

WOODWORKING FOR WILDLIFE

BARN OWL NEST BOX

The barn owl is crow-sized with a white, heart-shaped face. It appears golden from above and white from below and does not have ear tufts. It may be seen roosting in abandoned buildings and barns during the day, and heard screaming (not hooting) at night. Best habitat is farmlands. A diet consisting largely of rodents makes this owl an asset to the farmer.

The "Ohio Box" is about 40" long (ideally never shorter than 36"), 16" high and 12" wide. It is either five sided (with the open side against the inside of a barn wall) or six sided (hung in a silo or

outside on a building). The entrance to the barnside box (6" to 6-1/2" on a side) is cut into the barn wall which acts as the front of the box. For outside boxes, the same-sized entrance should be cut into the box itself. The box can be constructed from a 6' length of 1" x 12" pine board and 1/2" grade plywood or it can be made entirely from plywood.

Nail the box together with 7d and 8d box nails. The top should be removable for cleaning the box but secured by hinges and a latch or partially nailed to prevent entrance by raccoons.

When the box is fastened to the

inside of the barn wall, the barnside entrance should be about 6" above the floor of the box and about 18' or more from the ground.

Hang the silo box from the top of the climbing-well with 1/2" to 3/4" rope. The silo should be inactive and have a top opening large enough for access by barn owls.

Keep boxes free of pigeons and their nest litter whenever possible, especially in late winter and early spring. Also, barn owl pellets (regurgitated fur and bones of prey) should be cleaned out of boxes after each nesting.

For barnside boxes, there should be a clear flight-path to the box entrance which ideally should face open fields (not the property owner's house since young owls can be highly vocal at night).

Nest boxes should be placed within a mile of suitable habitat. Best habitats are grasslands, wet meadows, rice fields, undergrazed pastures and/or numerous woodland-field borders. These habitats often support abundant prey populations. Boxes placed where cotton rats and other similar sized

rodents are scarce are least likely to contribute to the stability of barn owl populations.

Barn owl boxes can also be placed or hung on the outside of metal buildings, grain bins and other tall structures.

