

Read 'awl' about it

The Lockdown Newsletter from the
Cannock Chase Shed

ISSUE No. 17



This issue...

Is your
garden
Bat
Friendly?



DIY Hints and
Tips from an
Expert...

Plans for bird and
Owl nest boxes

Let the worms do
the gardening –
raised bed no dig



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Shed News

Cannock Chase Shed has been granted the chance of a Grant of up to £1000.00 from The Co-op Local Community Fund. This will be from these 2 food outlets chosen by the Co-op - **Co-operative stores in Longford Road, Cannock & Stafford Road, Huntington.**

If you shop at either of those Co-op stores and purchase any Co-op brand items at these outlets or know anyone who lives or works in the area please ask them to vote for us. It's done on line and registered shoppers can to choose who to give their 'reward' to from a choice of three Community Groups. Occasional shoppers like me who do not live in the area have their 'reward' split equally between all three Groups automatically.

Every spend in the shop gives a donation to the Community however small.

I did a recce and bought Co-op milk at £3.00. A 'reward' of 4p went into the fund.

It will run for 12 months until October 2021 so there should be a chance for most of us to pop in during that time even if it's just when we are passing by.

We can spend the Grant on what we want but it has to be Shed and Member related.

Avril - Fundraiser for CCS.



(Hi Sue I am sending this as a WhatsApp. Video, hope it gets to you OK. Could you choose which version you want? Cheers!)

DIY HINTS AND TIPS FROM AN EXPERT

Careful planning is essential before starting any new DIY project. Firstly, study the Screwfix catalogue in great detail and order all you might need, supplement this with purchases from your favourite store. Wilkos have a large range of good value tools and equipment, but I am sure that you will have your own favourites. Always budget for more than the minimum needed.

Never use up part tins of paint, you will not get rid of the paint skin which will break up and deposit onto the well-prepared surface. Similarly always buy new brushes, expensive I know but always worth it.

Working outside? Always have a change of clean footwear by the door so that you don't tread in any mud.

Read the instructions! I cannot emphasise this enough, the people who design flat pack furniture know what they are doing. Assembled correctly there will be no "spare parts."

Always take safety precautions, use gloves, a mask and goggles as appropriate and always check and use ladders and make sure they don't slip.

Some paints and paint strippers contain powerful volatile solvents, when using indoors always ensure maximum ventilation.

DIY HINTS AND TIPS FROM AN EXPERT

Stripping paint using solvents? It's a good idea to open the tin first to let it warm up before use.

Before starting any new DIY project check in the garage and the shed, you may find that you have at least some of the things you need; this will save you both time and money. Old paint stripper does not go off! Don't believe me? Just give it a good sniff, or two.

Part-used paint can be made good use of, strain it through a pair of tights and always use an old well-seasoned brush. Modern paints can hide a multitude of marks and need hardly any surface preparation. Use a powerful solvent to clean up your brushes.

Socks! When you realize that you have trodden mud onto the clean floor remove your dirty shoes and carefully re-trace your steps using your socks to clean up as you go, no-one will ever know! Dip the sock into a good quality paint thinner first, this helps a lot with the cleanery thingy.

The people who design flat-pack furniture are not proper DIY enthusiasts. Instructions are for guidance only and any parts left over is down to their poor quality control and should kept as spares in a suitable, preferably unlabelled tin. Part empty paint thinner tins are excellent for this purpose.

Safety precautions, are fine if you are a so-called "professional" but you have age and experience on your side and that's what really counts. If there is any paint drips covering up the instructions use a good quality paint thinner to clean it off, and make it like a bit readable if it's a bit blurry blurred.

Some paints are like really powerful stuff, y`know and can wow, and yeh paint thinner is really, like really seriously good stuff and if I can just reach into the top corner on this old chair I might just

(note from editor: at this point the WhatsApp, video suddenly ended so I have copied it out word for word. Unfortunately he did not get a chance to finish this as he is still in hospital but as we were a bit short this month have decided to publish both versions, hope this is OK)

Submitted by Leslie Jewkes

LET THE WORMS DO THE WORK – RAISED BED NO-DIG GARDENING

I have been using raised beds, or in reality permanent paths, for two years now and I highly recommend them. The construction as you can see is of the simplest and uses 6in. X 1 in. rough sawn timber in 8 ft. lengths cut to give frames 4 ft. wide and as long as you like anchored on the inner side by stakes screwed to the frames at intervals. The trickiest thing by far in my garden was the careful measuring and planning needed beforehand using squared paper. The point is that you never tread onto the cultivated ground thus avoiding soil compaction.



