

in occupied nest boxes, allowing the foster parents to raise them along with their own young. If your group would like to build some nest boxes, you can obtain additional copies of this brochure and a related brochure on building kestrel nest boxes from any Arizona Game and Fish Department office.

— NEST BOX PLACEMENT —

Boxes placed near open spaces (parks, golf courses, large vacant lots and fields) where the owls can hunt will be most successful. The box should be in place by January in the desert. Place the box at least 20 feet above the ground in a large tree or other structure that provides afternoon shade. North and east sides of trees and structures are best. Have the door face away from the afternoon sun and away from prevailing winds, if possible. Attach the box securely.

If the box is in a tree, trim any branches in front of the box to provide a clear flight path (barn-owls have a 44 inch wing span). Remember to check the chains or cables yearly and adjust them as the tree grows. If you don't own an extension ladder, you can rent one or hire a tree trimming service to install the box and trim branches as needed. Clean the box once a year in the fall after the last brood of owlets has left.



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Build Your Own BARN-OWL NEST BOX



LOTTERY DOLLARS WORKING FOR WILDLIFE

An owl birdhouse? People usually don't think of providing housing for such birds, but Common Barn-Owls will raise their young in properly designed nest boxes. This species of owl seems to adapt well to co-existence with humans, often living in barns and abandoned buildings on farms and in cities.

Barn-owls share our space so unobtrusively that they are barely noticed. They are strictly nocturnal, remaining inside during the day. They are also relatively quiet. Instead of the well-known, owl "hoot", they have a soft, ascending, wheezy cry. At the nest they give a toneless hiss.

These large owls are attractive birds. The heart-shaped white face, outlined by a dark brown ring, and the black eyes are distinctive. The upper surface of the body, wings and tail is a pale rusty orange or golden color. Lower surfaces are whitish. The light color is especially striking as they glide through the night on silent wings.

Barn-owls are cavity or hole nesters and are quite adaptable in their choice of nest sites. In wild places, they nest in tree cavities and crevices in rocks, mine shafts and cliffs. In cities, towns and agricultural areas, they also nest in abandoned buildings, barns and hay sheds, placing their nests among the hay bales. In the warmer parts of Arizona, they often build nests among the hanging dead fronds (skirts) of palm trees.

The last two locations can lead to problems for the nesting owls. When hay bales are moved or palm skirts are trimmed or damaged by a storm, the nest may be destroyed. If a nest box is placed in an appropriate location nearby and the nestlings are placed inside, the parents



can continue to raise them. This allows the nestlings to grow into normal adults rather than risking behavioral damage from captive rearing. (Note: Only licensed wildlife rehabilitators can legally rear owls in captivity.)

Barn-owls provide efficient, natural rodent control in cities as well as in agricultural

areas. Barn-owls hunt rodents in open areas such as parks and fields, with rats, mice and gophers forming a high percentage of their diet. If necessary, they can locate their prey entirely by hearing when it is too dark to see. If you live near an open space, you can encourage barn-owls to live in your neighborhood by building a barn-owl nest box and placing it in a tall tree or other high, shaded location.

If a pair of barn-owls selects your nest box, you may notice an accumulation of food around the nest site before they actually start to nest. These items are offerings from the male to the female. The male continues to feed the female while she incubates the eggs, which takes about a month. Normally four to seven eggs are laid, although as many as eleven are occasionally produced. Both parents bring food to the nestlings. The young leave the nest about 55 to 60 days after hatching but remain with their parents for a few more weeks. During good years when plenty of prey is available, barn-owls may raise two broods of owlets. You can find more information about barn-owls in bird guides or other bird books in the library or a bookstore.

