

Nest Boxes for Native Birds and Animals

Information courtesy of Melbourne Zoo Education

Have you seen footage from our Jacobs Well EEC nest boxes yet? Visit <https://youtu.be/fog85ed1C9Y>

Hollows are homes

Many native bird and mammal species rely on hollows in trees for shelter and breeding. Hollows are formed when the centres of tree limbs rot away due to fungal or termite action. Hollows take many years to form and are only present in trees over 60 years old.

It has been common practice to remove old trees from urban parks for aesthetic and safety reasons, reducing the nesting opportunities of native birds and mammals, including **Eastern rosellas**, **Crimson rosellas**, **Laughing kookaburras**, **Galahs** and **Rainbow lorikeets**. Mammals that use hollows include **Brushtail** and **Ringtail possums**, as well as **Sugar** and **Feathertail gliders**.



Crimson Rosellas using a nest box
Photo: Gary Lewis

Nest boxes can be installed to offer alternative homes and nesting sites for these animals. Below is some information to assist you in creating nest boxes for your property.



Safety

- This activity is only suitable for adults with proficient knowledge and experience in woodworking and the procedures and safety for using the required equipment.
- Children may assist as deemed appropriate by parents.

Materials for Building a Nest Box

- Timber is best due to insulating properties. Ordinary Building (O.B.) or Pressure Treated Pine is suitable. Marine Ply is waterproof and durable. *Chemically treated pine is TOXIC and chipboard warps when wet.*
- Galvanised/nickel plated screws should be used to join all parts.
- Nest box must be weatherproofed using a lacquer or creosote. The inside should NOT be painted.
- A couple of handfuls of wood shavings, shredded bark or leaves can be added to cover the floor.
- See final page of this guide for an example of a nest box design.

Don't have these materials? No worries! Visit these sites for other designs and equipment options:

<https://www.wires.org.au/wildlife-info/wildlife-factsheets/making-a-ringtail-possum-home>

[https://www.redland.qld.gov.au/info/20287/wildlife-friendly backyard/642/nest boxes for wildlife](https://www.redland.qld.gov.au/info/20287/wildlife-friendly_backyard/642/nest_boxes_for_wildlife) (go down to the *DIY alternatives* section)



Additional features

- Ideally, if your nest box is the type with a lid, the lid should be hinged and slope down from the back to the front of the box. The lid should overhang the front and sides of the box by at least 25 mm.
- Three small (less than 10mm) drainage holes should be drilled in the floor towards the front of the box.
- Ensure the box is wind and rainproof.
- Roughen the roof and inside walls with coarse sandpaper or notch with a circular saw before construction: this will enable young animals to climb out.



Placement of Nest Boxes

- Different species prefer nest boxes at different heights.
- Nest boxes should be placed where people, cats, rats, foxes or dogs will not disturb them but should still be accessible to property owners for occasional checks and maintenance. To make sites inaccessible to cats and rats, tree-guards or exclusion collars can be installed on branches. Native predators such as snakes, goannas, kookaburras and currawongs are protected, and should not be harassed.
- Nest boxes should be sheltered from the prevailing wind and the hot sun.
- Some birds (kookaburras) prefer the nest box to be horizontal.

Attachment of the nest box



Nest boxes can be attached in various ways. Make sure that they are firmly positioned and stable so they will not vibrate or be easily detached by predators or strong winds, with a slight forward lean to assist the young to exit and help drainage.

- Place a strong piece of wire through an old garden hose and hang from a fork in a tree so that the nest box rests against the trunk. Do not tighten the wire around the tree as this will damage the tree.
- Fix a mounting strip to blocks attached to the back of the box. Use 100mm galvanised nails to nail the box to the tree.
- Add some bedding material (e.g. shredded bark or leaves) to the bottom of the box.

Maintenance of the nest box

- Avoid disturbing the nest box once it is installed. It may take some time for birds or mammals to 'accept' it and take up residence.
- Introduced birds such as Sparrows, Starlings and Indian mynas may nest in the box, and may even take over the nest box from native birds. The nesting materials of these introduced species should be removed as their presence has reduced the availability of nesting sites for native species.

Further reading

- *The Nest Box Book*, by Jim Grant, published by the Gould League. Includes plans and dimensions for nest boxes.
- Additional designs for specific species found here: <https://www.wires.org.au/wildlife-info/wildlife-factsheets/Wildlife-Nest-Boxes-LLS.pdf>
- Contact your local nursery or council for information on where to buy ready-made nest boxes.



