

BARN OWL

NEST BOX

Plans and Instructions

United States
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Natural
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Conservation
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The barn owl (*Tyto alba*) is one of the most beneficial owls in the world. Farmers who know the merits of the barn owl strive to keep this “cat with wings” around their crops. One of the common resident owls, the barn owl has, a white heart-shaped face and is distinguished by whitish or pale cinnamon underparts (that look ghostly at night) and buffy or rusty upper plumage. Average barn owls weigh about 1 pound, and are approximately 15 inches long with a wingspan of about 40 inches.

Barn owls frequently are seen near roads, vacant fields, and wooded areas at night. Their call is a long, raspy scream. They hunt from perched or flying positions. Velvety feathers with soft fringes allow them to silently approach their prey, which they can find in total darkness. A barn owl's diet consists mainly of rodents, such as gophers, ground squirrels, and meadow mice.

The female lays 1 to 11 white eggs between November and July. Incubation is about 30 days. One to two broods are reared during the season with the young leaving the nest after about 8 weeks.

NESTING SITES

Barn owls do not build nests but lay eggs in holes in rotted trees, rocky cliffs, or bluffs. Alternatively, they may use structures with an appropriate cavity, including barns, silos, and abandoned buildings. You can encourage barn owls by building a nesting box and by establishing perching sites.

PICKING A NEST SITE

Good locations for barn owl nest boxes are wooded areas or in open fields and meadows with a few trees. Oak and sycamore are ideal tree species. The box can face any direction and should be hung 3 feet below a stout tree limb suspended by cables or mounted on poles 15 to 30 feet above the ground. The entrance should be unobstructed and the box positioned so it does not attract human attention. Place about 6 boxes per square mile. Boxes mounted high in barns or abandoned buildings also are readily occupied by owls. If the nest box is placed on a post, the post should be wrapped with an 18-inch metal, conical predator guard.

IMPORTANT FACTS TO CONSIDER

Honey bees frequently take over barn owl nest boxes, making them useless for nesting. About one fourth of the nest boxes in coastal southern California are used by honey bees.

About 85 percent of barn owl nesting attempts produce fledging young. Reasons for mortality include human disturbance, limb breakage, and attacks by raccoons, opossums, skunks, and bobcats.

Summer is the best time to erect a barn owl nest box. Boxes should not be disturbed during the nesting season or owls may desert them.

Barn owl nest boxes can be especially useful on farms and ranches where rodent control is desired.

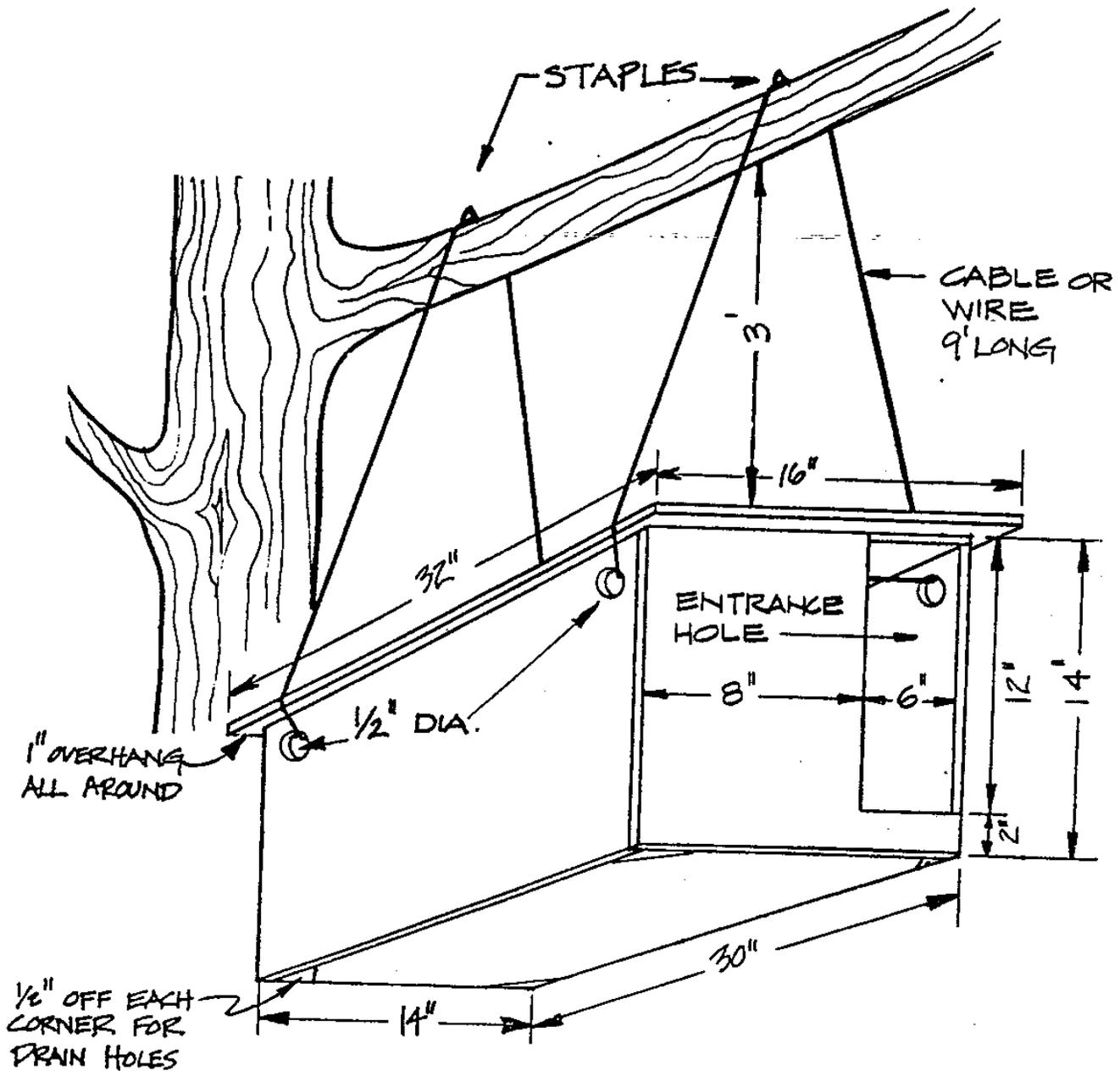
BUILDING A NEST BOX

Barn owl nest boxes are easy to build. Ideal material is 3/8-inch or 1/2-inch plywood. Nest boxes should be painted using a camouflage pattern or drab green, black, and brown to minimize human disturbance. Painting also helps prevent warping. Place a 2-inch layer of sawdust or wood chips in the bottom of the box and replace each year.

GUIDE

1. Make the entrance hole 6 inches wide by 12 inches high.
2. Hang or mount the box 15 to 30 feet above the ground and, if in a tree, 3 feet below a sturdy branch.
3. Use scrap exterior grade 3/8-inch or 1/2-inch plywood.
4. Use #4 or #5 galvanized hot dipped box nails.
5. Use a marine grade plastic resin or exterior wood glue for assembly.
6. Make the roof 16 inches by 26 inches to give a 1-inch overhang all around.
7. Use wire staples to keep the cable from moving on the branch.
8. Use at least a 9-foot long piece of wire to hang boxes.

BARN OWL NEST BOX Plans



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