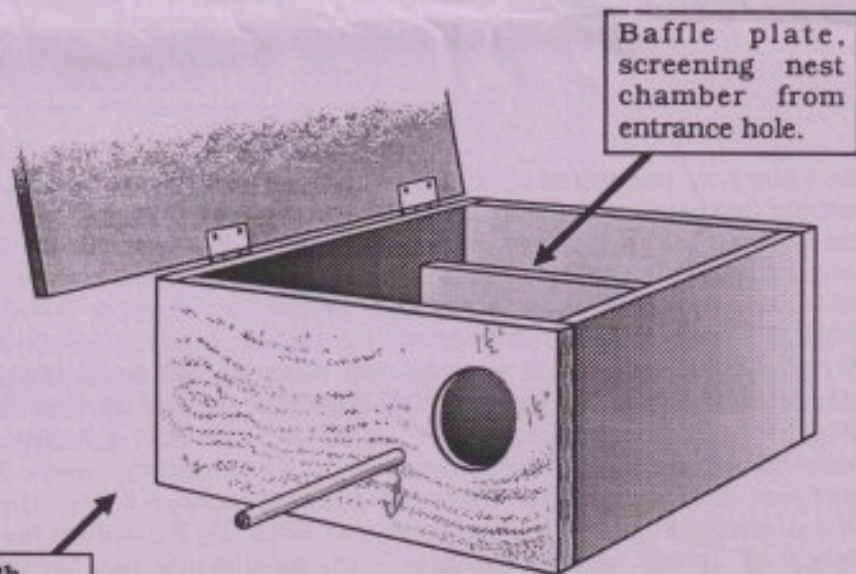
As above, but with  
lower nest chamber  
approx. 12" x 12" x 12"

Boxes should be mounted on trees, preferably slung under side limbs or alternatively secured to the main trunk by means of a batten. Where Little Owls regularly frequent farm buildings, a box attached to an outer wall may be successful, but should be provided with a good perch. The critical dimension for Little Owl nesting boxes is the diameter of the entrance hole. 2¾" (70 mm) allows access to Little Owls but excludes Tawny Owls. Little Owls like dark, hidden places for their nest chambers. One way of

achieving this is by making the box proportionately long, as in the simplest of the designs shown (Figure 1). Alternatively, the box may be angled, or provided with a baffle behind which the bird can remain concealed. Male Little Owls spend much time perching at or near the nest while their mates incubate, so a sheltered perch on the box is a worthwhile extra. Additional boxes in the territory may well be used as "larders", or plucking places for prey. The basic design in Figure 1 provides an 8" x 8" tube, 2 feet long. Wood chips used to line the box ensure a level surface internally, despite the orientation of the box. The roof sections are longer to provide an overhang beyond the entrance



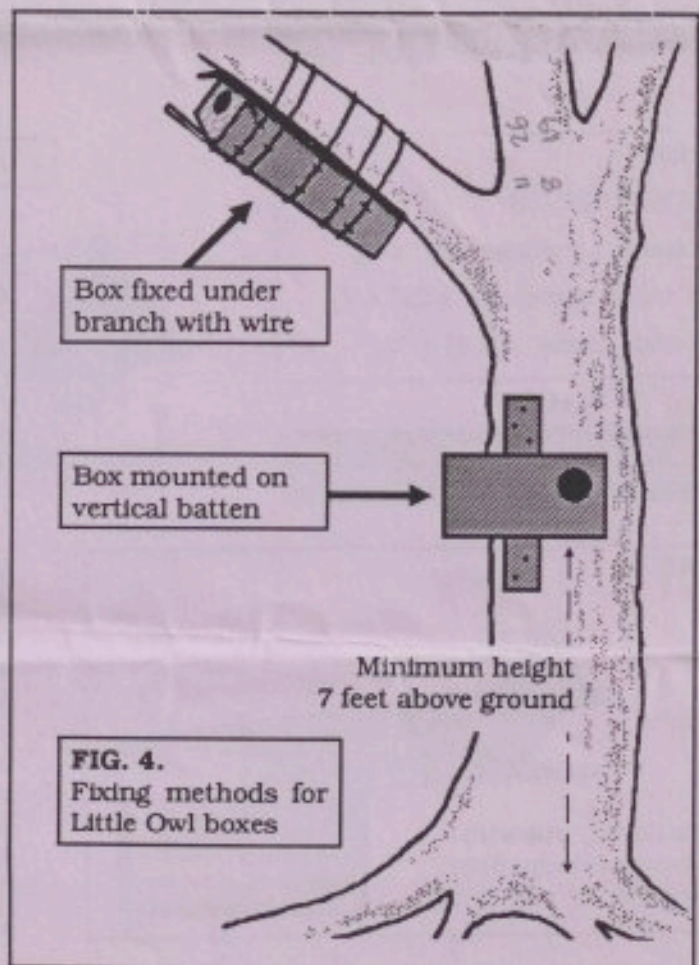
**FIG. 3a.**  
Plan and dimensions.  
All panels made of  $\frac{3}{4}$ "  
exterior plywood



**FIG. 3b.**  
**Compact  
box design with interior baffle.**  
Shown with hinged roof open;  
this projects 4" to shelter the  
entrance and 6" perch. Height of  
all side panels and baffle is 8".

panel, which gives shelter from the elements and deters some predators from entering. Figure 2 shows a similar box, but with a more secluded nest chamber sited below the level of the entrance passage.

As Little Owls are perfectly prepared to nest at or below ground level, height is not critical for the birds, and protection from human interference is usually the overriding factor. However, the box should be sited above the browsing height of stock if the field is used for grazing. Figure 3a depicts a compact design with an interior baffle to screen the nest chamber; plan view, with dimensions, is shown in Figure 3b. Boxes of this design are highly suitable for mounting on poles in treeless areas such as coastal marshland or farmland devastated by Dutch Elm Disease.



**FIG. 4.**  
Fixing methods for  
Little Owl boxes

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