

## Building and installing nest-boxes

The construction of nest boxes to provide artificial hollows for the 'Practical Parrot Action Project' was inspired by Len Robinson. Impassioned by his experience with Turquoise Parrots in 1966 and his many subsequent encounters, Len and his friend Trevor Owen have spent decades experimenting with methods of providing nest-sites for Turquoise Parrots by hollowing-out naturally occurring stumps with an auger and providing artificial nest hollows at various sites in the Warby Ranges. Several of these hollows were occupied by Turquoise Parrots and the initiative was deemed successful, but the last batch of hollows was placed in 1990 to assist the research being undertaken by Bruce Quin, and it is unlikely that these hollows would be intact and useable today. More recently, in 2010, artificial nest-hollows were again placed around the Warby Ranges by Monash University researchers who were investigating Turquoise Parrot nest-site requirements, and again the hollows were readily occupied. The current project builds on these previous efforts, and to-date the project

has built and erected over 200 nest-boxes, specifically designed to accommodate Turquoise Parrots. Nearly all of these have been placed at key breeding sites on private property.

Previous work on Turquoise Parrots in the region has given us good information on the types of hollows preferred by Turquoise Parrots, thus we designed a nest-box to meet their specific requirements. In addition to nest-boxes, suitable hollows have been salvaged from stockpiled branches and logs following the 2014 Wunghnu and Boweya bushfires. These logs consist of a hollow section of branch of at least 100mm internal diameter, capped on one end with a piece of timber with holes drilled for drainage. Both nest-boxes and nest-logs require a layer of clean sawdust or broken-up decaying wood (often found at the base of fallen dead trees in the bush), placed within the hollow to a depth of at least 50mm. This forms an important porous floor to the nest and helps with drainage and nest sanitation.

### Materials

Timber (undressed pine)  
 (3x) 800 x 120 x 25mm  
 (1x) 1200 x 120 x 25mm  
 (2x) 140 x 120 x 25mm

Fasteners  
 (16x) Galvanised screws

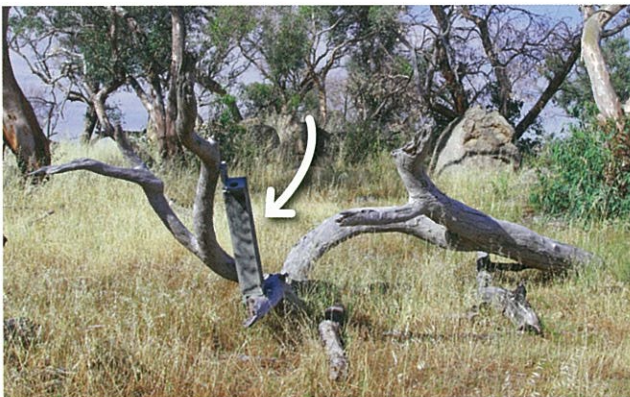
(2x) 100mm galvanised hex head tek screws (for installation)

### Paint

Exterior water-based paint, preferably pale grey/brown in colour (to match colour of dead wood)

