

Hawk
and
Owl Trust



**ARTIFICIAL
NEST SITES**
for Birds of Prey

No.4: TAWNY OWL



British Trust for Ornithology

Although the Tawny Owl does not occur in Ireland, it is the most common owl in England, Scotland and Wales. It favours woodland habitats, but also can be found on farmland and even in city parks. The tawny is known for its hooting call, although it also utters a shrill "kewick". Preying on small mammals and medium sized birds, the Tawny Owl is highly territorial, defending an area of approximately 18-30 ha. depending upon habitat quality. Breeding may start as early as February. No attempt is made to construct a nest, and the eggs are usually laid in a tree cavity, old stick nest or squirrel drey. In areas with few trees the eggs are sometimes laid on the ground. A common site is the hollow end of a broken branch, and the Tube type box shown below has been designed to mimic this natural site. The eggs hatch after 30-33 days incubation, and the young remain in the nest site itself until 20-24 days old. When they leave the site they are only partially feathered, but instinctively climb into the tree canopy where they continue their development. Tawny Owls can be aggressive towards human intruders at the nest and to smaller birds of prey, especially Little Owls. Nesting boxes should therefore only be sited with these considerations in mind. Several designs of nesting box have proved to be suitable for Tawny Owls, and two examples are described below. Boxes of the type shown in Figure 1 can be wired onto the underside of stout branches, and both designs can be attached by means of a batten. Nesting boxes should be mounted in quiet locations at least 2.5 metres above ground level, with the entrance hole facing south to southeast. Local weather conditions such as prevailing winds should be considered when mounting boxes.

