



Building out Pest Birds from Parrot Nestboxes

Preaching to the converted, placing a homemade nestbox high in the backyard, park or patch of bush is a great way of providing nesting or roosting sites for a variety of our native species.

Unfortunately, one problem is pest birds, such as European Starlings and Indian Miners also enjoy a nestbox home, often to the detriment of native species.

The following advice is designed to provide a brief advantage to native parrot species, in particular during the initial stage of their nest site selection.

KEY POINTS:

- Both native parrots and pest species utilise a hollow cavity in which to nest;
- The curved design of a parrot beak enables it to be a destructive tool, employed to crack, strip and break timber;
- Parrots will by nature, excise a nesting cavity, particularly dead and white ant infested timber to suit their size and needs;
- The straight pointed beak of most pest birds ie. European Starlings & Indian Miners are less adapted to destruction or nest excavation;
- Both native parrots and pest species are by nature pugnacious, particularly when ownership over a nesting site is concerned; &
- The breeding season for pest birds may commence early than many parrot species.

Within our urban environments, our native parrots species coexist with pest birds, and competition for nesting sites is often strong. By incorporating a simple method that prohibits pest species from access to the cavity, parrots may employ their destructive beaks to enter and successfully breed.

KEY PARROT BREEDING BEHAVIOUR: Good site selection is paramount, with North or North Easterly facing positions often preferred. These sites receive morning sun, some protection from direct afternoon sun and shelter from south westerly winds and rains.

It is my experience that it is often the male who finds the potential nesting cavity, calling to the female to view the site. Alterations to their intended home commences soon after the females acceptance.

Parrot species will also compete within the species for a single nesting site, with the hen taking no time to lay a clutch of eggs soon after the site is secured. The male will be particularly attentive and protective over the nest site, once the hen is setting on a clutch of eggs.

Pest species will also fight with parrot species, over a hollow log, cavity or nestbox. This usually occurs during the period of initial nest site selection. Once either species has secured ownership for the site and a clutch of eggs are laid, further disagreements are reduced. This is possibly due to the birds who secure the site and lay eggs, are in the nest and fend off intruders from a place of relative strength.



APPROACH: In an attempt to provide native parrot species with a competitive advantage over the pest species, if pests can be initially barred from the nest site, parrots may excavate the nest cavity without pest species interference. The likelihood is that the parrots will then retain the nest site and complete a successful cycle.

Pic A: Post season nest box, note excavation markings into entrance cover from previous successful parrot breeding.

MATERIALS: A sheet of 3mm thickness MDF

Drill & 10 mm diameter drill bit

Side cutters or pincer pliers

Hammer & short (2 cm) flat head nails



METHOD: Once you have made or procured your preferred timber parrot nestbox, simply cut a piece of MDF sheet to cover the entire front of the nestbox, in the area over the entrance hole (**see Pics. A & C**).

Drill a 10mm hole in the centre of the MDF, inline with the entrance hole. Use the side cutters or pliers to cut 4 – 6 short cuts around the 10 mm drilled hole. Free up the centre hole & cuts a little. **See Pic. B.**

Pic B: Prepared MDF entrance cover



FINAL NOTES: Hang your nestbox in a North or North East facing position. Occasionally observe bird behaviour from a distance, particularly during the early part of the breeding season. Consider replacing with newly prepared MDF cover at the end of each season, if required. It may take more than one season for a pair of parrots to access the covered nestbox hole.

Pic C: Altered nestbox ready for hanging



SPECIAL REQUEST: Help me to determine whether this approach is successful, a failure or otherwise, by emailing me your experiences. I hope to collect and analyse the results over a period of three parrot breeding seasons. Thankyou for your help. Any queries pls. make contact. Pictures of parrots utilising and/or excavating the entrance holes would be greatly appreciated.

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