The most difficult part certainly isn't the construction. Once you have cleared the beds of perennial weeds, garden compost or, if you are lucky farmyard manure is added in the autumn to a depth of a couple of inches and by the spring an easy turn of the top few inches of soil with a hand fork will be all you need to make the soil ready for planting. I also tip on fallen

autumn leaves and grass clippings, the bed can also be covered in thick cardboard as a mulch. My garden soil is typical of the Chase area and is a very "hungry" sandy and somewhat stony loam and needs an almost constant supply of organic matter and some soil protection in the winter. The paths between the beds are about 12 ins. wide and covered in wood chips – an electric garden chipper was a great investment and with shrubs and trees in the garden a great way to make use of "garden waste". Wood chips rapidly break down in the soil and provide valuable nutrients and keep in the moisture. The total cost of making the beds came to about £100 for 4 and a half decent sized frames. There are several important advantages to the "no dig" method. The soil is never compacted, weeding, maintenance, planting and harvesting is much easier and cleaner. Crops can be grown organically and you do not need to apply large amounts of fertiliser or chemicals. In UK gardens soil fertility is rarely a problem, and apart from cabbage white caterpillars and the occasional mole (more worms you see!) the garden has been largely pest free. If you would like to explore the "no -dig" concept check out the book "Organic Gardening" by Charles Dowding or, for free, have a look at his videos on YouTube.

Happy gardening!

Leslie Jewkes.

Is your garden Bat Friendly?

There are estimated to be more than 15 million gardens in the UK, covering an area greater than all of the UK's nature reserves combined. Our gardens and public green spaces are vitally important habitats for wildlife, including bats.

The UK is home to 18 species of bat, the largest being the noctule which weighs the same as four £1 coins, and the smallest is the pipistrelle, which weighs as little as a 2p coin. This diminutive bat has a giant appetite, however – it is known to gobble up more than 500 insects in an hour!

Installing a bat box will help local bats, encouraging them to move into areas that have limited roosting space. All our bats are insect-eaters, so having a few flitting around might just make those evenings in the garden a little less buggy!

Make your own bat box



What you need:

- an adult to help you
- rough cut, untreated timber
- tape measure and pencil
- saw
- hammer and nails
- rubber flap
- odourless wood glue (optional)

Dimensions: 140mm (side), 200mm (side), 90mm (base), 200mm (roof), 150mm (front), 360mm (back). Thickness: 25mm. Angled edge cut at 22°.

Construction: roughen back plate with 1mm deep cuts every 10mm. Seal gaps at edges with wood glue. 10mm wide entrance slit between base and back plate. Rubber hinge flap.

IMPORTANT: Do not use wood stain or preservative anywhere on box.

Installation: 5 metres high on tree trunk.

Notes: IT IS ILLEGAL TO DISTURB BATS WITHOUT A LICENSE - DO NOT INSPECT BOXES IF YOU THINK BATS ARE USING THEM. Look for droppings below to check for occupancy.

wildaboutgardens.org.uk

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust is part of The Wildlife Trusts, the largest UK voluntary organisation dedicated to conserving the full range of the UK's habitats and species. They are based at **The Wolseley Centre** in Wolseley Bridge, near Rugeley which is one of the county's hidden gems and it's completely free to visit. The Wolseley Centre is surrounded by 26 acres of wildlife-friendly grounds which are completely free to explore. There are many different wildlife habitats - including peaceful woodland (with dozens of bird boxes), a colourful hay meadow, tranquil ponds and lakes and lush marshland. The Visitor Centre underwent a revamp in May 2019 including a new-look gift shop, and a cafe that overlooks swan lake.

