

Homes for starlings

Starlings form loose colonies in the breeding season, they tend to nest close to each other, and the colony will regularly feed communally. In the winter they form vast flocks and roost communally often in reedbeds, or on structures like piers.

Starlings have declined by 82% since 1970, but more recently it looks like the decline is slowing. It is thought that one of the reasons for their decline is due to lack of nest locations as houses get renovated and new houses don't have nest cavities or boxes installed.



Male starling with leatherjackets at Banchory Golf Club
© Richard Mullen

Bed and breakfast service for starlings

Providing homes for starlings is an excellent step to help them. However, starlings still need to eat and drink. Starlings are known to spend the summer months feeding on soil-dwelling invertebrates like leatherjackets and chafer grubs. In the autumn and winter starlings will often switch to eating plants and seeds. Could 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.

Starlings
will eat leather
jackets and chafer
grubs. They use their
beak like a needle to
probe the ground so
leave very little
damage.

Benefits for wildlife and people

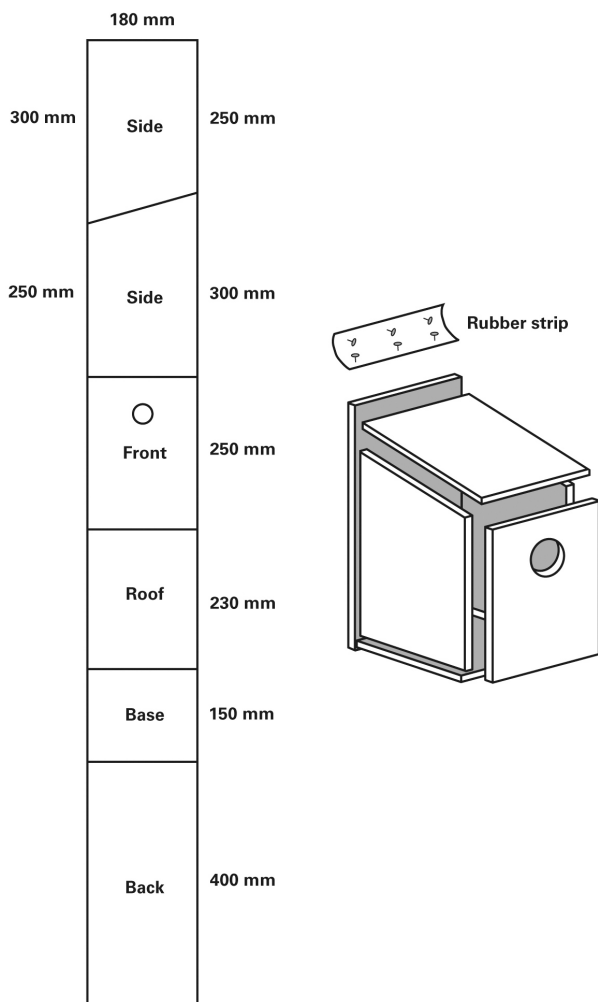
- Starlings are a declining species, attracting them to nest boxes creates an opportunity for you and your golf club members to see birds close up and learn about their social behaviour.
- Nest boxes could be made during family or member days at your golf club, this not only creates homes for birds but 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.



Starling feeding on leatherjackets at Banchory Golf Club © Richard Mullen

Creating a nest box

- Use a plank of wood 1.5 cm in thickness, 18 cm wide and 158 cm long. Do not use pressure-treated wood, as it contains harmful chemicals.
- Mark out as per the diagram below, with the front 250 mm long and the back 400 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 45 mm.
- 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/MoreThanAGolfCourse) on twitter!

Where to put my nest box

- For starlings it is beneficial to place several boxes near to each other over 3 m on a building as they are colonial nesters. Boxes could be placed over 3 m on a group of trees too.
- 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.

Working together to give nature a home



Starling in a nest box
© Eleanor Bentall (rspb-images.com)



Starling murmuration at Ham Wall © David Kjaer (rspb-images.com)

When will they nest?

- Starlings are resident in the UK, you will see them in big flocks in the winter (look out for them murmuring before they go into roost in reedbeds and on structures like piers across the UK). 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 starlings to find the new nest boxes. Be patient and watch out for adults taking in nesting material in spring.

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.



Starling in breeding plumage © Richard Mullen

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

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>

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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