



How to Build a Nesting Box

Western Screech Owls and American Kestrel nest box plans

Credit to Art Gingert, 2015

Adapted by OSS 2026

OKANAGAN SIMILKAMEEN STEWARDSHIP

Building a bird nesting box for your property is a great way to foster wildlife, build habitat, and can even help with pest control! They are necessary because naturally occurring nesting sites, like tree cavities, are less abundant than they used to be.

This document is a resource that includes plans and instructions to build your own nesting box for Western Screech Owls and American Kestrels. These boxes may also be used by Wood Ducks if the opening is made to be larger, and oval (4 1/2" x 3 1/2" oval).

Building plans are from Art Gingert's American Kestrel nest box plans, updated 2015 and have been adapted to include alternate measurements.. You can contact Art Gingert at PO Box 185 Cornwall, CT 0679.



Credit: Art Gingert, 2015



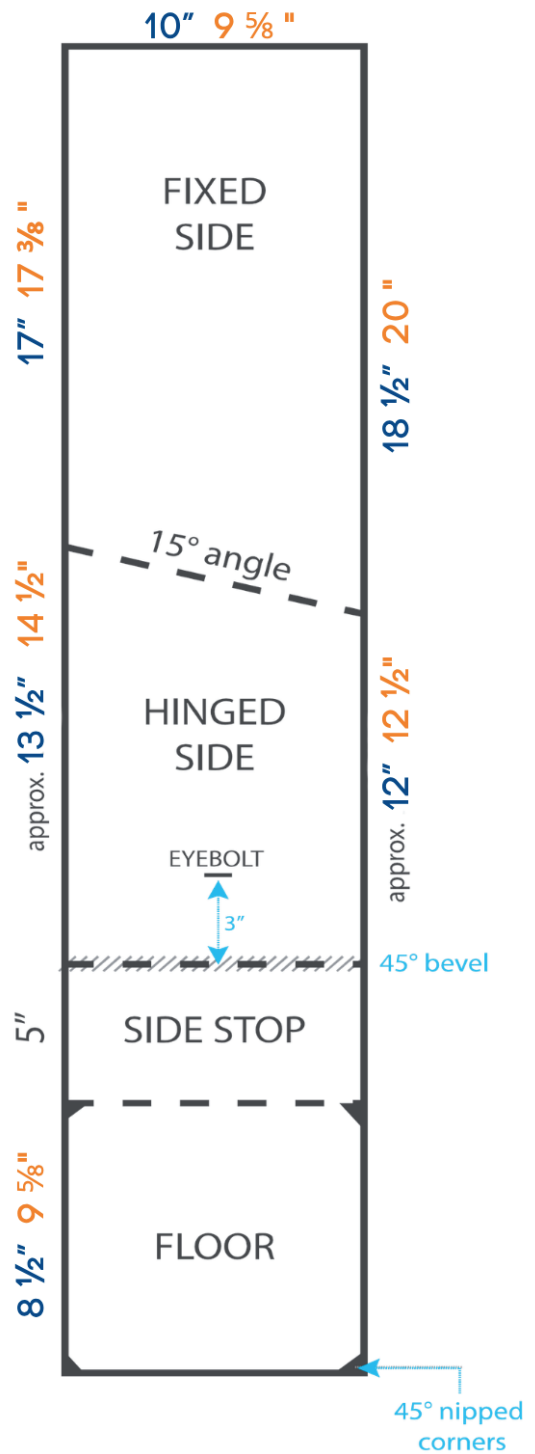
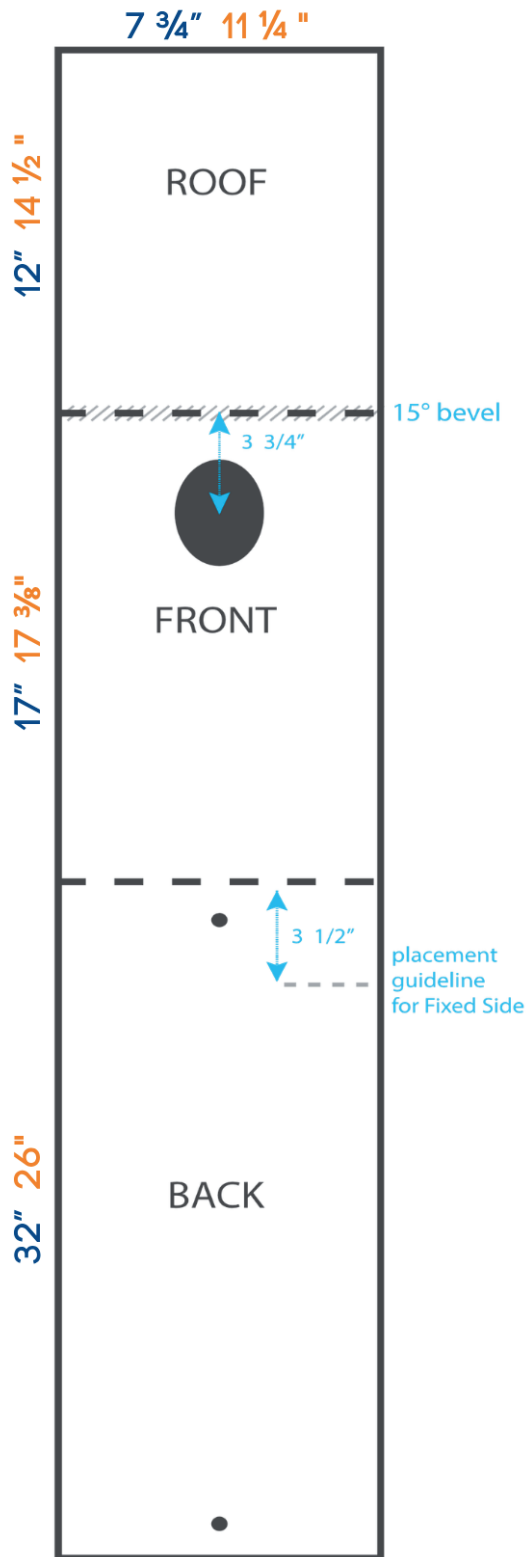
Western Screech-owls are birds of prey that are active at night. They are excellent hunters and great at controlling pests, such as mice! Western screech owls listed as Threatened in BC. They live in forests found along creeks, rivers and lakes, and nest in natural cavities found in mature deciduous trees. Unfortunately, the forest that these owls like to live in is mostly found in valley bottoms where people have had the biggest impact, and there aren't many natural cavities left. Putting up a nest box on your property can make up for the loss of their natural habitat and help screech owls return to their historic range.