Although the Centre itself is closed during the lockdown, their website is well worth a visit :

<http://staffs-wildlife.co.uk/>

Article suggested by Avril

BIRD BOXES

The West Midlands Ringing Group (birds, not bells) have asked for our help in making some bird boxes to encourage certain species that are in decline.

In the following pages you will find plans for small bird boxes, and much larger Owl boxes. We are hoping to find a way for members to build these at home, if they would like to be involved.

Making your own nest box is fun and rewarding. Wood is the best material to use. Soft woods, such as pine, are easy to cut and the natural resins ensure a long life. Hard woods, such as oak, will also be weather resistant but are hard to cut and may warp under certain conditions. Choose wood that is at least 15 mm thick.

Your basic tool-kit for making boxes will contain a handsaw, hammer, screwdriver, drill and drill bits. If you are using a rubber hinge to attach the roof then a heavy duty staple gun is useful. Use screws or nails to make the box, with glue used to provide additional strength.

Don't forget to drill drainage holes into the base and pre-drill holes in the back plate to allow attachment to a tree or building. It is important that the hinged roof can be opened easily for cleaning out the box at the end of the season and for monitoring visits. Use a water-based preservative on the outside of the box and leave the inside bare. There is no need to add any lining to the box.

HOUSE SPARROW NEST BOX

Reduce Hole Size To 28 Mm Diameter For Tree Sparrows

The loss of suitable nest cavities appears to have played a role in the decline of this familiar species, so the provision of one or more nest boxes is something that you can do to help.

A standard, small hole-fronted nest box, with an entrance hole of 32 mm diameter, works best for this species. House Sparrows may make two or three breeding attempts during the breeding season.

House Sparrow nest boxes are best placed so that the entrance hole is facing north-east and is sheltered from the prevailing wind and rain. Avoid obvious sun traps, such as south-facing walls. The box does not need to be positioned within cover. Position the box 2-3 metres off the ground, higher if you think there is the risk of disturbance.

House Sparrows are colonial breeders, so consider placing several boxes in close proximity. Some people have found that leaving a piece of straw poking out of the entrance hole of a new box can encourage its use by House Sparrows.

Plank size c 150 x 1170 mm All measurements are in mm



The loss of hedgerow trees, changes to woodland management and increasing urbanisation have all contributed to a decline in the availability of natural sites for cavity-nesting species like Blue Tit and Starling.

Species that nest alongside people, such as House Sparrow and Swift, have lost out to changing building regulations, which have reduced the opportunities for birds to nest under roof tiles or in holes in barge boards.

Well-designed nest boxes can replace these lost opportunities, increasing the numbers of nesting birds and boosting their populations, while providing the opportunity to collect valuable data.

MATERIAL

Boxes should be made of waterproof insulating material, such as wood or 'woodcrete'. Boxes made from thin wood, plastic, metal or solid ceramic may overheat, which is dangerous for birds.

WATERPROOF

Make sure that water cannot get into the box where the roof is fixed.

WALLS

Box walls should be at least 15 mm thick to provide adequate insulation.

OPENING ROOF

A roof that can be lifted will allow access for cleaning and nest monitoring. An overhanging roof will make it harder for cats to reach in.

