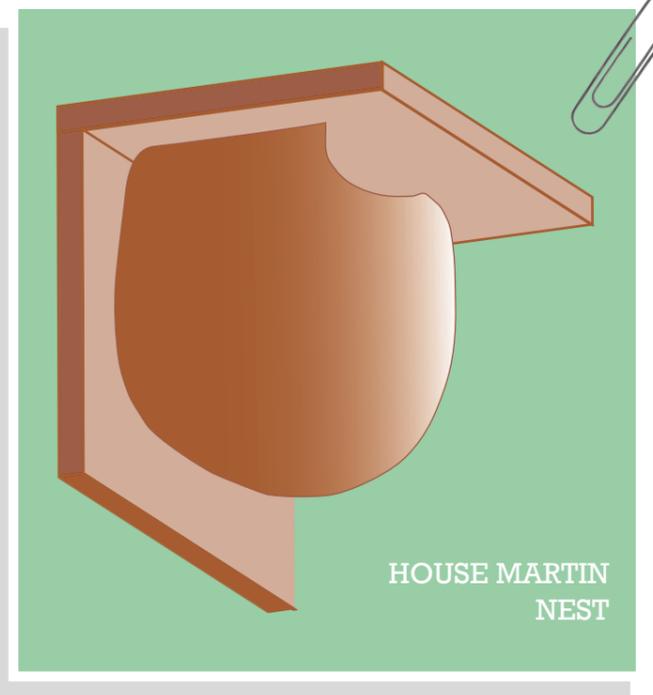


BOXES FOR HOUSE MARTINS

House Martins migrate all the way from Central or South Africa every year to nest. They deserve a helping hand. They nest under the eaves of houses and usually build their nests from mud. You can build a nest for them, moulding the clay yourself or you can buy ready made House Martin nests from mail order catalogues. The nests tuck right under the eaves and the entrance should be no larger than 2.5cm or Sparrows might invade. It may not be easy to attract House Martins to a new nest if they have not been nesting in the area. You may have to put a number of nests up together to try to get them to move in.

Some people object to droppings that the House Martins make. To avoid any problems, put up a temporary board below the nest to catch the droppings. It can be removed as soon as the birds leave on their long trek south.



HOUSE MARTIN NEST



HOUSE MARTIN

FOR FURTHER READING

Garden for Birds - Nigel Matthews. 1992. SGC Books.
Birds in Your Garden - Tony Soper and Roger Lovegrove. 1989. Webb and Bower.
Wildlife Gardening - Fran Hill. 1988. Derbyshire Wildlife Trust.
The Garden Bird Book - ed. David Glue. 1982. Macmillan.
Tits and Nestboxes - RSPB Leaflet.
The Blue Tit - J.Flegg. 1987. Shire publications (Shire Natural History Series).
Robins - Chris Mead. 1984. Whittet Books.
BBC/RSPB Videoguide to British Garden Birds.

Our aim is to protect, conserve and promote the natural and built environment for the benefit of present and future generations.

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WILDLIFE GARDENING

(2009)
 WG 006

DO BIRDS NEED BIRD BOXES?

Due to man's activities, some birds are finding it harder to find somewhere to nest, but special nest box schemes have helped the spread of rarer species like the Pied Flycatcher or Barn Owl. Most of the common birds can still find enough nesting sites in their natural habitat. However, in the urban situation, with many birds being attracted into gardens, there is a lot of competition for the few nesting sites that are available. It is easy to give these birds a helping hand by putting up nesting boxes. Nesting box design varies from species to species. You have to first decide what species you want to help and then build accordingly.

