

Bird nest box best practise installation and maintenance tips

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A. Installation

Where?

1. The best place to instal a bird nest box depends on the species the box is intended for. Therefore, think about the right habitat first, such as woodland, farmland, and urban areas.
2. Seek permission from the landowner before installing your box.
3. Avoid hanging a box with the opening facing north (which is cold and shady), or the most likely direction of typical rainy weather (this enhances the lifetime of your box).

How?

4. Songbird boxes should be hung between 2-4m high. Consider vandalism and easy access for subsequent control and maintenance when choosing the hight.
5. For non-passerine birds, please follow species-specific recommendations.
6. Always use non-rusting screws when fixing the box on a tree (this is just being kind to the tree) and avoid nails (screws fix the box better and allow for the box to be easily moved if necessary).
7. When fixing onto a wall or similar (for house sparrow boxes for example), drill a hole, use a wall plug and matching screw.

When?

8. Most resident hole-breeding songbirds (such as house and tree sparrows and tits) start looking for suitable nest sites as early as March, therefore, try and install your box before the end of February.
9. Migrant songbirds typically arrive sometime between April and early May, and hence, boxes that target species like pied flycatcher or redstart can also be hung as late as early April for a chance to be occupied already in the first year.

B. Box control

1. Ideally, boxes should be left alone during the breeding season to minimise disturbance of the nest, especially of incubating adults. When on eggs, birds are particularly susceptible to disturbance.
2. If ringing takes place, try and time your control with the period when eggs are most likely hatched. For most species this is between mid-May until mid-June. However, most birds will attempt a second brood if the first one fails.
3. Before opening the box, tap the box as if you knocked on somebody's door. This gives the adult in the box a warning. This may or may not reduce stress to the bird, but even if it doesn't, it seems a kind thing to do.
4. Spend as little time disturbing the box as necessary to allow the parent bird to return as quickly as possible. As a rule of thumb, try to keep your presence under 10 minutes (when ringing large broods of tits, this may take more time).
5. When opening the box, ideally hold a net in front of the entrance hole to allow nearly-fledged young that try to escape to be caught. Young that leave the box prematurely have reduced survival.
6. When ringing large broods, I recommend taking out only half of the young for ringing and, once finished, swap with the unringed half. Ring away from the box to allow parent birds to continue feeding.

C. Box maintenance

7. Boxes with songbird nests should be cleaned once a year, except for sparrow nests, which should only be cleaned every 2-3 years.
8. Cleaning should take place up until the end of February.
9. When cleaning the box, remove the whole nest. Then disinfect the box by burning a crumpled double-sheet of newspaper in the box, leaving the front door slightly open to create a draft.
10. Use the occasion to repair the box and repaint approximately every 10 years, but only ever on the outside.