



Kestrel Nest Box Information

Kestrels have long been a common sight across many parts of the British Isles from coastal areas to moorland and lowland. Sadly, in recent years, the Kestrel has seen a marked decline in some of these habitats and conservationists are trying to work out precisely what might be the cause. Habitat is an important factor with the need for small mammal rich areas that also have access to nest sites. Kestrels are known as cavity nesters but will also use old buildings and ledges on cliffs, in many parts of the UK they will readily take to nest boxes put up for them, especially in areas where there is a shortage of natural nest sites such as holes in mature trees.

Kestrel nest boxes are a simple straightforward design that really works, they just require somewhere large enough to accommodate an incubating female and then with the room for potentially 5/6 growing chicks. Trees or buildings are often the best place to site a Kestrel box that is nice and open with a clear flight path into the box. They should also be in or near to good quality hunting habitat. Like Barn owls, Kestrels are susceptible to rodenticides so we recommend avoiding the use of these anywhere near habitat with breeding kestrels.

Once you have selected a suitable tree or building work out which way the prevailing weather enters the area and face the entrance away from this - the box entrance essentially does not want to be facing into the prevailing wind and rain. If placing your Kestrel box in or on a building you can fix it inside or outside but avoid anywhere that has prolonged periods of direct sunlight. We place our boxes between 12 - 15ft off the ground but remember that is because we regularly monitor them, they are in secluded areas with no disturbance by passing public and we need easy access. If you are not worried about monitoring your box and just plan to give it a clean out once a year then you can place your box higher.

Fixing boxes to a tree has in the past caused a lot of discussion regarding the best method and which method doesn't harm the tree. We have spoken to several arborists about the best methods and always come back to using screws or galvanised coach bolts. The other options

include straps and plastic coach bolts/screws. Straps seem like the best option to some people but what they forget is trees grow and the straps don't; we have seen straps grow into trees killing the tree and also straps snapped with boxes hanging out of the tree or on the floor (not Raptor Aid boxes) - if you use straps they will need to be adjusted each year or possibly more on a fast growing species of tree. Plastic bolts when used properly are a good alternative as they are more chainsaw friendly should the tree be cut up years later; a metal bolt left in a tree could cause damage and injury to a chainsaw user. We have again however experienced plastic bolts snapping and you still have to drill into the tree as you would for a galvanised coach bolt. With this in mind we use and supply our boxes with a unique fixing plate and four screws which require minimal tools. To avoid





damaging a tree you can look at putting in a pole or fixing to a building. Raptor Aid will continue to research into the safest most reliable method for trees, boxes and future humans coming into contact with the tree. If fixing to a residential building planning permission may be required.

We recommend you get three people to erect your Kestrel box, and once you have picked your tree/building get the second person to foot the ladder whilst fixing the attachment plate in place. Remember to take great care when up a ladder and if in doubt get someone who is proficient or trained in using ladders and working at height. Once the attachment plate is in place then you can fix the box in place - the Kestrel box is not heavy but is an awkward size so we recommend using a third person to pull the box up to the fixing plate from the floor. This option means getting a strong rope over a higher point and attaching to the box then getting a third person to pull the box into place whilst the person on the ladder fits it to the fixing plate.

Kestrels do not build nests so we recommend with all nest boxes for owls and kestrels that you place a good layer of substrate in the bottom of the box before or after siting it. We recommend using something like compost soil or mole hill soil (We actually use old tomato plant grow bags as it's nice and dry after a season in the greenhouse and recycled). We don't recommend using anything that can go moldy such as damp leaf litter or wood chips as we have seen this stick to food and be ingested by the chicks. The substrate should be about 4/5 inches deep covering the whole base.

Monitoring and Maintenance

We recommend you monitor and maintain your nest box to get the best out of it and to provide data which will help us better understand Kestrels in the UK. You can easily monitor a Kestrel nest box without having to disturb the birds with a few simple tips from us. Firstly if you see sticks or leaves sticking out from the box this will not be a Kestrel but a Squirrel or non-target bird species like Jackdaw or Stock Dove. Squirrels, Jackdaws, Stock Doves will readily use Kestrel boxes and great care should be taken when clearing them out. Wasp, Bee and Hornets have also been known to use nest boxes so observe the box first before inspecting outside of the breeding season. If the nest box is showing signs of chewing marks around the entrance or any other area this will be squirrel damage and we recommend you move the box to another area. The best method of monitoring your box is to sit and watch the box from a safe distance; the pair will sit on the box and in the entrance if it's in use and can be seen flying in carrying prey when feeding young.

Kestrels can remain on territory throughout the winter months with the breeding season in the UK taking place from May through to August. Incubation usually starts in May and chicks can be seen fledging in June/July. During any of this period you may observe adult birds carrying prey to the nest box and birds changing over incubation or brooding duties. Once young are getting close to fledging stage you can often see them looking out of the box entrance. Kestrels are also very obvious when





hunting as they hover over rough areas of habitat looking for prey.

Early Winter (October/November) is a good time to go and check your nest box for damage, clear any debris out and either move it if it has been unsuccessful over a number of years or give it a coat of wood preservative. We recommend a neutral colour that is water based and non-toxic to animals (Cuprinol is a good brand). Make sure the base of the box still has a good layer of substrate and look forward to hopefully another successful breeding season.