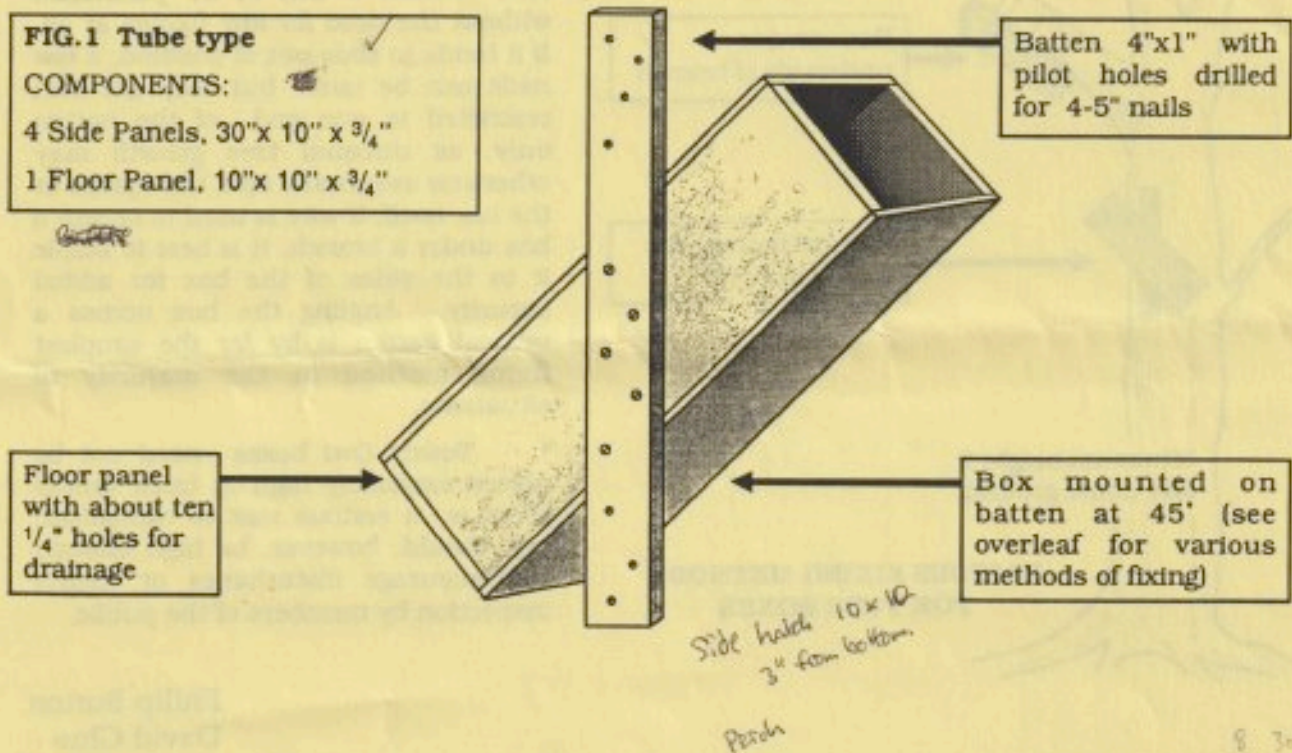
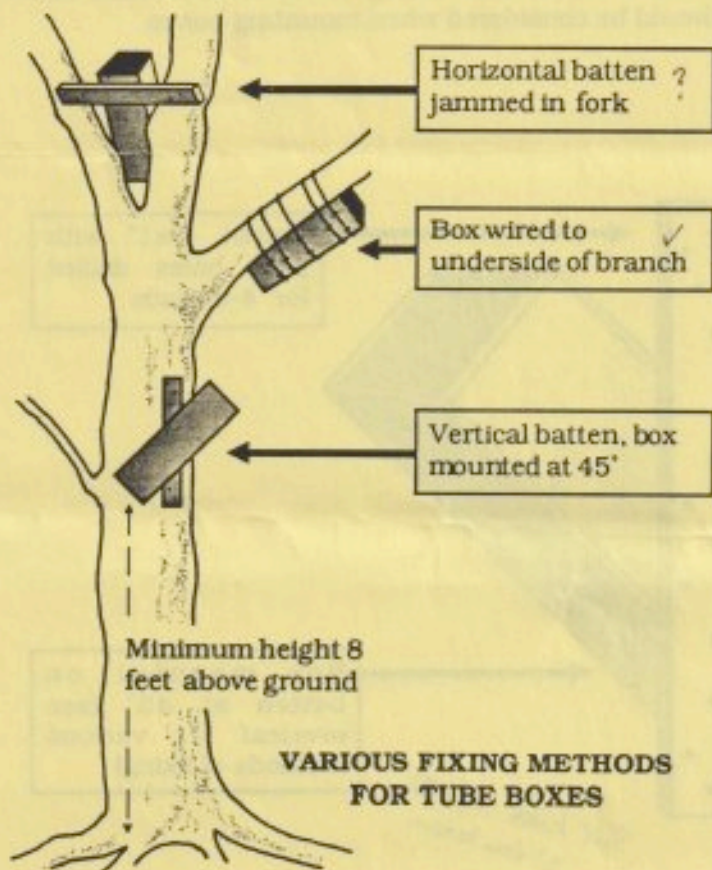
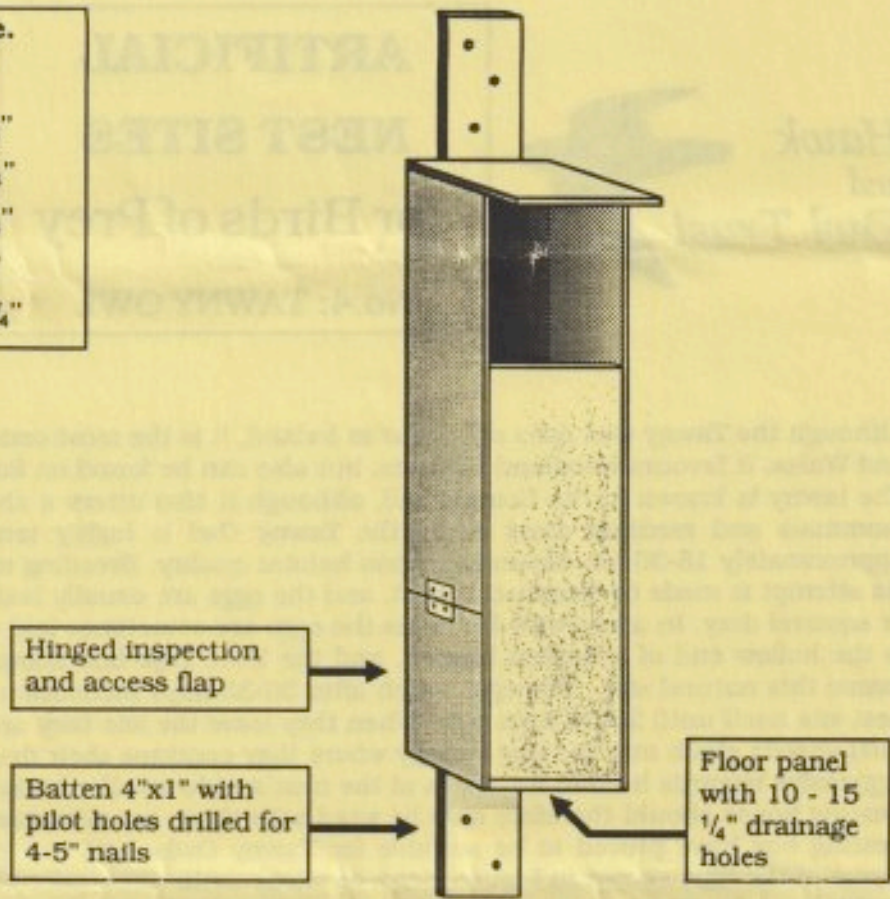


FIG. 2 Front entrance type.

COMPONENTS:

- 1 Rear Panel, 36" x 10" x 3/4"
- 1 Front Panel, 27" x 10" x 3/4"
- 2 Side Panels, 36" x 10" x 3/4"
- 1 Roof Panel, 14" x 10" x 3/4"
- 1 Floor Panel, 10" x 9 1/4" x 3/4"

Boxes of this type provide more shelter from the elements, though surprisingly little rain penetrates to the bottom of the Tube design either. Chances of seeing the birds perched in the box entrance are greater with this type, however. Various other designs will be accepted by Tawny Owls, and they quite often use Kestrel boxes, though Kestrels rarely nest in Tawny Owl boxes.



Tube boxes are very adaptable. They are best angled at about 45° to the horizontal in one of the ways shown on the left. A cross batten wedged into a fork enables a box to be positioned without the need for any fixings at all. If it tends to slide out of position, a few nails can be used, but they are best restricted to one end of the batten only, as unequal tree growth may otherwise eventually split the batten or the box itself. If wire is used to secure a box under a branch, it is best to staple it to the sides of the box for added security. Angling the box across a vertical batten is by far the simplest fixing method in the majority of situations.

Tawny Owl boxes need not be placed extremely high in trees unless there is a serious risk of vandalism, but should, however, be high enough to discourage disturbance or casual inspection by members of the public.

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