

## Nestboxes for wildlife

A nestbox is an artificial enclosure provided for hollow-dependant animals to live and nest in. Providing a well-constructed and maintained nestbox on your property can provide a supplementary home for native animals where natural tree hollows are missing.

### Why install nestboxes?

Many of our local native birds and small mammals rely on tree hollows to provide a safe home away from the weather and predators. Tree hollows can take over a hundred years to form and only occur in large old trees. Due to land clearing and logging, many areas lack old trees with hollows, leaving few places for hollow-dependant animals.

Nestboxes are part of a whole of landscape approach to conservation. Our priority is to protect old trees and restore natural habitat. While artificial nestboxes in trees cannot replace natural hollows, they give animals a safe place to breed and rest.



The nestboxes supplied by Connecting Country are made and installed by a specialist nestbox builder. Nestbox design is based on available scientific research and years of local field observation. All Connecting Country's nestboxes are made from quality materials and have a hinged lid, so it's possible to evict any unwanted visitors, if they move in.

### Nestbox inhabitants

Once installed, it may take months or years before a nestbox is occupied. Activity can be seasonal, and different animals use nestboxes in different ways.

Within the Mount Alexander region, nestboxes can support animals such as the threatened Brush-tailed Phascogale (Tuan), Crimson Rosella, Striated Pardalote

and microbats. Sugar Gliders often inhabit phascogale nestboxes and Owlet Nightjars may use rosella nestboxes. Some examples of common nestbox dwellers are described in the following table.

Animal	Description	Nestbox use
Brush-tailed Phascogale (also known as Tuan)	Brush-tailed Phascogales are threatened nocturnal carnivorous marsupials around 30 cm long, distinguished by their grey body and black bottle-brush tail. They mate in early winter and most males die after breeding. Litters of seven or eight young are born from late June to early August. Young remain in the pouch for seven weeks and are then left in the nest while the mother forages at night. Juveniles disperse in early summer.	Shelter and breeding from June to September
Crimson Rosella	These colourful parrots usually breed in spring and summer. Females incubate the eggs, and both parents care for the young. Chicks fledge at 25 days but remain dependent on the parents for a further 35 days.	Breeding throughout September to January
Striated Pardalote	These very small birds usually breed in spring and summer. Both parents share the tasks of building the nest, incubating the eggs and feeding the young.	Breeding throughout September to February
Microbat	Microbats are active catching insects at night. During the day they rest in dense colonies. They prefer having multiple roosts close by so they can move around in response to temperature, parasites and predators. Our local microbats breed in October to December.	Resting during daytime throughout the year

For further information, or to lodge opportunistic observations of Tuans or other fauna please call us on (03) 5472 1594 or contact [info@connectingcountry.org.au](mailto:info@connectingcountry.org.au)

## Nestbox maintenance

Like any home, nestboxes deteriorate over time and need maintenance. Regular inspections are essential to check for any unwanted visitors and ensure nestboxes are still usable. Species to look out for include introduced birds (such as Common Mynas), feral bees and ants. Common issues and solutions are detailed in the following table.

Issue	Description	Action
Bees	European honeybees move into the nestbox and establish a hive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use nestboxes that have an anti-bee treatment. From 2019, nestboxes supplied by Connecting Country have a non-toxic treatment that discourages bees.</li><li>• Contact your local beekeeper to remove the bees.</li><li>• Wait until bees move on, as most nestboxes are likely too small to sustain a long-term bee colony.</li></ul>
Ants	Ants move into the nestbox and establish a colony	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Temporarily prop the nestbox lid open to make it less appealing to ants, repeating as necessary.</li><li>• Avoid using pest strips as small birds and mammals may be affected by the poison.</li></ul>
Introduced birds	Non-native birds, such as Common Mynas or Starlings, move into the nestbox	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Remove nesting material and eggs, repeating if necessary.</li><li>• Cover the nestbox entrance hole temporarily, if birds are persistent.</li></ul>
Large parrots	Cockatoos and galahs chew on the nestbox, to maintain their beak condition or gain entry to the nestbox	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do not feed cockatoos and galahs.</li><li>• Spray cockatoos or galahs with water using a water pistol or hose.</li><li>• Cover nestbox with bird netting or chicken wire temporarily and wait until cockatoos lose interest.</li></ul>
General wear and tear	Nestbox condition deteriorates due to weather exposure, animal use or other damage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leave the nestbox in place if inhabited by a native animal.</li><li>• If the nestbox is vacant, remove and repair it. Most repairs can be done by a skilled handyperson, or by contacting a local nestbox builder.</li><li>• Aim to repaint your nestbox every five to ten years to protect the timber. Paint colour is not important, although light colours are cooler in summer.</li></ul>



*Brush-tailed Phascogale (Tuan) in a nestbox*  
(photo by Jess Lawton)

## Installing new nestboxes

Nestboxes are available to buy or can be built by anyone with basic woodworking skills. Each box should be constructed in accordance with relevant guidelines for the target species. For more information on nestbox guidelines see our [nest box resources page](#).

Ideally nestboxes should be installed on large native trees, on or close to the main trunk. Climbing animals such as phascogales, prefer rough-barked trees, whereas birds and bats are less fussy. Nestboxes should be placed high enough to be safe from predators such as foxes, but low enough for safe monitoring and maintenance. Always keep safety in mind, especially if using ladders. Orientation facing south or southeast is best, as this means the box is shaded by the trunk when summer sun is hottest.

## Monitoring

Although it's good to monitor your nestbox regularly, internal inspection of nestboxes should be kept to a minimum to avoid disturbing resident animals. It is generally done during autumn (March to May), when animals are active and looking for breeding partners.

Connecting Country advocates a sit and wait approach to check nestbox occupancy, also known as a stag watching. For observer safety and animal welfare it is not recommended to use ladders or to climb trees to check nestbox contents. This should be done between the 15 minutes leading up to twilight and 15 minutes after. If an animal is not heard or observed in the allotted half hour, then it is unlikely the box is occupied.

Another option is the use of a ground-based inspection camera on an extension pole. Remote cameras or observations from the ground can be also used to record nestbox activity with little disturbance.