Building nest boxes can be a good conservation project for scout groups, schools and other community groups. Building boxes and monitoring owl use of nest boxes provides opportunities for youth to learn about and become interested in wildlife. Putting up nest boxes in appropriate places can increase barn-owl populations in cities, towns and farming areas. Having nest boxes available makes it easier to quickly provide new homes for barn-owls whose nests have been damaged. Wildlife rehabilitators can place "orphaned" owlets

BUILDING THE NEST BOX

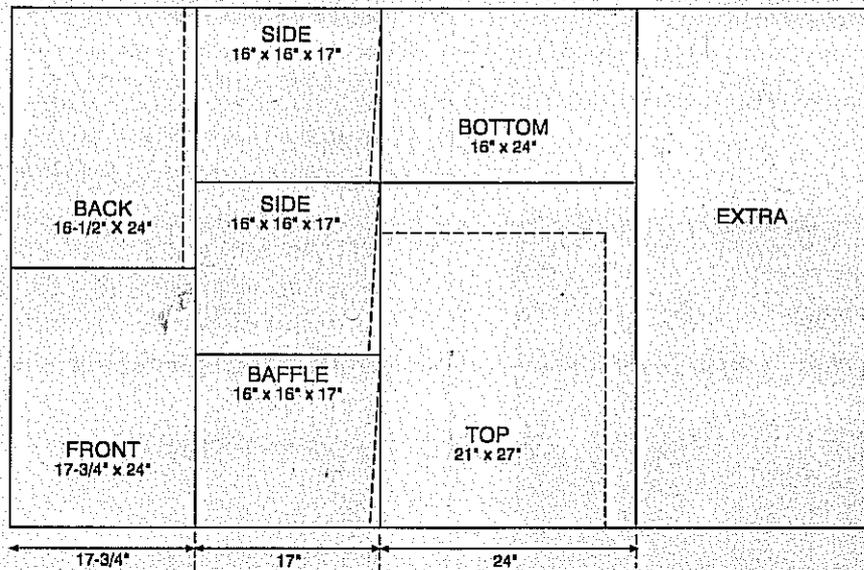


FIGURE 1

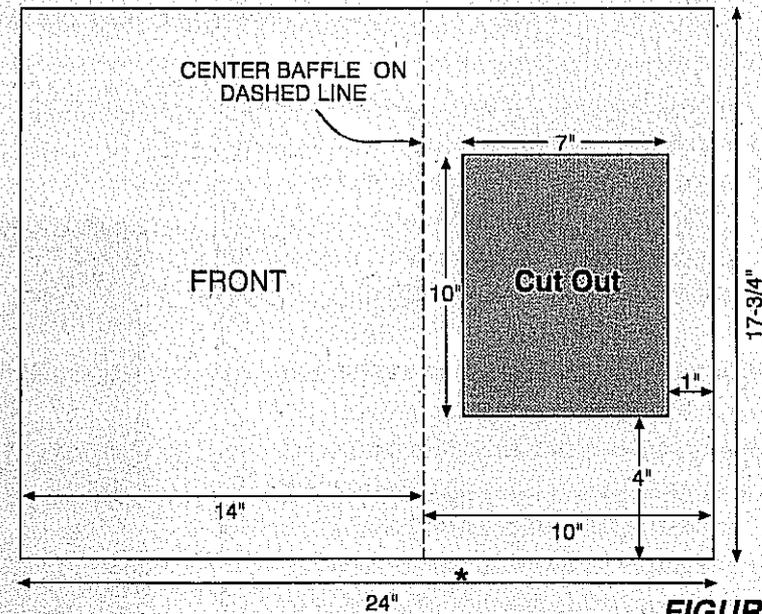
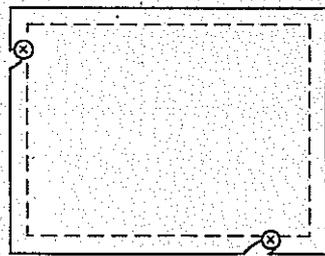


FIGURE 5



ALTERNATE HATCH METHOD
 Make door 1" larger than hatch opening. Make 1/4" notches and slide onto large screws.

