

SECTION A - OPENLANDS AND WOODLAND MARGINS

Dealing with other nesters:

Other species of birds sometimes nest in boxes erected for kestrels. This is especially true of the introduced European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*). Orienting a box with a southern exposure discourages starlings. If starlings are seen entering the box, inspect the box immediately and remove any nesting materials they may have brought to it. It may take several visits to the box to dissuade these interlopers.

If starlings have already begun to lay eggs, remove the nesting material and destroy the eggs. (Note: Starling eggs are pale blue, and are much smaller than kestrel eggs [1.1 x 0.8 inches versus 1.4 x 1.1 inches].) Be careful, however, not to destroy the eggs of native Screech-Owls (*Otus asio*) and Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*), both of which are protected species. Screech-Owl eggs are pure white and nearly spherical. Bluebird eggs are similar to starling eggs, but smaller [0.8 x 0.6 inches].

Kestrels sometime evict starlings from nestboxes. When this occurs, kestrels will lay their eggs directly on top of the starling's nest. Do not disturb such nests. Kestrels are capable of raising their young successfully in this situation.

Finally, squirrels can easily out-compete kestrels for nestboxes. To discourage squirrels, erect nestboxes at least 50 yards away from wooded areas.

American Robin

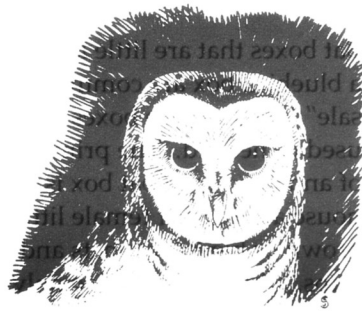
Plan 6 (page 36)

One of Pennsylvania's most abundant backyard birds is the American Robin. It is a welcome

sight in the spring, its song is beautiful, and it provides great enjoyment for people as it raises young each summer. Their grassy nest is lined inside with mud, and the eggs are bright blue.

A robin nesting shelf can be placed on a wall by a window where the robin family can be easily seen. Or, the nesting shelf can be placed on the trunk of a tree about 6 to 10 feet above the ground. The nesting shelf can be left unpainted, or it can be painted an earth tone.

Remove the robin's nest after the young leave as robins build a new nest each year.



Barn Owl

Barn Owl

Plan 12 (pages 45 & 46)

The Barn Owl is crow-sized with a white, heart-shaped face. It appears tan from above and white from below and does not have ear tufts. It may be seen roosting in silos and barns during the day, and heard screeching (not hooting) at night. Best habitat is farmlands. A diet consisting largely of rodents makes this owl an asset to the farmer.

From 3 to 11 eggs are laid, generally from April through July, but nesting will occur beyond these months if the food supply is adequate.

These owls are very sensitive to disturbance during April and May. They are likely to abandon a nest if disturbed during these months.

Changes in the design and construction of barns and silos have resulted in fewer, safe roosting and nesting sites for the barn owl. This, coupled with a loss of farmlands and a loss of best foraging habitat on remaining farmlands, has contributed to the decline of barn owl observations in Mid-western states. Insofar as these factors are present in Pennsylvania, too, there is a potential for a decline in barn owl populations here.

Nest boxes should be placed in older barns or silos that are at least within a mile of suitable habitat. Best habitats are grasslands, wet meadows, dairy areas and/or numerous woodland field borders. These habitats often support abundant prey populations. Boxes placed where meadow voles and other similar-sized rodents are scarce are least likely to attract Barn Owls.

"Grounded" young owls are susceptible to predation. For this reason, the boxes illustrated in Plan 12 open to the inside of the barn or silo, and an exercise platform is fastened to the front of the box. Plus, in older barns fledglings can fly from rafter to rafter. The assumption is that owlets are safer inside the barn or silo than outside; at least for the first few days after leaving the nest box.

Keep boxes free of pigeons and their nest litter whenever possible, especially in late winter and early spring. Barn Owl pellets (regurgitated fur and bones of prey) should be cleaned out of boxes after each nesting. These pellets