

Nest box for the Blue-winged Kookaburra

The Blue-winged Kookaburra has a distinctive pale eye and the head is off-white with brown streaks. The shoulders are sky blue and it has a uniform blue rump. The back is mid-brown. Males have a dark blue tail whereas female's tails are barred red-brown or blackish. The call of the Blue-winged Kookaburra is coarser and ends more abruptly than the call of the Laughing Kookaburra. Blue-winged Kookaburras typically lay three eggs, with both sexes sharing in the incubation and subsequent feeding. They form quite large family groups, with older siblings helping to raise young. The incubation period is 26 days and fledging occurs after 36 days.

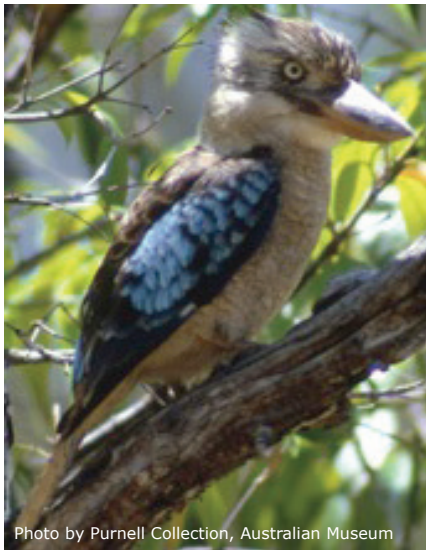
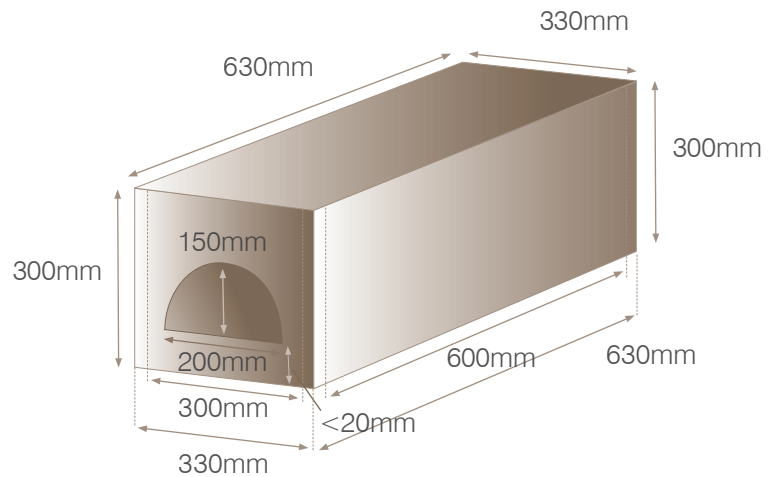


Photo by Purnell Collection, Australian Museum

Habitat Information

Blue-winged Kookaburras are found in tropical and subtropical open woodlands, paperbark swamps, around watercourses, clearings, cane fields and farmlands of northern Australia. They have suffered from loss of habitat resulting from land clearing, and are often killed on roads. In order to increase the chances of your nest box succeeding, it is a good idea to provide appropriate habitat for them in your garden. Blue-winged Kookaburras eat a wide range of invertebrates and vertebrates (like lizards and frogs). They require somewhere to perch where they can view the ground and then swoop down to grab their prey. Retaining trees in your garden will help them, as will providing plenty of native grasses, ground cover like fallen branches and shrubs which will help to attract some of their prey species.



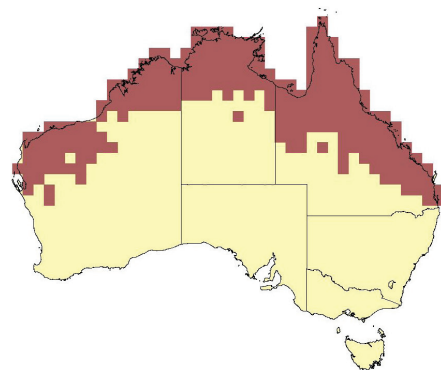
Shapes needed (based on 15mm thick timber)

- Top: rectangle 330mm x 630mm
- Sides: 2 x rectangles 300mm x 600mm
- Front and Back: 2 x rectangles 330mm x 300mm
- Base: 300mm x 600mm

Special Notes

Young kookaburras defecate over the edge of the nest entrance, so the opening should be less than 20mm from the nest box base.

Unless you see an introduced bird moving into the nest box, resist the urge to lift the lid and look inside. If you disturb the birds then they may abandon the nest box. Only open the lid to remove unwanted invaders.



