Wildlife Boxes and Hollows

ARBURY PARK OUTDOOR SCHOOL
Making connections with our environment

By installing artificial hollows we can help provide homes and resting habitat for birds, bats and possums. Supplementing naturally occuring hollows with nesting boxes is not a true substitute so it is vital to protect trees that have hollows, including dead ones. Ninety percent of hollows in Australia are found in Eucalyptus trees, so conservation of for these is very important.

The hollow shortage

The clearing of Adelaide's original bushland has resulted in the loss of natural nesting hollows in old trees. These old trees act as native apartment buildings, housing up to 30 hollows per tree. Large hollows, suitable for cockatoos and brushtail possums, can take up to 300 years to form. With the loss of old trees, species that rely on hollows for shelter and breeding now compete for limited prime real estate.

Mimicking natural hollows

For us to recreate habitat for wildlife we need to understand what natural hollows do. In the summer, hollows have their own air-conditioning as living trees transpire (lose water through evaporation). In winter, it is warmer inside a natural hollow compared to outside. As there are many different sized hollows in trees, we need to be thinking of different size wildlife boxes.

1. Possum boxes

Both of our local possum species will use an artificial wildlife box. The smaller Common Ringtail Possum tends to make a drey, a leaf nest in the branches of trees, but will use hollows during the wetter periods of winter and spring. The larger Common Brushtail Possum depends on hollows and will not build a drey as an alternative. Installing a wildlife box is unlikely to increase the possum population in your area, but may reduce the likelihood of one taking up residence in the roof of your house.

2. Bird boxes

The depth and width of the bird box and the size of its entry hole will determine what species are attracted to a nesting box. Birds that use vertical hollows include rosellas, red-rumped and other parrots species. Alternatively, some pardalotes, ducks and kookaburras prefer horizontal hollows.

3. Bat boxes

Nine species of bats within the Adelaide metropolitan area can use boxes during the day and during the winter months when they hibernate. Bat boxes are designed with a landing pad at the bottom of the box so they can crawl up inside.

A western pygmy possum (Concinnus cercartetus) *peers out from its nest box* *Photo Elisa Sparrow*

Installing a wildlife box

Equipment required: extension ladder, cordless drill and driver bit, tape measure, knowledge of direction (North), extra person to assist. Screws for installation are provided with your Arbury Park wildlife box.

- Paint your wildlife box with water based exterior paint. This will protect the wood which is untreated.
- Select a native Australian tree.
- Locate a position high enough to avoid threats from dogs, cats, rats and foxes at a recommended minimum of 2 metres off the ground.
- Consider directional orientation (according to recommendations on reverse side of this page) and suitable leafy canopy overhead to provide natural shade.
- Install vertically, or slight angled forward, to reduce rainwater entry.
- Drill a screw into the tree, leaving enough of the screw exposed to hang your wildlife box over keyhole on the back.

