

Build A Nest Box

Many species of raptors that live in New York State have declined in numbers because of habitat loss. Within the habitat that remains, cavity-nesting raptors cannot find suitable places to raise their young.

Even when hunting habitat and prey are available, the lack of a nest site can be the major reason for the non-productivity of a hawk or owl species in a given area. Old, dead trees, which provide the best natural sites for cavity-nesters, are often the first to be cut by landowners.

With the recent emphasis on wood burning stoves, the accelerated loss of these sites could impact all hole-nesting species of birds. Whenever possible, we should try to preserve existing nest sites.

Where sites do not presently exist, or have been destroyed, furnishing artificial nest sites is an excellent method for maintaining, or even increasing populations. Hole nesting raptors such as Screech Owls and American Kestrels do not build nests of their own. They rely on natural sites or those created by other birds or animals, including humans.

When nest boxes are properly constructed and erected these raptors will readily inhabit the "bird house" and may use it year after year. Attracting raptors is desirable not only for their ability to control rodents and insects, but because they are interesting species to have close by for observation.

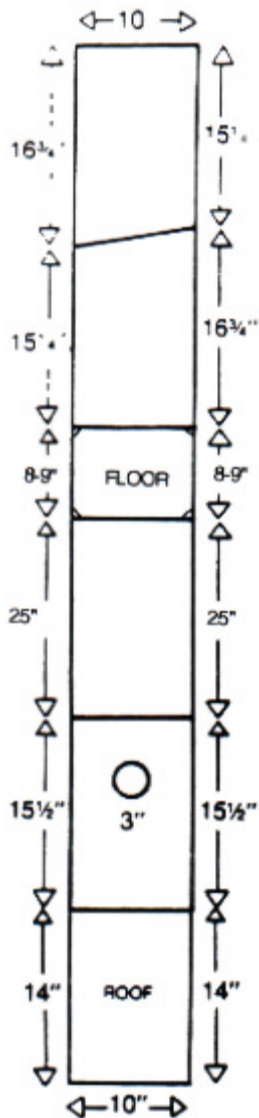
The number of boxes that can be placed in a given area is limited only by how many you are willing to build. Most raptors will defend their breeding territory and not allow others of their species to occupy their territory. The size of the area they defend varies depending on the species of raptor, available prey and other factors. Within reason, the more boxes provided, the better the chances of some being found and used.

Kestrels are residents of New York State throughout the year although some migrate. Screech Owls are generally non-migratory and remain in the same areas all their lives. The habitat in which both birds live is similar and the nest boxes made for them are identical. Kestrels are birds of open terrain, seldom entering woods. They hunt fields, meadows, roadsides and other open areas. They are regularly seen perched atop utility poles and wires or hovering in mid-air, searching the ground below for prey.

Kestrel nest boxes should be placed in open areas. Good locations are: trees along the edge of a woodlot, a lone tree in a field, on a barn or other farm building, or mounted on a pole. Constructing your own pole offers the advantage of being able to place the nest box anywhere. Open fields and meadows afford the hawk proper habitat to hunt mice, moles and their summer favorites - grasshoppers. Boxes should be placed 12 to 20 feet above the ground. When using a pole for erection, a metal sleeve 30 inches wide, placed several feet above the ground, should be wrapped around it and nailed in place to keep mammal predators from climbing to the nest box.

Screech owls live in open woodland terrain. They are found not only in open country, but in lightly wooded areas, city and rural parks, small woodlots and a particular favorite - apple orchards.

One 8-foot 1-inch by 10-inch plank

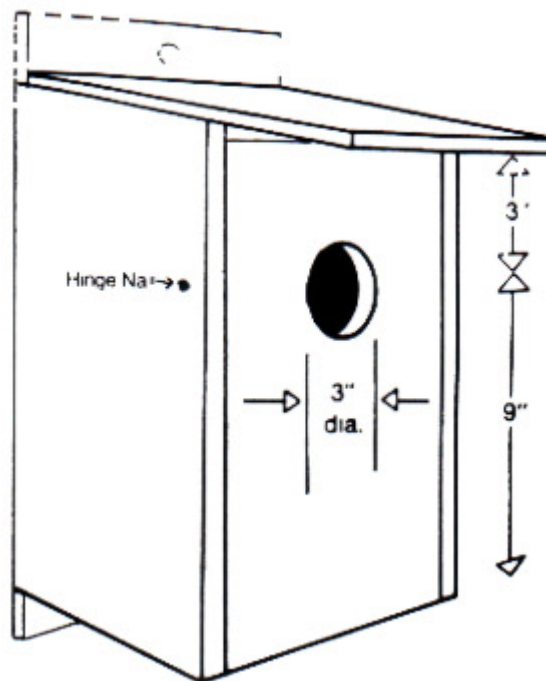


Materials and General Instructions

The best materials are 1" thick rough cut lumber. If a wood preservative or paint is used, apply it only to the exterior of the box.

When constructing the nest box, the size of the entrance hole and its height above the floor of the box are important and the dimensions given should be used. Proper hole size and placement will allow the birds to come and go freely and still keep a raccoon from entering or reaching the young.

The hinged front, with a single nail placed at the entrance hole level on each side, provides easy access for cleaning and maintenance. The roof can be shingled for added protection from the weather.



Generally, boxes should be mounted so the holes face southeast. In new or freshly cleaned boxes, a layer of pine shavings should be applied to the floor which will help contain the eggs and make incubation easier. Use only a one inch thick layer, no more, as eggs can get lost in shavings that are too deep. **Do not use cedar shavings, sawdust, hay or straw.** These materials could be eaten along with food or get wet and support a fungus growth that would kill the chicks.

Owl Nest Boxes

You can use the same instructions, but adjust the dimensions, to make a nest box for cavity nesting owls:

Species	Floor (inches)	Depth (inches)	Entrance above floor	Diameter of entrance	Height above ground
Barn Owl	10 x 18	15-18	0-4	6	12-18
Barred Owl	12 x 12	20-24	14	6 x 6	15-20
Saw-whet Owl	6 x 6	10-12	8-10	2.5	12-20

(Information adapted from a publication of The Raptor Trust, 1390 White Bridge Road, Millington, N.J. 07946)