

Barn Owl / Kestrel Box

Specification extract · Pages 13–15 plus Appendix pages 104–106

What this document is

This is an extract of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) document “ACRES Co-operation Non-Productive Investments Specification”, Version 2.2, July 2026. It contains the pages covering the Barn Owl / Kestrel Box action (pages 13–15 plus appendix pages 104–106 of the full specification, including the related nest-box designs from the appendices).

Because the specification runs each action straight into the next, the first and last pages of this extract may also show the end or beginning of a neighbouring action. The section for this action starts on page 13 (the printed page number matches the page number in the full document).

Always check the current version

DAFM updates the specification from time to time. The full document is the authoritative version and should be consulted before undertaking any work. It is available from:

Full specification (PDF, opens at this action):

https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/f8e2ccf8/NPI_specifications_July_2026_2.pdf#page=13

ACRES NPI page on gov.ie:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/service/f5a48-agri-climate-rural-environment-scheme-acres/#non-productive-investments>

About this action on the ACRES CP website

<https://acresireland.ie/action-projects/npi-barn-owl-box-kestrel-box/>

*Maximum units and payments per NPI-Annual Works Plan for Registered Farm Partnerships in place from the start of the ACRES contract, shall be the maximum as outlined above, multiplied by the number of holdings, as approved by the Department in the formation of the partnership, up to a maximum of 3.

SECTION 1 NPI Habitat and Wildlife Support

Barn Owl/Kestrel Nest Box

Objective

This action provides safe and secure artificial nesting sites for Barn Owls in suitable locations. To secure a safe food source for nesting Barn Owl and Kestrels, the Rodenticide Free Rodent Control NPI is encouraged in conjunction with this action.

Background

The Barn Owl is the most threatened species of owl in Ireland and is on the Red list of 'Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland'. Barn Owl populations have been affected by changes in land use, the loss of suitable prey-rich habitat and nest sites, and the increased use of rodenticides. There can be significant benefits for Barn Owl and other wildlife by providing safe and secure nesting sites in the form of nest boxes in suitable locations, creating and enhancing habitat and reducing the risk of secondary poisoning through best practice rodent control measures.

Site suitability

Although Barn Owl nest boxes can be provided on any farm which has a suitable location, nest boxes are of most value in areas where Barn Owls are more abundant and where there may be less nest sites available. These areas are shown on the Barn Owl suitability map in the Barn Owl nest box guidance document available [HERE](#) and on Departments website gov.ie - [Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme \(ACRES\) \(www.gov.ie\)](http://gov.ie).

- This action can be selected on parcels with an Eligible hectare ≥ 0 .
- This action is available on CP and Non-CP LPIS parcels that will be claimed by the participant for the remainder of the ACRES contract.
- On CP parcels, this action can be selected on fields with any scorecards assigned or submitted.
- No more than two nest boxes should be applied for in any one farmyard or field parcel.
- Barn Owl nest box/es must not be located within 500m of a motorway or dual carriageway and must be below 300m in altitude (altitude above sea level). **These restrictions do not apply to Kestrel boxes.** Outside of suitable areas for Barn Owl, nest box/es for Kestrel can be provided as an alternative. A design template for a Kestrel nest box is shown in Appendix 3.
- Barn Owl boxes should not be placed in the middle of a woodland habitat. Trees along the woodland edge may be suitable.
- Both Barn Owl and Kestrel nest boxes should not be located within 30m of busy national or regional roads due to risk of collision of birds with traffic.

- Barn Owl/Kestrel nest boxes should not be located within 250m of a wind turbine.
- Where bird or bat boxes are installed in the same parcel/farmyard as Barn Owl/Kestrel Nest Boxes, they should not be facing each other to reduce the risk of predation. Barn Owl/Kestrel boxes should not be placed in the same building as other bird or bat boxes.
- Barn Owl/Kestrel boxes and Bat Boxes should be sited at least 20m apart from each other.
- Although boxes might be attached to suitable large trees commonly found at some types of archaeological monuments (e.g. ringforts), they should never be attached to the fabric of the monuments themselves, particularly monuments which are masonry structures (e.g. castles, churches etc).
- Avoid placing Kestrel nest boxes within 1km of important Breeding wader and Corncrake sites.