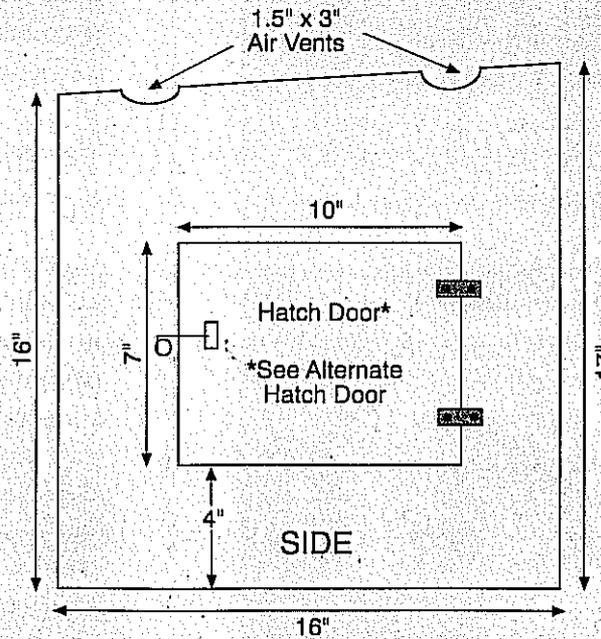


FIGURE 2

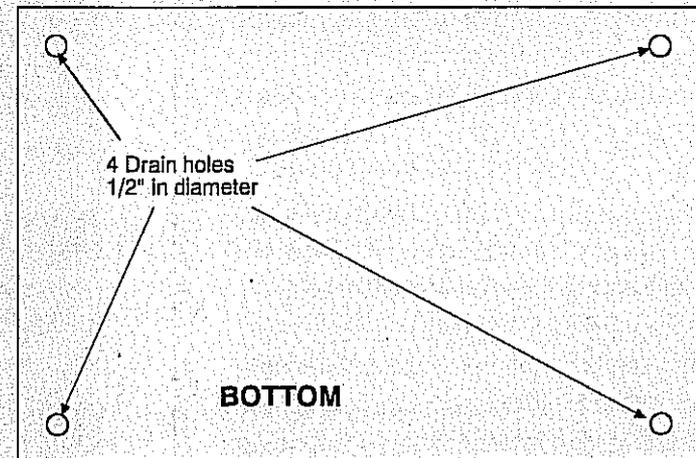
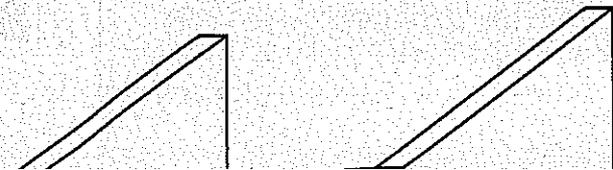
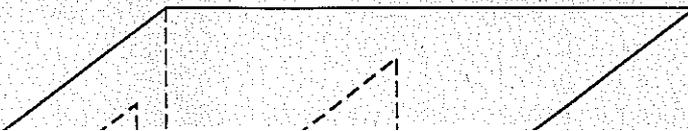


FIGURE 6

SIDE DOOR
 (Hatch Door)