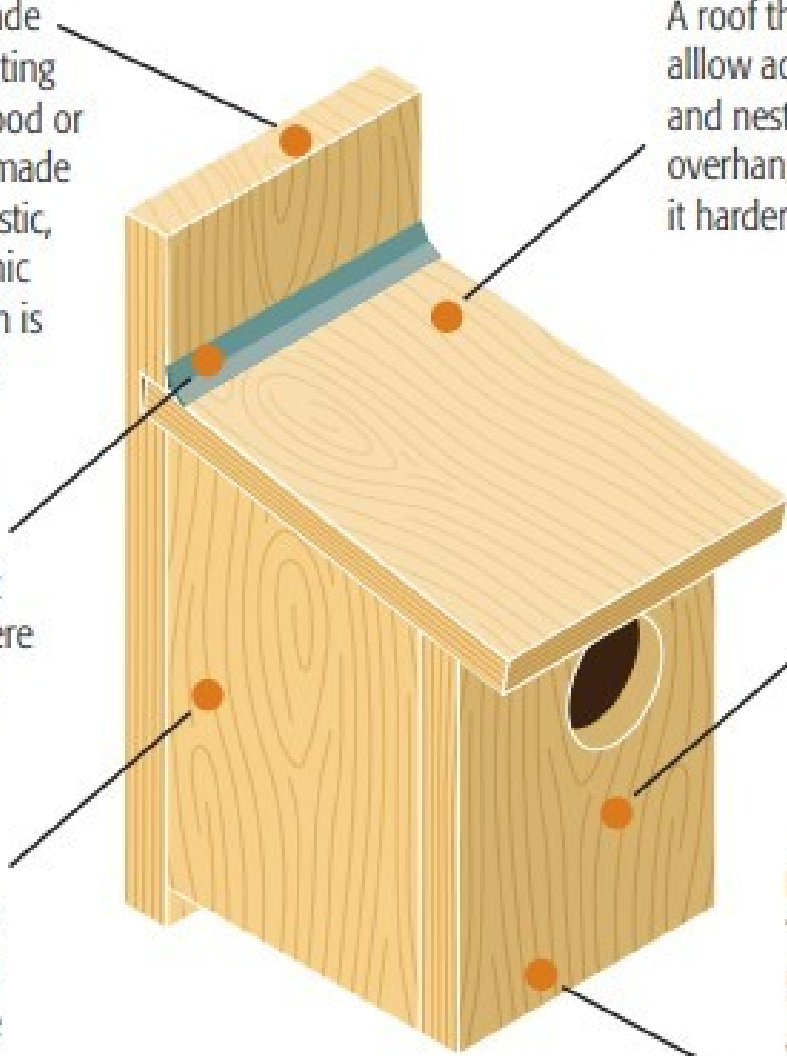
HOLE LOCATION

The hole should be at least 12 cm above the floor of the box to prevent predators reaching in.

FLOOR SIZE

The inside cavity should be a minimum of 15 cm across, and the floor should have small drainage holes in case water gets in.

Boxes should ideally look natural or inconspicuous.