Requirements

1. The location(s) of the nest box/es must be clearly marked on the map submitted. Each box applied for is only eligible for one NPI payment and once claimed must be maintained in the same position for the remainder of the ACRES contract.
2. Install Barn Owl/Kestrel nest boxes as approved. Nest boxes must be placed at least 3 metres above ground level.
3. Barn Owl/Kestrel nest boxes can be placed indoors or outdoors and therefore must be of suitable design informed by the location/s selected. See Appendix 1/Appendix 2 and the Barn Owl Action guidance document [HERE](#). The use of higher standard materials woodcrete or mineral boards are also acceptable.
4. If rodenticides are used, you must implement an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach to rodent control on your farm. Their use must be justified and used in accordance with EU Biocidal Products Regulation (BPR) and product labels and records maintained regarding their use. Information on use of Rodenticides can be found [HERE](#)
5. Once in place, the nest box/es must not be approached. It is an offence to cause disturbance to a breeding pair or at the nest site. Essential maintenance described in the [Barn Owl Action guidance document](#), is permitted during the month of December only.
6. Only one claim for payment is allowed per approved NPI-Annual Works Plan. This action can only be claimed for payment once delivered in accordance with NPI Specification.

Additional guidance

- Barn Owl/ Kestrel boxes should be placed at least 4m above ground level when erected in trees.
- The Barn Owl is very sensitive to disturbance - their presence may be discrete and visiting the nest box at any time of the year can cause detrimental disturbance. Although the main nesting period is March to August, they can nest at any time of the year.
- If essential maintenance of the nest box is required to ensure the nest box remains suitable for Barn Owl (e.g. removing sticks from the nest box or securing it in position), this should be carried out in the month of December only, unless the circumstances

warrant immediate action. Please refer to the Barn Owl Action Guidance document available [HERE](#)

- In order to monitor populations, you can register your nest box/es with [BirdWatch Ireland Barn Owl Survey](#). This information will be kept confidential and will help to monitor the uptake of nest boxes and to understand the health of Barn Owl populations across the country.
- These are large nest boxes, so it is important to take all necessary safety precautions when installing/maintaining a Barn Owl box.
- Wood preservative products containing creosote should not be used on nest boxes. Exterior nest boxes require exterior grade FSC approved plywood as outlined on guidance document.
- Other NPIs that should be considered to complement this action include Field Margins, Winter Stubble, Riparian Margins and Rodenticide Free Rodent Control.
- A video on the importance of buildings for supporting wildlife can be found on [BirdWatch Ireland](#).

Further information

The Barn Owl nest box guidance document prepared by BirdWatch Ireland contains all the information you need on nest boxes (including an instructional video, design plans and information on the construction, installation, placement, and monitoring of nest boxes), how to identify if your farm is suitable for this action, information on rodent control measures and contact details for advice relating to this action.

Further information is available on Farming for Nature website [here](#).

Appendix 1: Interior Barn Owl nest box



To build an interior Barn Owl nest box you will need:

1. One sheet of 9mm thick 2440x1220mm interior grade FSC approved plywood
2. Approx. 6000mm (6 metres) of 25x50mm wooden batten
3. 30mm, 40mm, and 50mm wood screws

Ideally, interior nest boxes should be positioned in a quiet shed or barn, at least 3 metres off the ground. The barn/shed should have a permanently open entrance/exit. Ideally the box should face the entrance/exit. If installing two nest boxes, one can be installed at each end of the barn/shed.

For a step-by-step guide on how to construct an interior (above) and an exterior Barn Owl nest box (next page), visit the Barn Owl guidance document that accompanies the ACRES specification [HERE](#).