Diagrams

When marking out from the plans, there is a simple way to maximize the use of the sheet of plywood. If you are not confident in marking out on your ply, templates can be cut from stiff cardboard and moved around for the best fit. It is then just a matter of tracing around the cardboard onto the plywood. The thickness of your saw cut needs to be taken into account.

Detail of nest box construction

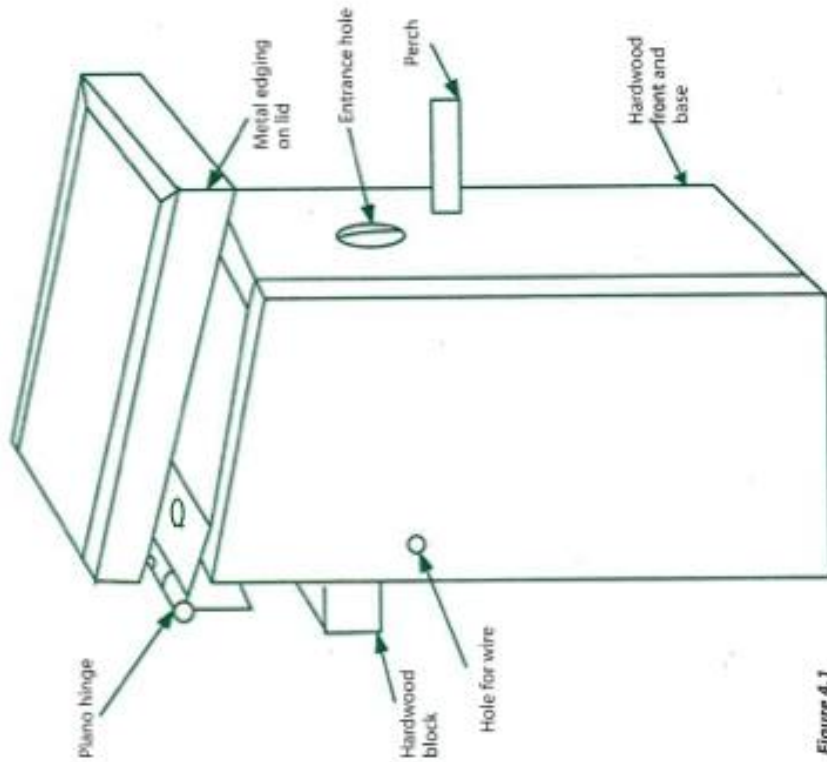


Figure 4.1

Ringtail/Brushtail Possum

BOX

PLAN

These dimensions are for 19mm ply

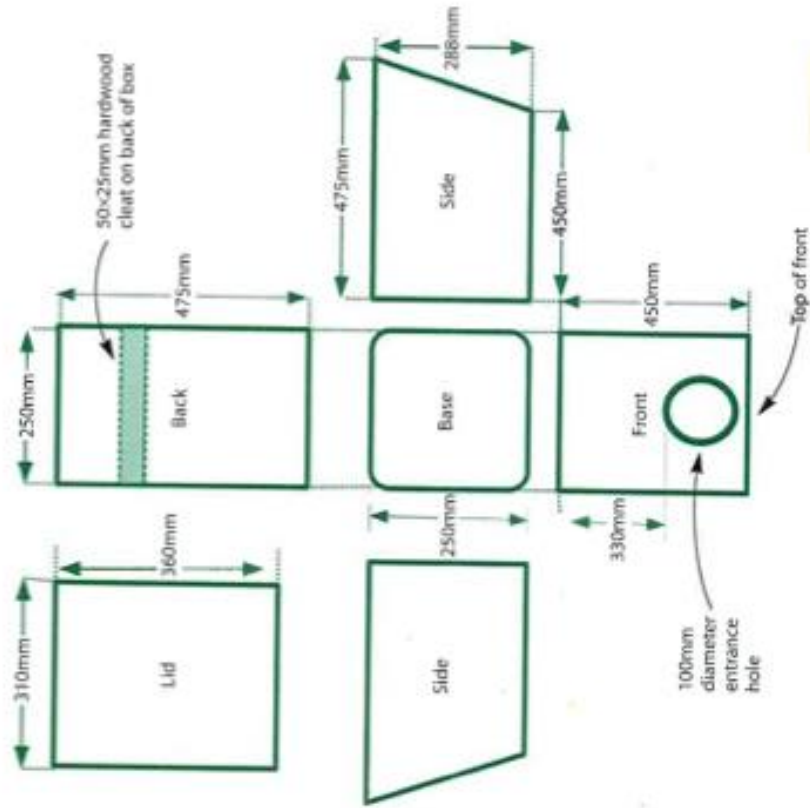


Figure 4.2

Not to scale