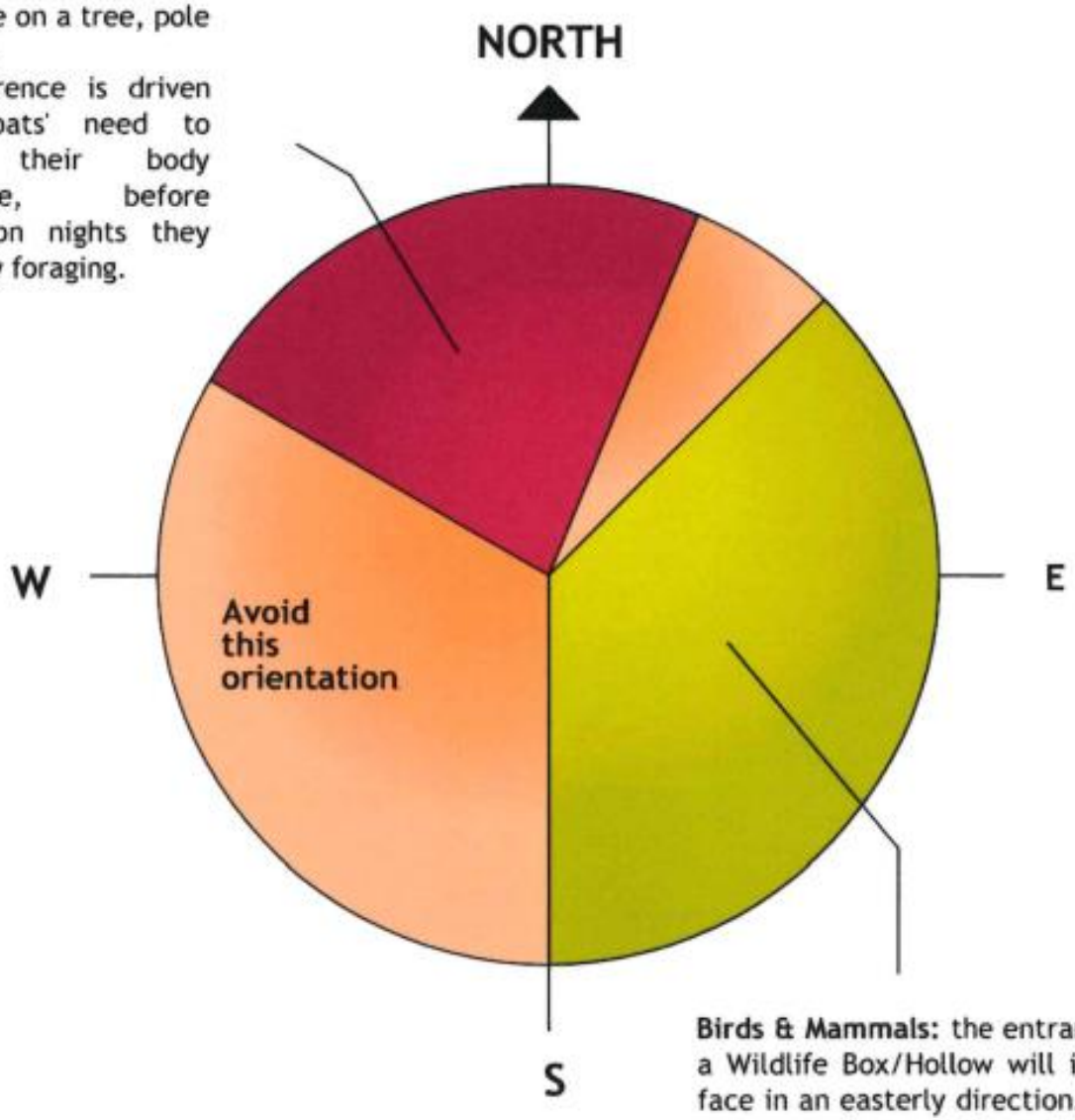
We recommend nest boxes are checked annually to make sure they are still intact, safely secured and have not been taken over by introduced species.

Reference sourced from NRM Education and 'FauNature'

Government of South Australia
Department for Education

Recommended Orientations for installing a Wildlife Box/Hollow

Micro-bats: prefer a north to north-westerly aspect. This may be on a tree, pole or building.
This preference is driven by the bats' need to increase their body temperature, before emerging on nights they are actively foraging.



Birds & Mammals: the entrance of a Wildlife Box/Hollow will ideally face in an easterly direction. This may range from north-east to due south.
This orientation allows for the hot north/west sun and the prevailing south-westerly rain to be avoided. Ideally the box/hollow will be sheltered by the tree canopy and trunk during the hottest part of the day.
Parrots and other hollow nesting birds tend to prefer an open aspect. Mammals such as possums and gliders, however, prefer a more closed or sheltered aspect (e.g. dense overhanging foliage).

N.B.: Across southern Australia the prevailing weather/rain systems tend to come from the south and west.
This may differ in other parts of the country. Therefore when orienting a wildlife box/hollow (entrance) in other locations, this needs to be borne in mind.