



LITTLE OWL NEST BOX

The Little Owl is a species of open country, favouring lowland habitats such as farmland, parkland and orchards. Introduced from the Continent during the latter part of the 19th century, the species can be found breeding across England and Wales, just reaching Scotland in the north. Little Owls like a dark nest cavity, so our nest box design reflects this. Populations are in decline, both here in the UK and elsewhere in Europe, making studies of breeding ecology and success all the more important.

CONSTRUCTION

The use of FSC-approved WBP plywood or marine plywood (12 mm thickness), should give this nest box good longevity. The cutting plan, overleaf, is for a design that incorporates an internal tunnel to reduce the amount of light reaching the nesting chamber. There is some evidence that Little Owls prefer darker nest cavities, presumably because such sites offer increased protection from some nest predators. The sides, top and base of the box can be attached directly to one another; alternatively 20 mm batons can be used to provide greater rigidity. Use screws and waterproof glue. The entrance hole should be 70 mm in diameter. You can add a ring of Tippex around the entrance to help determine occupancy; the ring becomes discoloured when the box gets used. If the box is being placed outside then 'torch-on' felt the roof and seal the vertical joints with weatherseal.

Note that the access door on the front of the box can be made in a different manner if preferred, for example being made using a second layer of wood, with the door fitting over a smaller entrance hole beneath in order to reduce the risk of any light reaching the nesting chamber where the door joins the box. Attach a bolt to the door and hinges to allow access for monitoring and to clean out the box at the end of the season. Don't forget to drill drainage holes into the base. Pre-drill holes in the back plate to allow attachment to the tree/building or attach a baton to the box instead, the baton then being attached to the tree/building. Use a water-based preservative on the outside of the box and leave the inside bare. Add a layer of large sawdust chippings (an inch or so deep) to the box to form a scrape into which the eggs can be laid. Attach the box to the tree with aluminium nails to minimise risk to anyone in the future who cuts into the tree with a chainsaw.