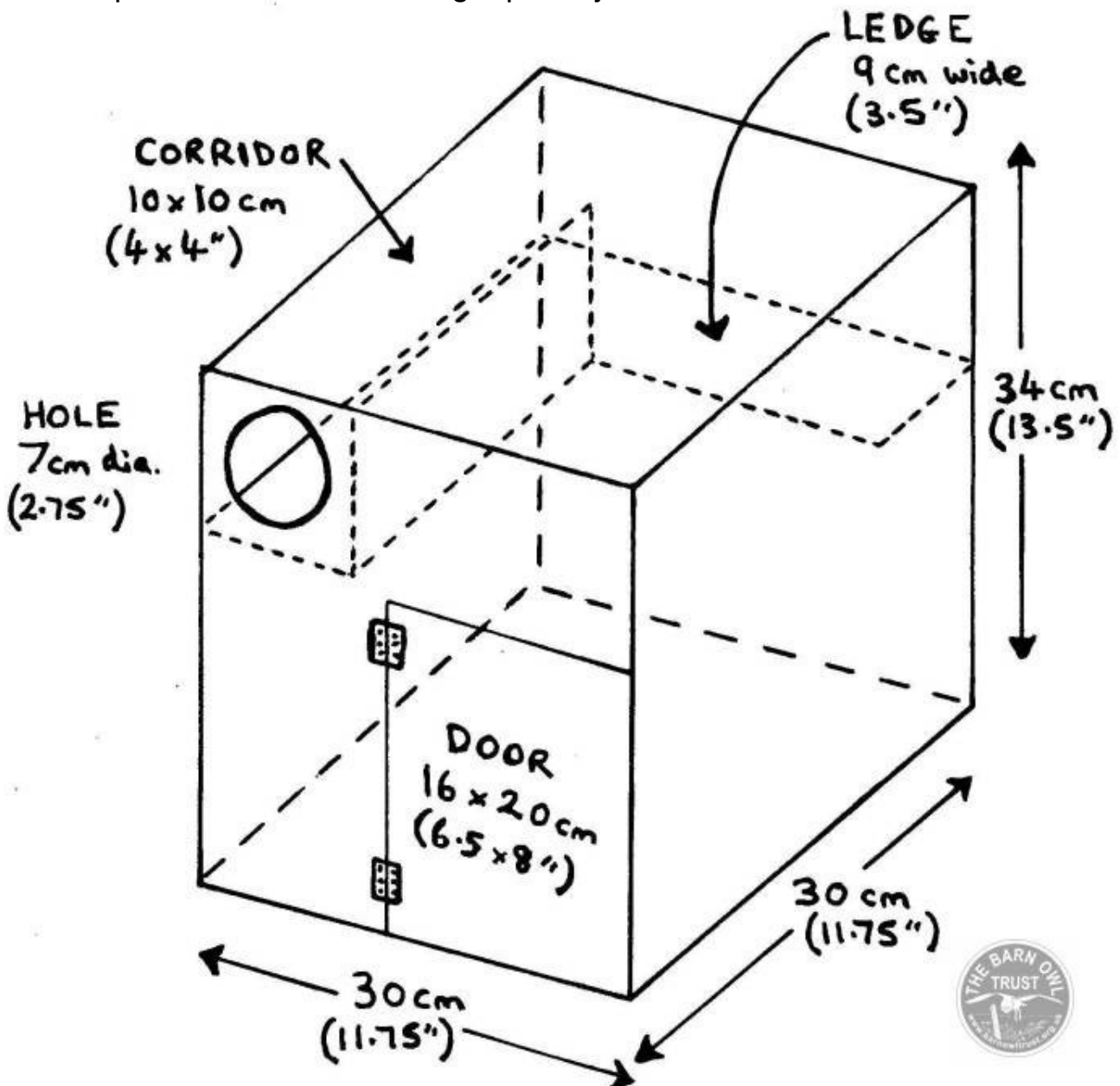


How to build a Little Owl box

The box is made of 12mm tanalised softwood ply and held together with 40mm rust-proof screws. Please avoid using hardwood ply unless it is stamped 'FSC Approved'. The position of the access hole and internal baffles can be reversed to allow for different placements, as ideally, the box should be positioned in such a way as to allow the owls to walk out onto a branch or wall top. Construct the sides first and then cut the floor to fit within the sides as this helps to keep the interior dry. The removable panel that allows access to the main chamber should always be incorporated. Use brass hinges to prevent rusting and remember when you fit the panel, that wood swells when damp.

If located outdoors, use thick roofing felt on top of the box, drill a 10mm ($\frac{1}{2}$ ") drainage hole in each corner of the floor, treat with creosote substitute and allow to dry thoroughly for 2 or 3 days before erection. All joints should be sealed with good quality sealant such as 'Ever Build – Weather Mate'.

A small 'exercise platform' can be added immediately below the entrance hole and above the inspection hatch. Providing a perch just in front of the box could be beneficial.



Build a home for a Barn Owl

Did you know? Barn Owls have declined by at least 70% and all of the causes of this decline are man-made.

The Midland Ringers have asked us to help by building owl boxes for them to install and monitor.

These plans have come from the Barn Owl Trust website, where you can find excellent [video instructions](#) on how to construct the box as well as detailed [Photo Instructions](#). (Click on the links to go straight there).

