

Homes for spotted flycatcher

The spotted flycatcher is a long-distance migrant which returns from southern Africa each spring, arriving later in the spring than most other migrants.

Spotted flycatchers have declined in the UK by nearly 50 % in the last two decades. Their long term decline is very worrying, with a decline of nearly 90 % since 1970.

They breed hidden away in vegetation in our woodlands, orchards, farmland and gardens. These charming little birds are sparrow-sized but slimmer, grey-brown and streaky, but very appealing with a large eye and distinctive upright posture.

They are often seen on a conspicuous perch, from which they will flit out to catch an insect, before returning to the same perch.



Spotted flycatcher
© Ben Andrew (rspb-images.com)

Bed and breakfast service for spotted flycatchers

Providing homes for spotted flycatchers is an excellent step to help them. However, spotted flycatchers still need to eat and drink. As their name suggests, spotted flycatchers eat flying insects including species like craneflies. Providing areas of long rough with a diverse sward, especially on the edge of a woodland, will attract plenty of insect prey for spotted flycatchers to snatch from the air from their perch. Maintaining waterbodies with clean accessible water will provide a water source for many birds and other species to use. Providing a buffer zone around the waterbody with longer vegetation will limit runoff contaminating the water sources for those birds and other species.



Spotted flycatcher with a fly © Andy Hay
(rspb-images.com)

Benefits for wildlife and people

- Spotted flycatchers are a rapidly 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.
- Open fronted nest boxes could be made during family or member days at your golf club, this not only creates homes for spotted flycatchers 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.



Spotted flycatcher © Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

Working together to give nature a home



Creating an open fronted nest box

- Use a plank of wood 1.5 cm in thickness, 15 cm wide and 119 cm long. Do not use pressure-treated wood, as it contains harmful chemicals.
- Mark out as per diagram 1 below, with the front 6 cm long and the back 35 cm. If possible, cut the line between the roof and sides at 30° so the roof sits better on the box.
- There is not an entrance hole on this style of box. The height of the front is designed to be suitable for spotted flycatchers, a 10 cm front would be suitable for robins and 14 cm front suitable for wrens.
- 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.
- Nest boxes should be well concealed, in a creeper or dense shrub against a wall or tree.
- Face in any easterly direction to avoid strong direct sunlight, prevailing wind and rain.
- Where possible give the box an all-round view and ensure there is a clear flight-path to the nest box.
- Ready made nest boxes can be used, ensure the dimensions are as described above (although note most ready made open fronted nest boxes have a larger front unsuitable for spotted flycatcher).

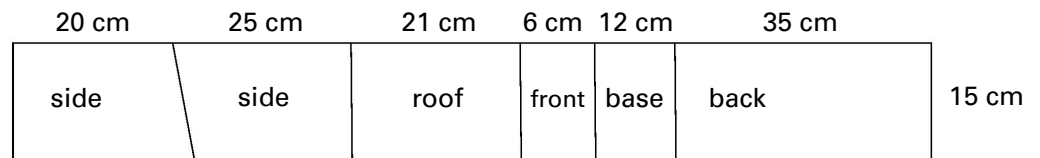
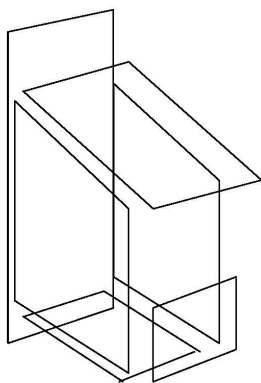


Diagram 1: Dimensions of an open fronted nest box for spotted flycatcher

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.



Spotted flycatcher © Ben Andrew (rspb-images.com)

When will they nest?

- Spotted flycatchers are late arrival migrants to the UK, having travelled all the way from southern Africa, and will not arrive until mid-May.
- It might take a while for spotted flycatchers to find the new nest box. When you see spotted flycatchers around the golf course, take note of which areas they are using and place the nest box in a suitable location near to those areas.



Spotted flycatcher on a nest
© Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

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.

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 spotted flycatchers go to the RSPB website: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/spotted-flycatcher/>

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>



Spotted flycatcher © Andy Hay
(rspb-images.com)

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 [@marieathorn](https://twitter.com/marieathorn) and use [#MoreThanAGolfCourse](https://twitter.com/hashtag/MoreThanAGolfCourse) on twitter!

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 advice relating to nature and wildlife on your golf course contact Dr Marie Athorn on: Marie.Athorn@rspb.org.uk

Working together to give nature a home