PLACEMENT

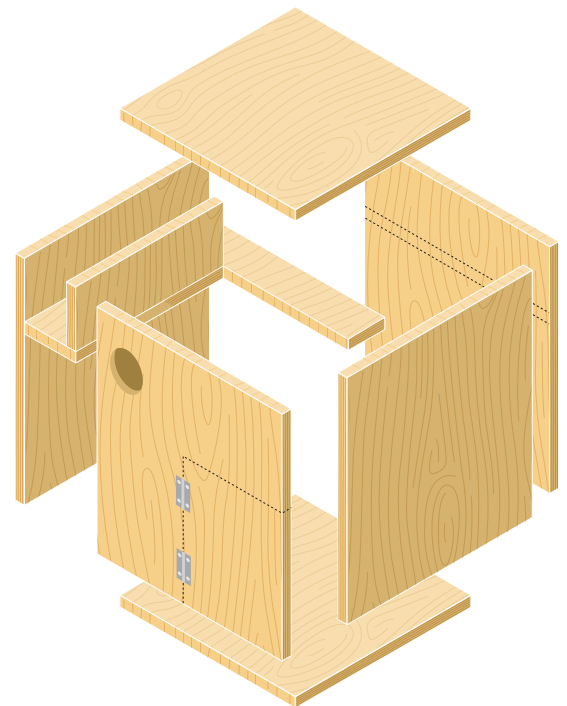
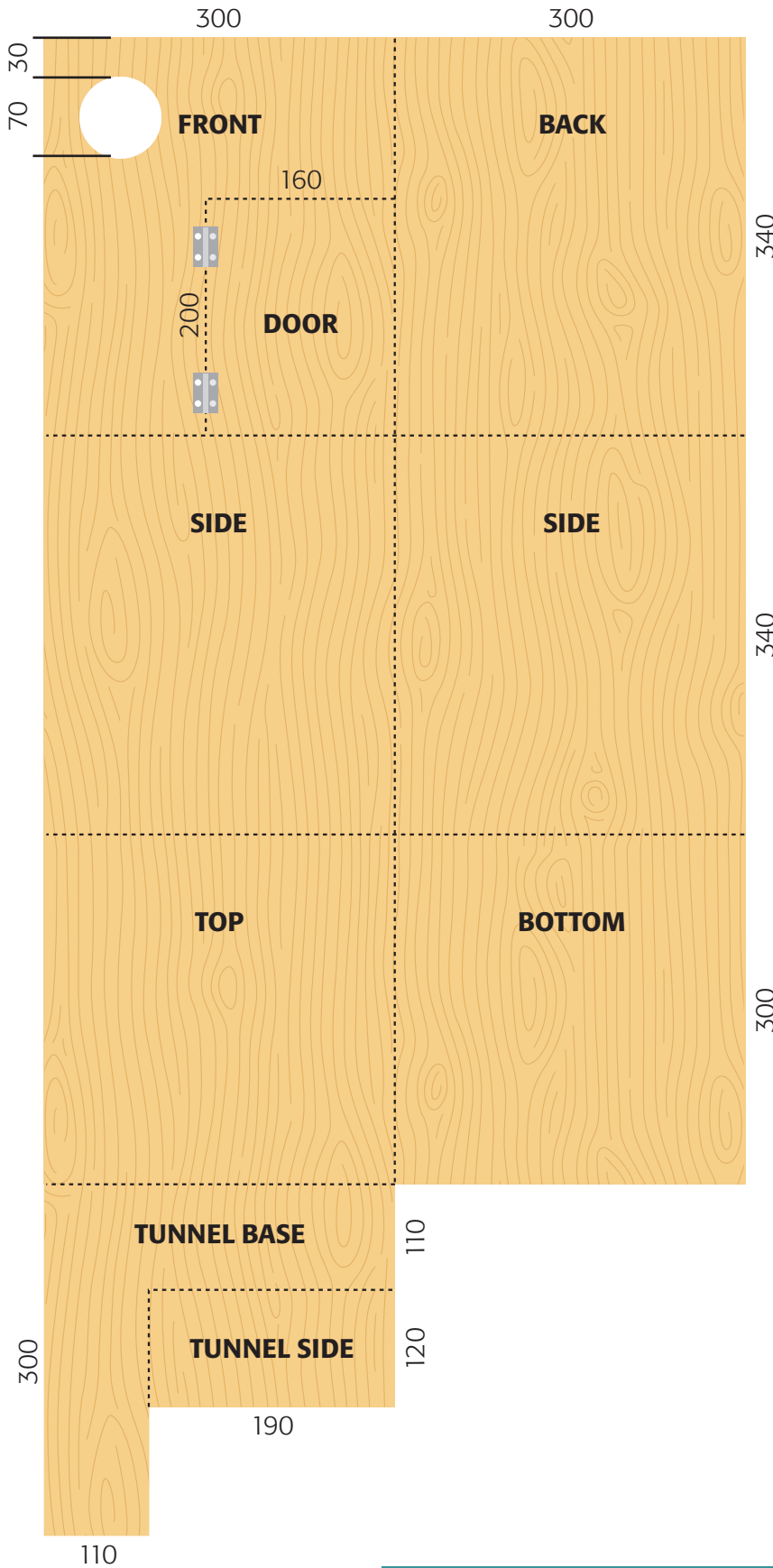
Little Owl nest boxes are best placed within suitable farmland habitat, either in a suitable hedgerow with mature trees or on a farm building. Little Owls can nest surprisingly low down, sometimes even occupying a cavity that is below ground level, so the box does not have to be positioned that high. Generally a box placed c. 2–5 m above the ground is suitable. Position the box entrance so that it is away from the prevailing wind (generally this means avoiding the west or south-west). You are responsible for your own safety, so assess the risks and take care when building the box, fixing it into position and when monitoring.

MONITORING

Some 150 to 200 Little Owl nests are monitored annually by BTO volunteers, but the collection of information from additional sites is a priority. Nest inspections should begin in the second half of April or early May, the first visit hopefully providing information on both occupancy and clutch size. Some Little Owl pairs may use one or more cavities close to the nest site as a prey larder, something that may occasionally result in the nest box being used for this purpose rather than for breeding. Wear goggles and head protection when visiting nests. A detailed monitoring protocol for this species is being developed by the BTO as part of Project Owl.

LITTLE OWL NEST BOX – CUTTING PLAN

All measurements are in mm



Little Owl *Athene noctua*

Clutch size: 3–4 eggs

Incubation: 27–29 days

Chicks fledge at: 30–35 days

Broods: 1 per year

Seasonality of nests with eggs (E) and young (y), derived from Nest Record Scheme data.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
E												
Y												