### Placement

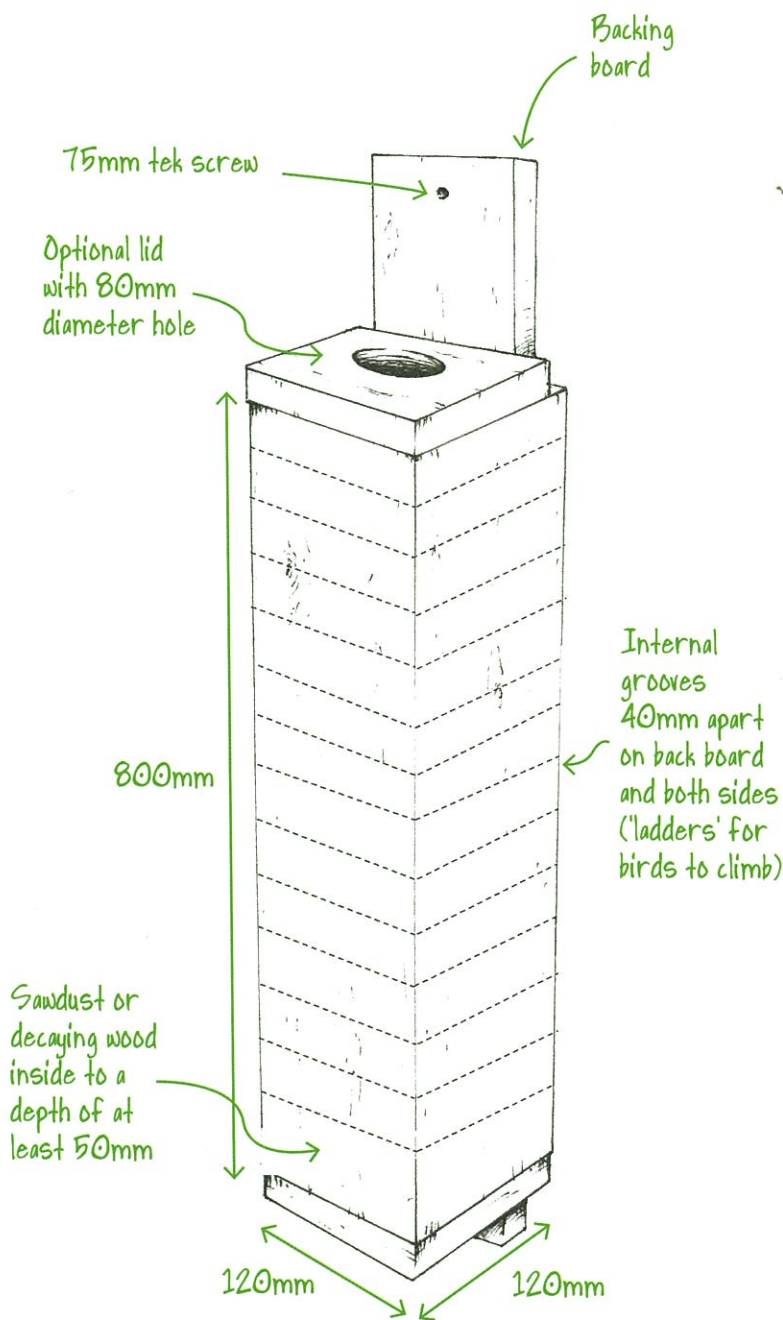
When placing nest-boxes and nest-logs, they should be tilted slightly from vertical (at around 10°), attached to the south or east face of a stump or low trunk, and with the entrance (top of the hollow) at about 1.5-2 metres above ground level. It is best to place nest-boxes and logs in



Both of these nest-boxes, positioned low to the ground on dead timber, were successfully used by Turquoise Parrots in 2015.

Landholders and members of the local community help transform salvaged logs from bushfire affected areas into Turquoise Parrot nest-sites





a position where they are likely to receive shade, especially spring-summer afternoon shade, from canopy trees in the vicinity. Ideally, nest-boxes and logs should be attached to stumps or low on dead trees as these would be most likely to support hollows and may be more easily found by any prospective Turquoise Parrots. If fixing to living trees, strapping hollows around trunks and limbs should be avoided. Instead, large screws placed through a backing-board should be used. It can be a good idea to erect two parallel metal fence posts in an appropriate site, and attach the nest-box or log at the required angle and height to those posts either with tek screws or tie wire. This 'stand-alone' method of hollow placement may reduce the risk of predation from goannas, snakes and antechinus as it would be more difficult for those predators to climb metal posts.

When selecting areas to place hollows, it is preferable to target:

- Known nesting habitats, such as mixed Blakely's Red Gum and Red Stringybark woodlands. In timbered farmland, place hollows within 100m of a forest edge if available, or in forested area, within 100m of a clearing/edge.
- Lower slopes and rocky gullies where there are already stumps and dead limbs present (though avoid placing an artificial hollow on a tree or stump where a potentially suitable natural hollow exists).
- Sites within 250m of surface water that is suitable for Turquoise Parrots to drink from (gently sloping banks).
- Sites close to known feeding areas.

#### Monitoring and maintenance

It is important to monitor artificial hollows once they are installed, especially in late winter and early spring, to check that hollows are secure, free of any unwanted pests such as feral bees, and containing enough decayed wood matter/sawdust. Use a torch to inspect the interior of the hollow. If you are fortunate enough to have Turquoise Parrots occupy a hollow, firstly give yourself a pat on the back and then let us know! Record what you observe but be careful not to disturb the birds or visit their nest too frequently. Once the birds have finished breeding, at the end of summer, it is good practice to clean out the hollow if possible, and replace the decayed wood matter/sawdust.



Turquoise Parrot nest-box attached to a natural stump.



Installing nest-hollows between two upright metal posts may alleviate the risk from climbing predators such as goannas and antechinus.