Materials to use

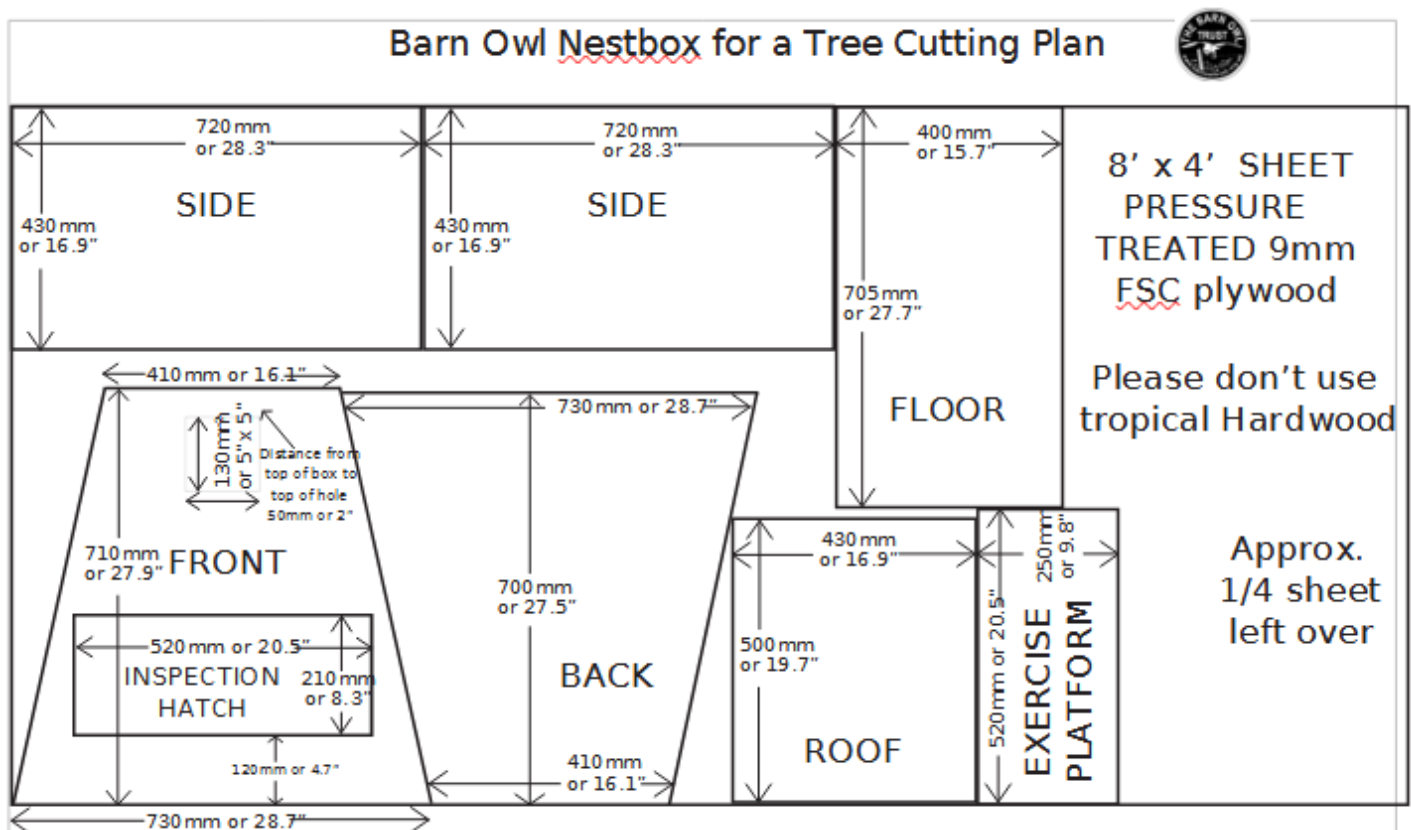
The basic owl box should be built using rot-resistant or Tanalith E treated sheet material manufactured using a waterproof adhesive. We use 9mm exterior grade tanalised softwood ply (or structural exterior grade ply complying with EN314-2 Class 3, CE2+ or C+/C), 25 x 50mm tanalised batten and 30mm rust-resistant screws. Please avoid using hardwood ply, unless it is stamped "FSC Approved".