American Kestrels are the smallest falcon species in North America. Much like screech owls, they provide pest control to landowners because they eat insects and small mammals. While not listed as a species-at-risk, American Kestrel populations have been declining since 1970. Building an American Kestrel nesting box for your property can help combat population decline.

Nest box plans

- Western Screech Owl box dimensions
- American Kestrel dimensions



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Building your nest box

MATERIALS

- Lumber: 10 feet of 1"x12" pine or cedar board.
- measuring tape, pencil,
- handsaw (or power saw)
- hinge, hinge nails, and hammer.
- power hand drill with attachments
- 20 sheetrock screws (2" each), coated or galvanized
- • 1/2" bit;
- • 5/64" bit, to pre-drill the screw holes;
- • 3" hole saw;
- hammer

Assembly

1. Cut Front, Back, Roof, Fixed Side, Hinged Side, Side Stop, and Floor pieces according to the diagram on the previous page. Mark and measure carefully before cutting.
2. Drill 3" entrance hole into Front piece as shown in diagram. If building for wood ducks, this is where you would make a 4 1/2" x 3 1/2" oval hole instead.
3. Score horizontal lines into the inside of the front panel for fledgelings to use as a ladder to exit the box.
4. Attach Back to Fixed Side, then secure Floor to Back and Fixed Side
5. Attach Front (with entrance hole- ensuring horizontal lines are on the inside) to fixed side and floor
6. Attach Roof to Fixed Side, Front, and Back.
7. Apply 45 angle bevel across Hinged Side, check fit, and secure Side Stop to Front, Back, and Floor.
8. Finally, attach Hinged Side using hinge nails.

Notes on assembly

- Drill holes before screwing
- Do not paint or use treated wood. It will be durable and non-toxic in its natural state.
- Using a small amount of PL construction adhesive on joined edges helps to make the box weatherproof.
- Refer to reference picture and diagram as you build
- You may want to add closure tabs to keep the Hinged Side closed.
- Add about an inch of shavings, or "duff" to your nesting box prior to installation. Do not use sawdust as it can suffocate newly hatched birds.



Installing your nest box

Materials:

- 15-foot ladder
- Power hand drill with attachments
- Sheetrock screws (2" each), coated or galvanized

Where should you put a Western Screech-owl nest box?

- Nest boxes should be mounted at least 3 meters (10 feet) above the ground in a shaded area/ cluster of trees that is secluded from disturbances such as roads, sidewalks, and playgrounds. Ideally the box will also be placed in an area that is not already frequented by other predators.
- Look for large, sturdy, healthy trees that will be able to support the weight of the nest box. Cottonwood trees are most ideal, but Ponderosa can work well too!
- Ensure tree branches or over-hanging vegetation is cleared from the nest entrance to allow for a clear flight path.
- Ideally, the nest box should be mounted in January or February, prior to nesting season, which begins in late March or April.

Installation

- Carefully place and climb the ladder so that you are able to affix the nesting box at a height of at least 3m on your selected tree.
- Screw the back plate to the tree, both on top and bottom. Ideally you should be able to place at least 3 screws.
- Check for stability

NOTE ** It is suggested to have assistance as the nesting box can be heavy and unwieldy, especially when working at heights. **

How do you care for a Western Screech-owl nest box?

Annual cleaning is best carried out in the fall (October or November) when the owls are the least likely to be using it and there are no viable eggs or fledglings present. Remove all old nest materials and replace them with a couple of centimeters (1 inch) of dried leaves on the bottom. Always use caution when up a ladder taking care of your owl box and be aware that other species may be using the nest box. It is always best to knock on the side of your nest box before opening it to give occupants a chance to get out. We've known squirrels and hornets to come flying out!



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