

# PART 20: HOW TO MAKE A Mammal nestbox

MAKING A NEST BOX IS A SATISFYING AND PRACTICAL WAY TO MAKE AN IMMEDIATE DIFFERENCE TO THE LIVES OF WILD MAMMALS LIVING NEAR YOU. HERE WE PROVIDE BASIC PATTERNS FOR FIVE TYPES OF NEST BOX.

**S**ecure sleeping and nesting quarters are one of the principal limiting factors influencing the density of mammal populations. Increasing the availability of nesting, roosting or hibernation sites in your area may boost local populations and also increase your opportunities to watch mammals at close quarters – a win-win situation.

Where possible boxes should be made of untreated solid timber, preferably from sustainable forests. Plywood is cheaper but won't last as long. By all means recycle materials from old shelving and the like, but beware materials which may have been treated with nasty chemicals.

**When to go back**  
Part of the joy of setting up a nest box is seeing the animal that ends up in residence. But where

*The high pitched shrieks of common shrews are sometimes inaudible to older people, but they are worth following – the animals may be so engrossed in their shouting match that they ignore your approach.*

threatened or protected species are concerned, the temptation to go back and have a look might impact negatively on the animal you are trying to help. It could also put you on the wrong side of the law. So, while we've provided information here on boxes for some protected species (bats, otters, dormice), it's important to realise that while you are welcome to try and help all these animals by providing homes, you need a licence to do anything that will disturb them once they've moved in. If your motives for building a nest box include a desire to help you see wildlife close up (and there's nothing wrong with this at all), we'd recommend you start with needy but non-protected species such as hedgehogs.

**Uninvited guests**  
Don't be disappointed if the animal that moves into your nest box is not the intended beneficiary. Birds often take advantage of the free nest boxes to rear their chicks. Let them do so, and clear out the nest at the end of summer. If the box repeatedly attracts the 'wrong' species, consider moving it next year.

**DIY NOT FOR YOU?**

If you'd like to give a mammal a home but you're simply not the DIY type, or you have nowhere to put a nest box, why not sponsor one of ours instead? PTES runs a dormouse nest box scheme. For £12 you can fund a deluxe dormouse des-res at one of the many dormouse sites we monitor around the country.

**BATS**

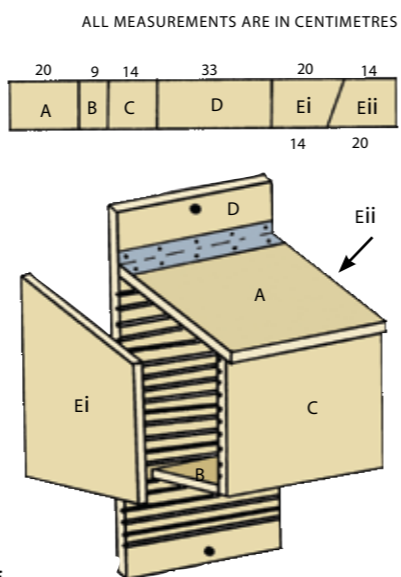
## Bat box

A small group of bat boxes hung on buildings or on tree trunks can add greatly to the bat appeal of gardens and other green spaces. You need a licence to work directly with bats themselves, but anyone can put up a few boxes then watch from below as the bats make use of them.

**YOU WILL NEED**  
A 110cm length of 15cm wide untreated timber plank  
15 cm wooden batten  
10 x 15cm scrap of roofing felt  
13 x 1 inch nails  
About 10 panel pins  
2 x 3 inch nails  
Hammer, wood saw

**CONSTRUCTION**  
Mark and cut the plank as shown. Score grooves for bats to grip into panels C and D using the saw. Assemble panels B, C, D, and E using 1 inch nails as shown. Attach lid, using roofing felt and panel pins to create a hinge.

**LOCATION**  
Fix to a tree or wall using the longer nails. Ideally group boxes in threes facing different directions so that one is always sheltered from the wind. Make sure the box is well out of reach of cats.



