

TAWNY OWL NEST BOX

The Tawny Owl is a species that favours woodland habitats, but it may also breed in larger rural and suburban gardens. A cavity-nesting species, it readily takes to suitable nest boxes, allowing breeding success and productivity to be monitored by BTO ringers and nest recorders. Boxes should be placed as high as possible in a suitable tree. If monitoring the nest box be aware that Tawny Owls are sensitive to disturbance during the egg laying and early incubation period (March to early April). Females can be aggressive at the nest, so always wear eye protection when checking nest boxes of this kind.

CONSTRUCTION

The use of FSC-approved WBP plywood or marine plywood, (12 mm thickness), will give this nest box longevity. The cutting plan, overleaf, is for an open-fronted design that has been shown to be successful by BTO nest recorders working on the species. Chimney style boxes may also be used by this species and may be less likely to be occupied by Grey Squirrel. 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 glue to make the joins.

Note that the bottom edge of the door and top edge of the smaller (bottom) section of the side should incorporate a 45° angle in order to ease door opening and closing. Use a piece of damp proof course or other plastic to make the hinge for the door, which can be fixed to the door and the larger (top) section of the side with a staple gun. A similar approach can be used to seal the joint where the roof meets the back plate – take the plastic up and over the back plate to complete the seal. Attach a bolt to the bottom of the door and side panel 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 and pre-drill holes in the back plate to allow attachment to the tree. 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.

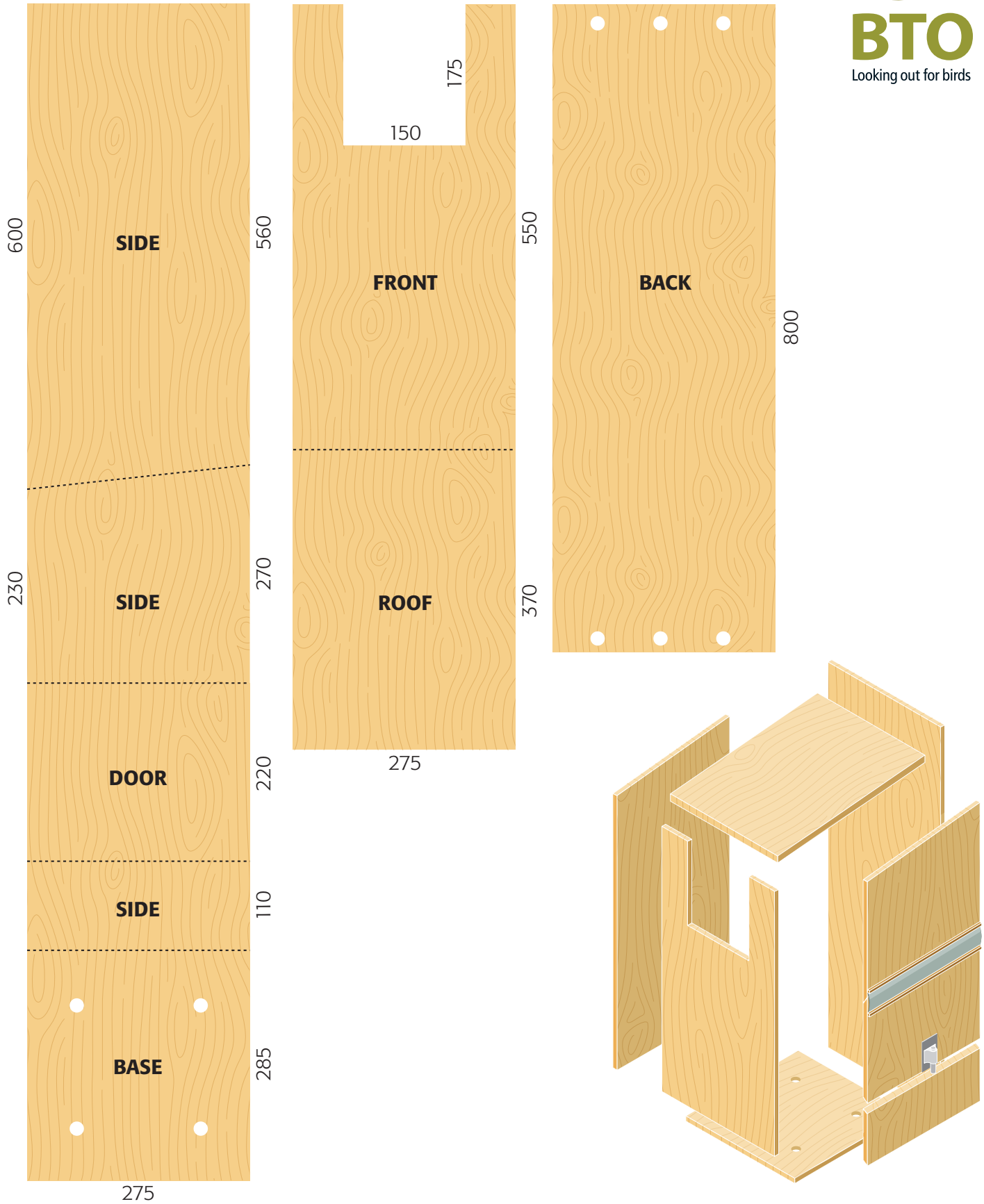
PLACEMENT

Tawny Owl nest boxes are best placed within suitable woodland habitat (deciduous or coniferous) or a well-wooded garden. Tawny Owl chicks leave the nest before they can fly – a behaviour known as branching – and it has been shown that those emerging from nests higher off the ground are less likely to be taken by predators. Position your box on the main trunk of the tree as high as you can safely manage and ideally c. 5–8 m above the ground. 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 500 or so Tawny Owl nests are monitored annually by BTO volunteers but we are keen to secure more information from a wider number of sites. Nest inspections in this species can cause desertion, the risk being greatest during egg laying and early incubation, so obtain data on clutch size only during the latter part of the incubation period (see over). Time visits close to or after sunset, so that females can return to the nest after dark. Female Tawny Owls can be aggressive towards intruders when nests contain chicks, and some people have been blinded by such attacks. 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.

TAWNY OWL NEST BOX – CUTTING PLAN



Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*

Clutch size: 2–3 eggs

Incubation: 28–30 days

Chicks fledge at: 32–37 days

Broods: 1 per year

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

