

Barn Owl Nesting Boxes

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VINEYARD TEAM
Promoting Sustainable Winegrowing

Barn owls play an important role in both the ecosystem and in Integrated Pest Management approaches to rodent control in vineyards. Review the information below for facts about barn owls and tips for attracting them to your vineyard.

- **Barn owls are effective predators of gophers, mice, and voles in vineyards.**
- **Barn owls are cavity nesters.** They have to compete with other birds for nesting sites.
- **Barn owl nesting boxes provide nesting habitat.** The surrounding area becomes their hunting grounds.
- **Nesting boxes should not be disturbed between February and September.** The barn owl is courting, mating, nesting, laying, incubating, and then fledging their young during this time.
- **Nesting boxes should be cleaned and repaired between early October and mid-December.** This is when nesting boxes are least likely to be occupied.
- **Barn owls remain faithful to breeding sites if they are maintained.**
- **SIP Certified Standard 1.1.7 pertains to nesting boxes.** Take a photo of your nesting box to provide documentation for this standard.

Maintaining Nesting Boxes

The adult female barn owl will regurgitate her pellets inside the box. She breaks these up to make a soft bedding for her eggs and then her chicks. The chicks then also regurgitate their pellets inside the box. **This buildup of material results in:**

- **Poor ventilation** and warmer temperatures inside the box which discourages nesting.
- **Less space**, making nesting less likely.
- **Excess weight**, creating wear and tear on the box and the pole.



Owls in box.

Tools:

- Ladder
- Dust mask
- Gloves
- Bucket for collecting material
- Pry bar

Steps:

1. **Wear a dust mask and rubber gloves.** The material you are removing may contain pathogens like the Hanta virus.
2. Open the box.
3. Chip out and collect the material.
4. Spread or otherwise dispose of the material. You don't really want it all in one place.
5. Make repairs to the box itself and the pole.

Installing New Nesting Boxes

Siting:

- Barn owls will tolerate some level of human activity.
- Barn owls tolerate the presence of other barn owls, so densities can be relatively high.
- Providing one nesting box for every 10 to 20 acres is a good rule of thumb.
- Along fence lines and access road are good locations.
- Do not install nesting boxes on power poles to prevent accidental electrocutions.
- Away from riparian areas or groves of trees. These areas hide the predators of the barn owl.
- Near a tree within about 100 yards of the nesting box. Face box entrance toward this tree.

Setting:

- Set the post 2'-4' deep.
- The nesting box should be 8'-12' above the ground.
- Be sure you can get to it with a ladder in the future.
- The direction of entrance is important in terms of access to safe perches and away from the prevailing winds.
- Apply 1-3" of bedding inside the box. Pine, fir, and hard woods are recommended. Do not use cedar bedding, saw dust, or straw.

For more information see this helpful brochure "[Barn Owl Nesting Boxes: Best Management Practices](#)".

Do you have any barn owl nesting box installation or maintenance advice or stories to share? Contact Vineyard Team at 805.466.2288 or Craig@vineyardteam.org.