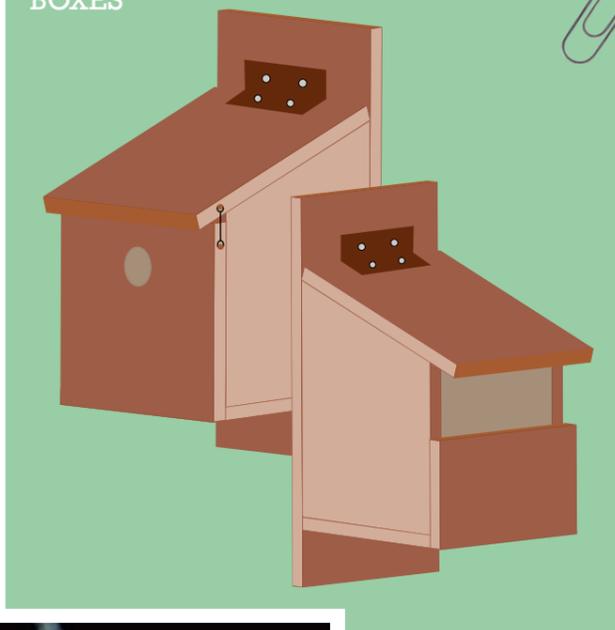
WHICH BOX FOR WHICH BIRD?

Birds like Blue Tits, Great Tits, House Sparrows or Starlings will readily nest in boxes with holes as entrances because they would naturally nest in crevices or hollow trees. By keeping the size of the entrance hole below 30mm, you can keep the opportunistic Sparrows and Starlings out, leaving it for the Tits. Birds like Robins, Wrens or if you are really lucky, Kestrels, will nest in boxes with an open front, because they would naturally nest in hedges or more open situations. If you have House Martins or Swallows nesting in the vicinity, you may like to put up special nest boxes that would suit them. Specific designs for rarer urban breeders like Treecreepers and Barn Owls are available. Contact the RSPB or BTO for further advice.

WHERE TO PUT THE BIRD BOXES

Siting of the boxes is very important. The boxes should never be in full sun as the heat can kill the young, nor facing the prevailing wind as the rain can then flood the box. It is best to face the boxes north. Tit boxes should be at least 2.5m from the ground and in a spot where cats cannot get at them. There should also be enough open space around the boxes so the Tits can fly unimpeded into the box. Tit boxes should not be near each other – it will only create urban strife! Do not inspect the nests too often as this can lead to the desertion of the nest and its young occupants. Robin boxes should be amongst foliage as Robins and Wrens like privacy, but not where cats can get them!