Distribution of the Blue-winged Kookaburra

Materials Needed

- Timber at least 15mm thick (for adequate insulation). If you use thicker timber, please adjust the dimensions of the nest box appropriately. It is best to use untreated recycled wood, such as off cuts or plywood, or plantation-grown wood, rather than using unsustainably harvested timber. Never take hollow limbs or branches from the wild. (Note: if using plywood, use glue and nails to assemble your box)
- Wood glue (something odourless)
- Non-toxic paint or sealant
- Linseed oil
- Screws
- Stainless steel hinge (either one long one or two smaller ones)
- Hook latch and eye
- For mounting strip attachment: A piece of timber 830mm by 90mm or 500mm by 90mm depending on whether you are attaching it to a limb or the trunk respectively) plus 100mm galvanised screws (for mounting the strip to the tree)

Tools Needed

- Drill
- Saw + coping saw
- Hammer
- Screwdriver
- Safety glasses and dust mask
- Coarse sandpaper (or a rasp)
- Ladder

Construction

1. Cut out shapes

- Wearing safety glasses and a dust mask, use the saw to cut out all of the required shapes for the box.
- Label each panel with pencil (on the inside) so that you can keep track of each part.
- Paint the outside and edges of each panel with non-toxic paint or sealant. Leave the inside face of each panel raw.

2. Add features to the panels

- Front panel: use your coping saw to cut a semi-circular hole 200mm wide and 150mm high. The hole should be at the centre of the panel, 20mm from the bottom.
- Side panel (for tree limb attachment only): select the side that will attach to the tree limb. Run the mounting strip horizontally along the length of the nest box (with excess timber at either end) and secure with small screws from the inside of the panel. Pre-drill 2 holes in the mounting strip, one at each end. Alternatively you can run 2 mounting strips vertically at each end of the box.
- Side panel (for trunk attachment only): select the side that will attach to the tree trunk. Run the mounting strip vertically down the middle of the nest box and secure with small screws from the inside of the panel. Pre-drill 2 holes in the mounting strip, one at the top and one at the bottom.
- Bottom panel: drill at least 5 small holes into the bottom panel for drainage.

3. Put the box together

- Glue the side panels to the outside edges of the bottom panel and secure with screws. Use at least 3 screws per panel face for the entire box
- Repeat for the front and back panels.
- Use the hinge to attach the top panel to the back panel. This will allow you to lift the lid to inspect the nest box.
- Fit a hook latch and eye to stop the lid from blowing open in a strong wind.

4. Final touches

- Ensure there are no protruding screws or staples.
- Treat the outside of the box with linseed oil to help it last.

Installation

Ideally boxes should be installed on large, mature trees, close to or on the main trunk or a thick horizontal limb. Install the box as high as possible to prevent predation but low enough to be safely accessible for monitoring and maintenance.

For this species the ideal height for the box is 5-10 metres. Obviously many people will not possess the equipment necessary to be able to safely access these heights, and so we recommend that you place the box at the highest point you can comfortably access.

Choose a position for the nest box that:

- Faces north or north-east and away from prevailing winds and night time lights
- Has a large, thick (> 700mm circumference) and horizontal limb (for limb attachment method).
- Ensure that you use appropriate safety measures when installing the box. Never use a ladder alone and use a pulley system to raise the box to the installation location
- To limit cat and rat predation, try placing a smooth collar of metal or plastic around the base of the tree.

Attachment method 1 (limb attachment):

- Use the galvanized 100 mm screws to secure the box to the tree through the predrilled holes at the front and back of the mounting strip. Make sure the box is horizontal (or with a very slight forward slope).
- Ensure the box does not move too much in windy weather.
- If you remove the nest box, be sure to also remove the screws

Attachment method 2 (trunk attachment):

- Use the galvanized 100mm screws to secure the box to the tree through the predrilled holes at the top and bottom of the mounting strip.
- Ensure the box does not move too much in windy weather.
- If you remove the nest box, be sure to also remove the screws.

Maintenance

Regularly observe your box to make sure that the intended species has not been driven from their nest by introduced birds, and always contact an apiarist if honeybees take over the nest. If introduced birds (like Mynas or Starlings) move in, remove their nesting material and any eggs. You may need to repeat this more than once. If they are persistent, cover the hole for a while.

After the chicks have fledged and the adults have left the box, clean it out to prepare it for next year. Remember that trees grow in girth as well as height, and be sure to check the fixings on the box every year or two to adjust for growth.