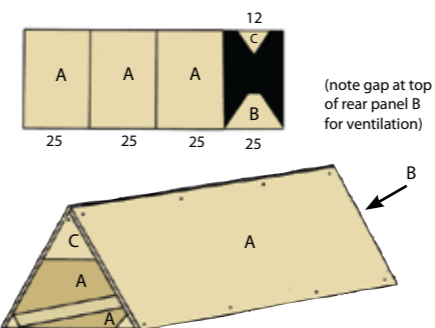
ANDREW PARKINSKY

**HEDGEHOG**

## Hedgehog box

Hedgehogs need secure homes for breeding in summer and for hibernating in winter. This box will serve both purposes and increase the chances of hedgehogs spending time in your garden.

**YOU WILL NEED**  
60 x 100cm marine plywood  
180cm triangular batten  
24 x 1 inch nails  
Hammer, wood saw



**CONSTRUCTION**  
Assemble the panels as shown, using nails and battens.

**LOCATION**  
Place the box amongst vegetation so that the entrance is not too obvious – the base of a hedge is ideal. Don't be too tidy in the garden – any hedgehog that moves in will want to use local materials for bedding and windblown leaves are ideal.



**HOG BOX**  
Instead of building a box you can buy a lightweight flatpack version direct from PTES on 020 7498 4533.

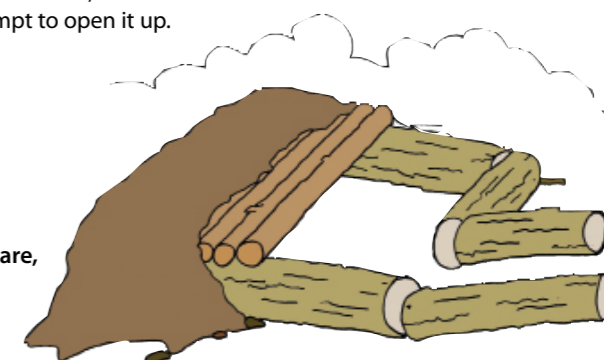
**OTTER**

## Artificial otter holt

This is a big project and you need to have permission from the landowner. Once built, check the area close to the holt occasionally for signs of occupation but don't attempt to open it up.

**YOU WILL NEED**  
Several large logs and at least a dozen 2m lengths of smaller timber.  
2m square tarpaulin  
Chainsaw, spade, lots of energy!

**CONSTRUCTION**  
Dig the holt into an existing earth bank. Excavate an area at least 2m square, with the entrance tunnel offset to provide shelter from drafts. Line with timber. The internal chamber should be about 1m in diameter. Roof with logs, poles or planks, seal with the tarpaulin and replace the soil.



**DORMOUSE**

## Dormouse box

A dormouse box is a bird box with a back door! The entrance is located at the rear so the dormouse can scramble in easily.

**YOU WILL NEED**  
110cm x 15cm timber or marine plywood  
13 x 1 inch nails  
1 x hook and eye  
150cm length flexible plasticised wire  
Hammer, wood saw, wood drill with 5mm bit  
**CONSTRUCTION**  
Mark and cut the timber as shown, cutting a 3cm hole in panel D and attaching the two small offcuts from panel E as spacers. Drill drainage holes in the base panel B. Assemble panels B, C, D,

and E using 1 inch nails as shown. Attach panel E inside the lid to create a snug fit. Fit hook and eye to secure lid in place.  
**LOCATION**  
Choose an accessible location in prime dormouse habitat – 10–15 year old hazel coppice is ideal. Choose a tree whose branches mesh with others. Use the telephone wire to tie the box firmly to a trunk at chest height.

**NEST TUBES**  
If you're planning to erect nest boxes as a means of finding out whether a site has dormice, a more cost-effective method is to use nest tubes, available flatpacked from The Mammal Society. Call 01278 641747 to order. A nest tube survey will tell you whether a full scale box monitoring scheme is worthwhile.