Wood preservative

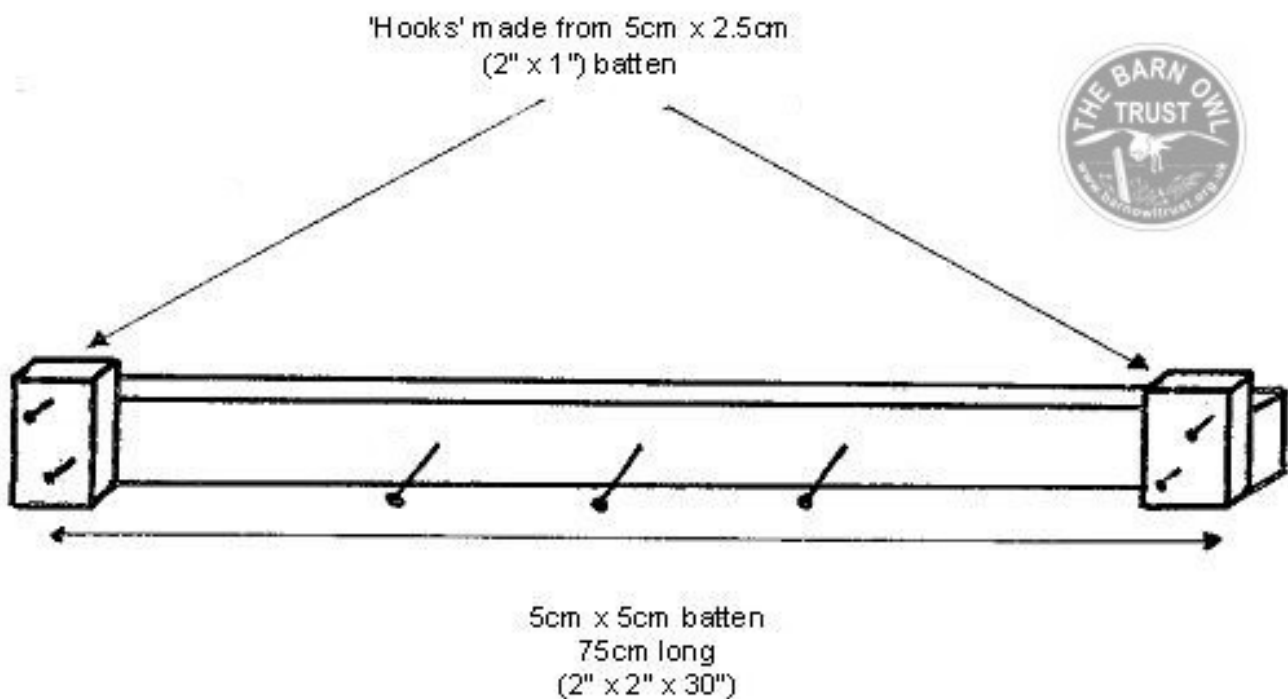
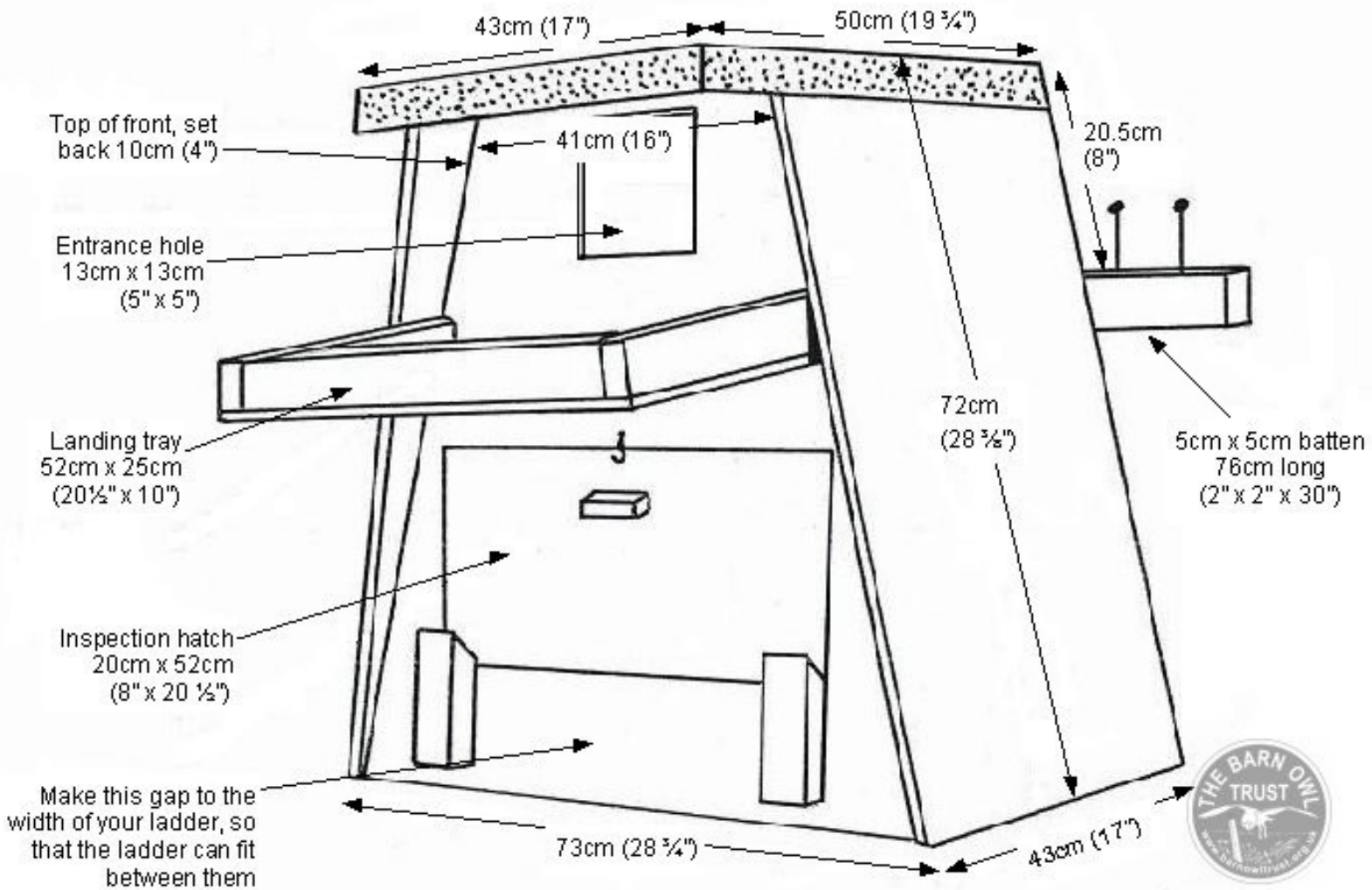
Where tanalised plywood is not available, any type of wood preservative may be used provided that the box is dry before erection. It is essential that the edges and ends of all parts are treated before assembly.