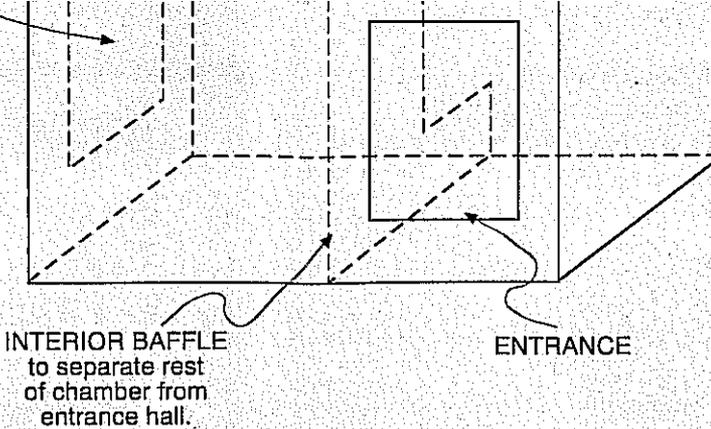


FIGURE 3

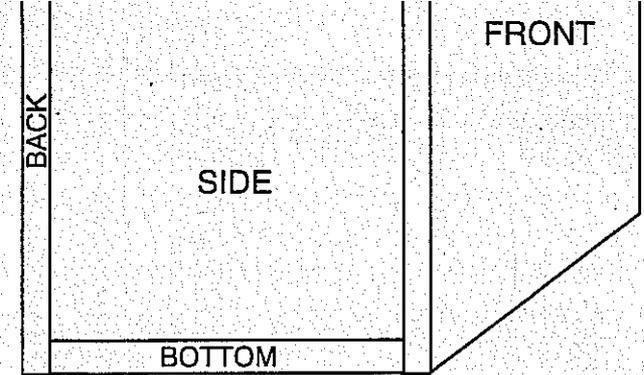


FIGURE 7

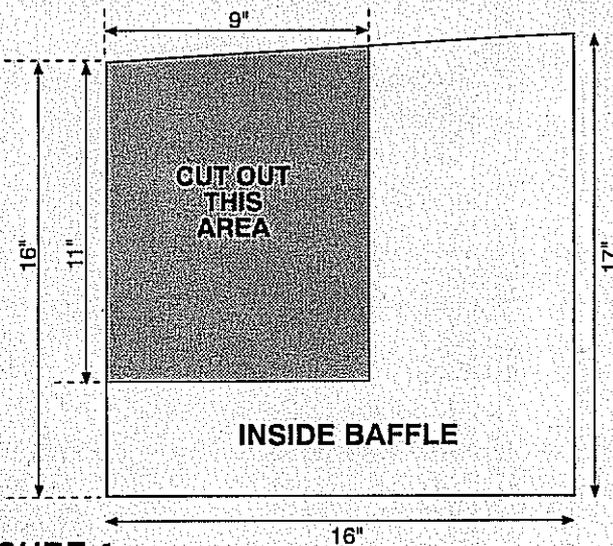


FIGURE 4

MATERIALS:

- 1 standard sheet of 3/4" plywood
- 1-1/4" dry wall screws
- Wood glue
- Wood preservative
- Small hinges and latch (if hinged door is used)
- Eye bolts and chain or cable, or 2x4" lumber and 8" lag bolts

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cut a standard piece of 3/4" thick plywood into pieces as shown (Figure 1). The baffle is optional in hot climates. If you use 1/2" or 5/8" plywood, decrease the height (shorter dimension) of the front and back pieces to compensate for the change in thickness of the bottom piece.
2. Cut air vents in top edge of side pieces as shown (Figure 2). In hot climates, four or five additional 1/2 inch ventilation holes in each side are recommended.
3. If you are using an inside baffle, cut a 7 x 10" hatch door opening in one side piece (Figures 2 and 3). This side piece will become an outer wall of the inner chamber.
4. If you are using a baffle, cut a 9 x 11" piece out of upper rear corner of baffle (Figure 4). You can use this piece for the side door.
5. Cut the front door opening in front panel (Figure 5).
6. Drill four 1/2" drainage holes in bottom (Figure 6).
7. Drill screw holes in bottom, front and back pieces.
8. Apply wood preservative and let it dry.
9. Use wood glue and screws to attach sides and baffle (if any) to upper surface of bottom piece, and front and back panels to bottom and sides (see Figures 3, 5 and 7).
10. Drill screw holes in top and use glue and screws to attach top to sides, baffle, front and back.
11. Install side door on side panel, if applicable (Figure 2).
12. Use eye bolts in corners of back and sturdy chain or cable to attach box to tree. Alternatively, the box may be bolted to a piece of 2 x 4 inch lumber which is then bolted to the tree or other surface.