SIMPLE BIRD BOXES



GREAT TIT

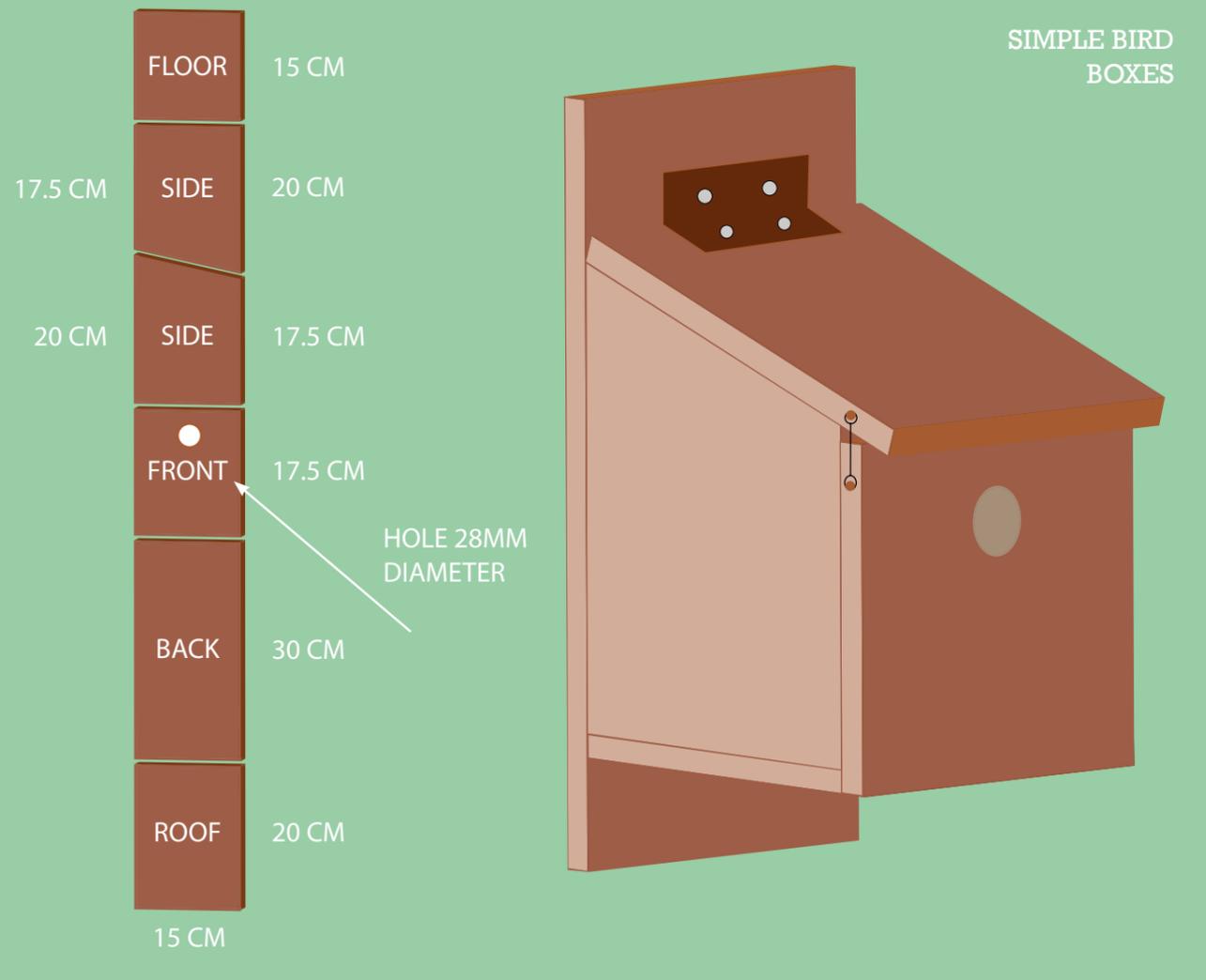


WREN



BARN OWL

SIMPLE BIRD BOXES



WHEN TO PUT YOUR BOX UP

The bird boxes should be put up in early to mid winter, because this gives the treated wood time to dry out and also because it gives the birds time to get used to and inspect the nests before nesting. Just like us searching for a house, birds spend some time looking at all possibilities and will not necessarily go for the last minute bargain.

THE ANNUAL WASH

This must not be a spring clean! This must be done in October or November and involves removing the old nest and cleaning the box with boiling water. This will kill any parasites or fleas. Only use boiling water. It is sufficient and has no side effects. Do not worry if there are unhatched eggs in the box. This is natural and birds lay enough eggs to account for these losses.

THE NECESSARY BUILDING BLOCKS

- One plank 15cm wide, 1.4m long and 2cm thick will do to make one bird box. Unplaned wood is the cheapest and perfectly acceptable. Thinner wood will lead to large temperature variations within the box and possible death of the nestlings. Floor boards could be used. The wood should be treated with a preservative, eg Creosote or Cuprinol, but not in the inside and not around the entrance hole. The box should be well dried before hanging up.
- 35mm screws or galvanised nails. Screws are better because it is then easier to take the box apart to thoroughly clean it.
- A strip of runner (eg old inner tube), leather, waterproofed canvas or roofing felt 15 x 8cm and a number of carpet tacks for the hinge.
- An eyehook for the lid.

A BOX FOR TITS

The two diagrams show how to cut up a plank into the appropriate sections and where each bit goes. Use the strip of rubber as a hinge to attach the lid to the back. This is better than proper hinges as no water can get into the box. The eyehook will connect the lid at the front. The entrance hole should be no bigger than 30mm so Starlings can't get in. Make the entrance hole at least 12.5cm up from the base so cats can't get at the eggs or young birds. Drill a couple of holes in the base so any water that does get in can drain away.

BOX FOR ROBINS

The principles of the construction are exactly the same as that for the Tit box. The only difference is that there must be a large open entrance hole 10cm wide.



ROBIN



BLUE TIT

A BOX FOR ROBINS