Waterproofing

The top of the owl box should be covered with heavy duty roofing felt. A waterproof sealant (such as Ever-Build Weather-Mate) should be used in all the wood joints to prevent water seeping in. If you need proof that this is necessary, try leaving your nestbox under a sprinkler for a few hours. 20mm diameter drainage holes can also be drilled in the floor of the box. The front, back and sides must overhang the floor of the box.



Barn Owl Nest Box for a Tree



Websites worth a visit: [THE BARN OWL TRUST](#)
[BRITISH TRUST FOR ORNITHOLOGY](#)
[RSPB](#)

Just for Laughs

I see people about my age mountain climbing; I feel good getting my leg through my underwear without losing my balance

It's weird being the same age as old people.

I'm at a place in my life where errands are starting to count as going out.

I got a job at a bakery because because I kneaded the dough.

Cronacoaster (Noun): The ups and downs of a pandemic. One day you're loving your bubble, doing work outs, baking banana bread and going for long walks and the next you're crying, drinking gin for breakfast and missing people you don't even like.

Never sing in the shower! Singing leads to dancing, dancing leads to slipping, and slipping leads to paramedics seeing you naked. So remember...Don't sing!

When I was a kid I wanted to be older...this is not what I expected

I don't always go the extra mile, but when I do it's because I missed my exit

Marriage Counsellor: "Your wife says you never buy her flowers. Is that true?"
Him: "To be honest, I never knew she sold flowers."

Don't be worried about your smartphone or TV spying on you. Your vacuum cleaner has been collecting dirt on you for years.

It's probably my age that tricks people into thinking I'm an adult.

I know a guy who's addicted to brake fluid, he says it's fine though, he can stop anytime he wants to.

There has been a break in at Battersea dogs' Home. All the dogs have been freed. Police are desperately searching for leads....

We can all agree that in 2015 not a single person got the answer correct to, "Where do you see yourself 5 years from now?"