

A PIECE OF THE COUNTRYSIDE (BIRD BOXES)

13th November 2003.

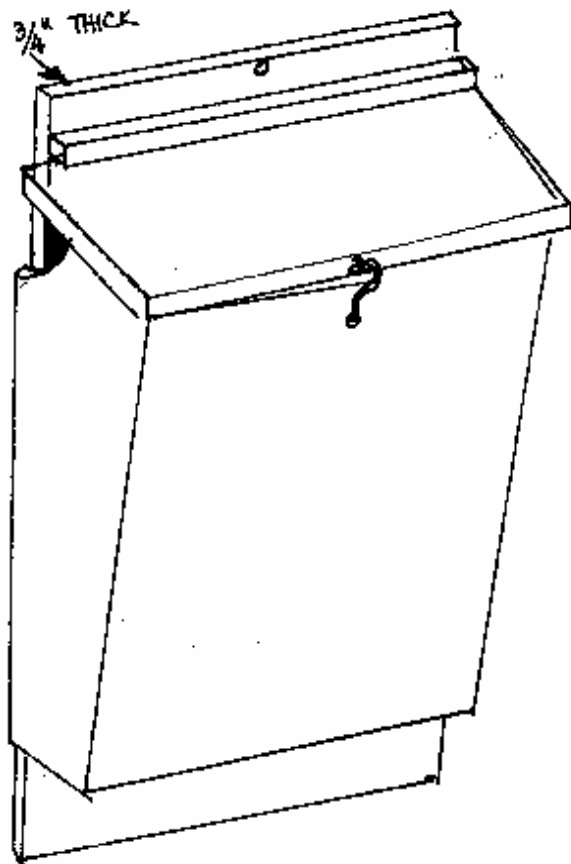
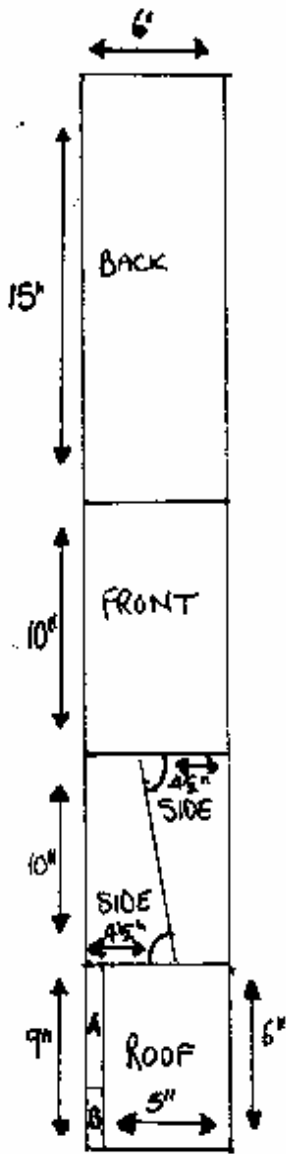
Bird boxes! There are many to choose from on the market, but by and large I have found most of them to be inadequate and expensive. By far the best ones are those you can make yourself for very little outlay and much pride at the end result. As I have said, many of the ones on sale are inadequate and the reasons are as follows. A lot of nest boxes are incorporated with a feeding table underneath. This is always wrong, because come spring, any pair of birds wishing to nest in the box, will have so much interference from other birds feeding at the table, that they will just give up and abandon any work they have done, or even young chicks or eggs. It would be a bit like complete strangers coming into our garden to have their picnic or barbecues, you really wouldn't like it, and would have to spend so much time chasing them away, that you would probably give up in the end and move house! Another bad design fault with bought bird nest boxes is that they are simply not the right size. I assume it is to save money on wood, but many boxes in shops and also from bird magazines are simply not deep enough or just fancy looking but totally impractical. Don't get me wrong, there are *some* good ones out there, but you have to really shop around and the better ones are pricey.

Now is the time to get them up in place, or begin to make them if you are going to give it a go. Birds do begin to look for possible nesting sights at this time of the year and also use them to roost in over the winter months. Begin by choosing the right wood, this way it will be weather proof and also last for many years to come giving both you and the birds much pleasure. If you can get hold of some old floor boards then that will be ideal, if not just visit your local DIY store and find some seasoned wood or you may even have some off cuts laying around the shed, or even at the local timber yard, they may have some cheap off cuts to sell. The general size and thickness of the wood is $\frac{3}{4}$ " thick by 6" wide and about 2 metres long.

Let's start off with a simple tit box. Most people will only need one in their garden as these birds are not keen on sharing their territory with other tits, although if you have a big enough garden, then you could have more than one, or even one at the front and another at the back. Siting the box is critical. The main thing of course is protection from the elements and enemies. The main rule of thumb is to position the box with the opening facing in an arc from north through to east or south-east, this is to avoid full sun and Atlantic winds. I personally prefer to put my own tit boxes on the house wall where no cats can get above it or creep up on it from trees, but anywhere is fine so long as it is safe from all of the above things and at least 5 to 6 feet above the ground. Also, don't be tempted to put a sweet little perch on the outside of the box. The birds will not need this at all, but any marauding stoats, weasels or magpies will love them. If you use softwood, then you can coat the *outside* with Cuprinol or creosote, but not the inside. In fact it is a good idea to score wood inside on the side where the entrance hole is, this way, it gives the chicks a foothold when they need to get out once they are ready to leave the nest.

Below are a couple of basic bird box designs for the garden to start you off, but don't forget, unlike us, birds really are not fussed about colour or fashion, just build it to be warm and water proof with the right dimensions, and they will love you for ever, and give you endless hours watching them build their nests and rear their young in the spring. One more important thing to remember, is to drill some holes in the base of the box to let any moisture drain out and keep it aired. Just a few drilled holes will do so long as they are less than 4mm or queen bumble bees or tree wasps will enter. This will not interfere with the birds at all, as the nesting material will cover them, but will prove vital if by chance any water should get in. Although it is not necessary to have a roof that opens, I always like to be able to get inside to clean out the old nesting material at the end of the season to get rid of any fleas, mites or other undesirable homemakers in the box. An old pair of wellies are useful for this. Cut into strips, they make great hinges, and also make for a water- tight covering over the back. You can cover the roof itself with a bit of roofing felt just to give extra water proofing, but don't be tempted to put thatching on or you will find this will disappear the first spring it is up, as other birds will raid it for nesting material. The tit box plan I have attached with this can be adapted for use for quite a few other birds as well. If you only want blue tits to use it, then the entrance hole must be no bigger than 1.1/8th, or the size of a 10p coin. Great tits will get in and not allow blue tits to use it otherwise. If on the other hand you want great tits using it, then make the hole a bit bigger. Bigger still and sparrows may use it, or if you do away with an entrance hole and cut the wood to 3" leaving the top 2" open, then birds like spotted fly catchers or robins will use it. Tuck the box into thick cover like ivy and you will get some kind of birds using it I'm sure. Also, the entrance hole doesn't have to be at the front, it can be positioned on either side if you wish. So long as the floor space is at least 4" by 4" it will be fine, although the dimensions given are a little bigger, any more than this will simply mean that the birds have to bring more nesting material than they need to and also when the chicks hatch, they will benefit from being close together for warmth.

TREE CREEPER BOX



TIT BOX.
 THIS CAN DOUBLE UP FOR ROBIN BOX IF YOU MAKE THE FRONT
 3" FROM THE BOTTOM & LEAVE TOP 2" OPEN.