Appendix 2: Exterior Barn Owl Nest Box



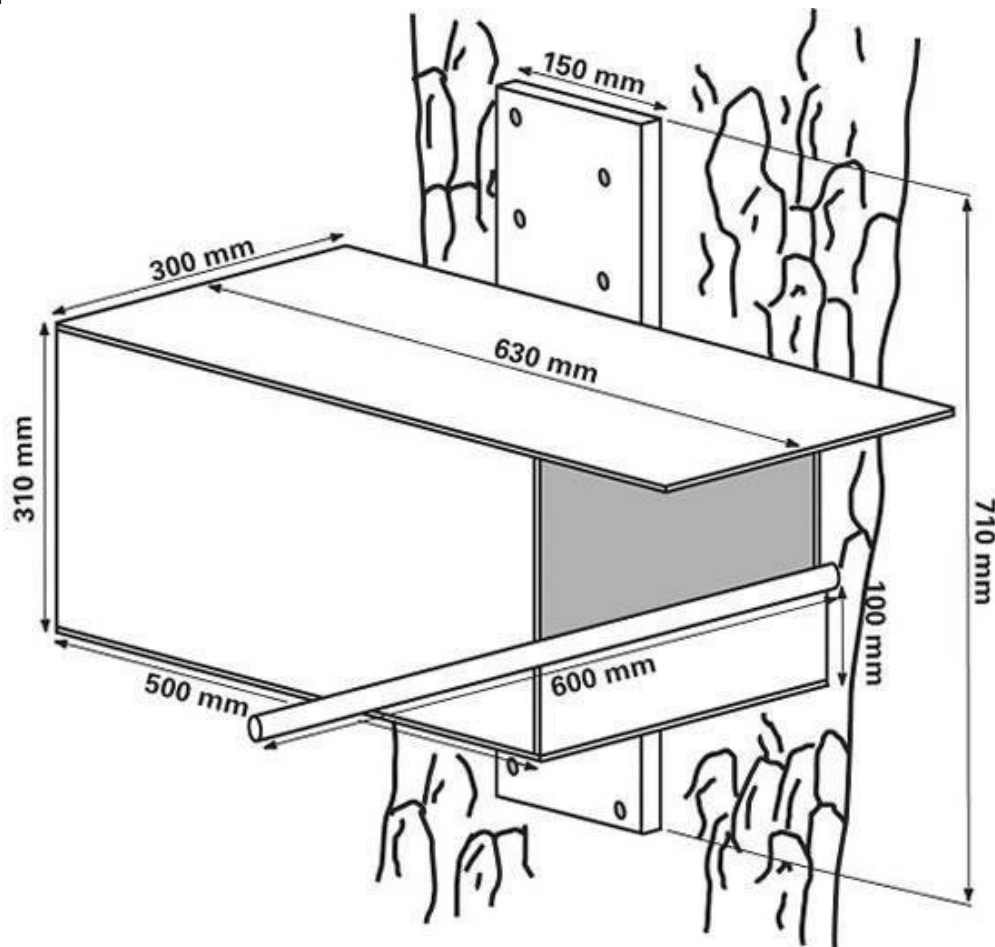
Exterior Barn Owl nest boxes are best situated on large trees with a clear view of the front of the box from the surrounding land. Ideally the box should be situated out of prevailing weather conditions, around 4 to 5 metres high, on a bare trunk so low hanging branches won't block the view of the box from any passing owls. It is also important to locate the box away from main roads. Do not locate the nest box within woodland as Barn Owls are an open habitat species.

To build an exterior Barn Owl nest box you will need:

1. One sheet of 9mm or 12mm thick 2440x1220mm exterior grade FSC approved plywood
2. Approx. 6000mm (6 metres) of 25x50mm treated wooden batten
3. Approx. 2000mm (2 metres) of 50x50mm treated wooded batten
4. 30mm, 40mm, 50mm, and 70mm wood screws
5. Thick roofing felt or torch-on roofing felt
6. Weatherproof wood glue, all-weather sealant and 12mm felt nails
9. 50mm barrel door bolt or similar

Appendix 3: Kestrel Nest Box

The Kestrel nest box below ([RSPB Design](#)) illustrates the required dimensions, using either 9mm or 12mm Marine ply. Roofing felt can also be used over the top and sides to provide additional protection.



Note 21: The small perch at the entrance. This allows the adult and young to perch outside the box.

Important tips

- 1) Face the box away from the prevailing winds (generally, face the box toward the north or east).
- 2) The box can be placed in a barn, an old building or shed, or on a tree.
- 3) Put the box at least 20 feet from the ground if possible.
- 4) Put the box away from occupied houses, or any other area where people visit regularly. The quieter, the better.
- 5) Don't 'hide' the box. Make sure the box is visible to a passing Kestrel. If the box is in a tree, trim away branches at the entrance so that birds have a clear flight path to the box.