

Homes for house sparrows

House sparrows, as their name suggests, always live close to humans. They are sociable birds, living in small colonies, and they spend a lot of time in social interaction.

House sparrows have declined by 65% since 1970, but more recently it looks like the decline is slowing. Their decline is linked to lack of nest locations as houses get renovated and new houses don't have nest cavities or boxes installed.

House sparrows form monogamous pair bonds that may last until one of the pair dies, perhaps a couple of years - small birds like this tend not to live long. They tend to nest close to each other, typically with nests a few feet apart.



Male house sparrow © Ben Andrew (rspb-images.com)

Bed and breakfast service for house sparrows

Providing homes for house sparrows is an excellent step to help them. However, house sparrows still need to eat and drink. House sparrows mainly eat seeds so it is really easy to provide them with food. They will spend a lot of time near buildings, can you put out bird feeders near the clubhouse? That way your members can watch them come and go too. A water bath somewhere quite, with cover nearby, also provides them somewhere to drink and wash.

Benefits for wildlife and people

- House sparrows are a declining species, attracting them to nest boxes creates an opportunity for you and your golf club members to see birds close up and learn about their social behaviour.
- Nest boxes could be made during family or member days at your golf club, this not only creates homes for birds but provides an opportunity to engage members with wildlife on the course.
- As a species of conservation concern, any beneficial features are always a positive step.

House sparrow or tree sparrow?

House sparrow



Females and males look different, males have a grey crown

Male house sparrow © Ray Kennedy (rspb-images.com)

Tree sparrow



Females and males look the same, they have a brown crown

Tree sparrow © Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

Creating a nest box

- Use a plank of wood 1.5 cm in thickness, 15 cm wide and 133 cm long. Do not use pressure-treated wood, as it contains harmful chemicals.
- Mark out as per diagram 1, with the front 200 mm long and the back 350 mm.
- If possible, cut the line between the roof and sides at 30° so the roof sits better on the box.
- The entrance hole on this box is advised at 32 mm but other hole sizes would also support other species e.g. 28 mm for tree sparrows and 25 mm for coal tits and marsh tits.
- When securing the roof use a waterproof strip to make a hinge. This might be either a piece of tyre inner tube or strip of wall damp proof used in building construction.

Once you've made your nest box and put it up at your golf club why not take a picture and share on social media. Tag [@marieathorgolf](https://twitter.com/marieathorgolf) and use [#MoreThanAGolfCourse](https://twitter.com/hashtag/MoreThanAGolfCourse) on twitter!

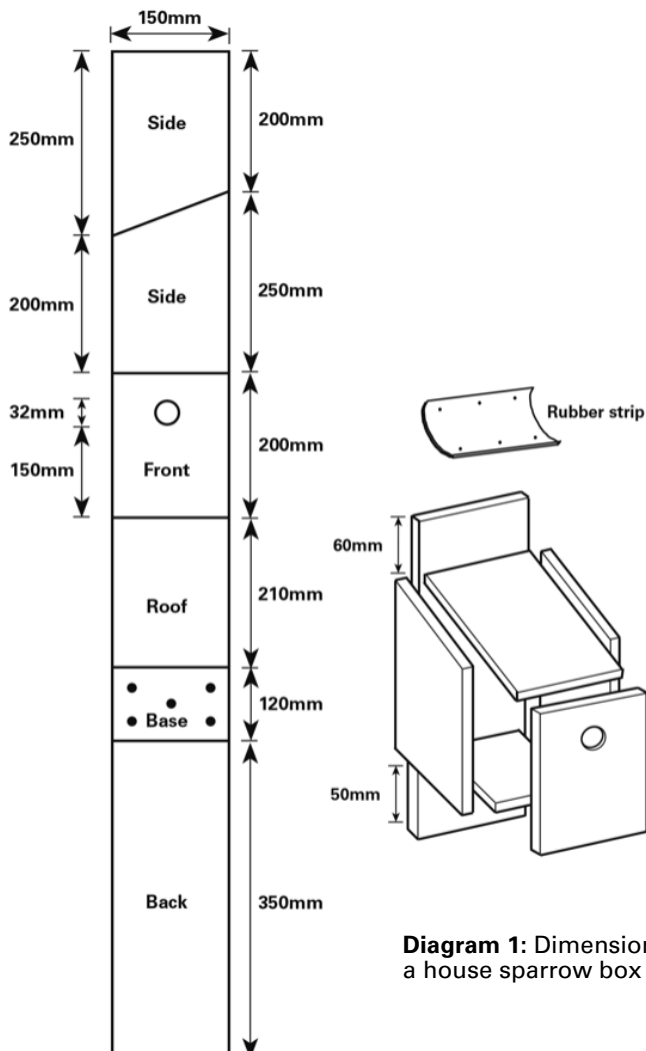


Diagram 1: Dimensions of a house sparrow box

Where to put my nest box

- For house sparrows it is beneficial to place several boxes next to each other over 3 m on a building as they are colonial nesters. For other species place single boxes over 3 m on a building or tree depending on the species you are trying to attract.
- Nails or screws damage trees and should be avoided for fixing bird boxes, they also present a danger to anyone using a chainsaw on the tree in the future. Use a wire loop around the tree trunk or aluminium or copper nails.
- Nest boxes should be placed to avoid strong direct sunlight, prevailing wind and rain.
- All wild birds, their eggs and nests are legally protected whilst in use or being built. Please leave the nests alone during this period and allow the birds to rear their young.



Male house sparrow
© Ben Andrew (rspb-images.com)

Working together to give nature a home





Female house sparrow © Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

When will they nest?

- House sparrows are resident in the UK, you will see them in big flocks in the winter. When it comes round to nesting, they start early in March and can often have several broods throughout the year.
- It might take a while for house sparrows to find the new nest boxes. Be patient and watch out for males chirping from the same spot, this is often an indication of a nest site.

Managing your nest box

- All wild birds, their eggs and nests are legally protected whilst in use or being built. Please leave the nests alone during this period and allow the birds to rear their young.
- If the boxes are easily accessible, it is recommended to clean them annually and check fixtures and fittings are secure in autumn or winter.
- If this is not possible, undertake the work whilst attending to other routine structural maintenance so long as it is outside of the breeding season.

Think about what type of nest boxes you put up. Watch and see what species use your golf course. Sometimes a slighter different nest box can provide a home for a species struggling for nest locations.

Further reading

More guidance on how to help wildlife on your golf course on The R&A and RSPB partnership webpages: <https://www.randa.org/en/sustainability/services/rspb-partnership>

To read more about house sparrows go to the RSPB website: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/house-sparrow/>

RSPB nestboxes for small birds: <http://www.rspb.org.uk/advice/helpingbirds/nestboxes/smallbirds/index.aspx>

BTO guide to lots of different nest boxes: <https://www.bto.org/sites/default/files/u15/downloads/publications/guides/nestbox.pdf>



Juvenile house sparrows © Ray Kennedy (rspb-images.com)

Contact

A partnership between the R&A and the RSPB exists to address wildlife conservation and the management of natural habitats at golf courses throughout the United Kingdom. If you want any advise relating to nature and wildlife on your golf course contact Dr Marie Athorn on: Marie.Athorn@rspb.org.uk

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