EDUCATOR NOTES

Building a nest box

Learning and Engagement Approach

This activity is designed to engage young learners aged from 7 – 13 years. The activity is intended to:

- understand how animals use tree hollows
- value the importance of habitat and natural tree hollows
- investigate the animals that live in your local area
- appreciate the animals that live around us
- develop associations with local landcare and environmental groups
- undertake a hands-on project.

Safety Considerations

- Conduct a risk assessment for your organisation prior to beginning this activity. Nest boxes are a complex project and carry risks, including using cutting tools and working at heights.
- Check the weather before conducting any outdoors activity. If there is going to be extreme temperatures, storms or high wind, postpone the activity.
- Ensure that everyone is wearing closed shoes, hats, and sunscreen and has a water bottle handy.
- Keep any allergy plan information at hand and any associated allergy medication.
- Only trained adults should use cutting equipment, such as saws and drills.
- A professional should install the nest box.
- Feral bees can occupy nest boxes. If this occurs, seek the assistance of a professional apiarist to remove the bees as soon as they are noticed to reduce the risk of stings.
- Regularly inspect your nest box to ensure that it is well secured and not showing signs of wear and tear.

Materials and References

You can make nest boxes for a variety of wildlife, including birds, microbats and marsupials. It is important to provide habitat suited to your local wildlife. You may also be able to get some assistance from your council's environment officer or Landcare group to identify what types of animal need habitat in your area.

Nest boxes are usually made from timber. To make a nest box, you will need to use timber that is thick enough to provide insulation for your animals. Hardwood of a minimum 15mm thickness or Marine Plywood of a minimum 17mm thickness is needed.

The wood will also need to be painted to slow the weathering of the timber. An outdoors acrylic paint works well and grey or dark green colours help your nest box to blend in.

This fact sheet from WIRES contains some excellent information, along with nest box designs and plans and remember that your Local Landcare or environmental group is a great resource and may be able to assist with expertise and materials for your nest box project.

Community organisations, such as Men's Sheds may also be able to help with your nest box project.

Site Suggestions

When identifying a site to install your nest box, consider how your animal might use this location. Many animals are shy and avoid human contact, so installing the nest box away from high traffic areas will help them to feel more comfortable.

Most species prefer a nest box that faces north-east or south-east, if possible. This allows some warmth from the morning sun and helps to shield the box from the direct heat during the middle of the day.

Educator Tips

Building a nest box is a complex activity, so please seek assistance for this project.

It is essential to know about the types of animals in your area so that the nest box you install is suitable for your animals. An unsuitable nest box may not get used, or may not adequately protect its inhabitants. Research the animals in your area before you begin and draw on knowledge from local government, landcare groups and environmental organisations to identify a target animal. The activity sheet has been designed to help young Landcarers to identify the how the animals in your area are likely to use the nest box.

Although this is a technically challenging project, nest boxes are very rewarding and children take delight in knowing that they have created habitat for their local animals.

Aligning this Activity

This activity can be conducted as a stand-alone activity, or linked with the Creating a Wildlife Habitat series:
- Research
- Vision
- Design

- Planting
- Monitoring and care

Extension Activities

Extension 1: Hollow Count
Conduct a walk around your local area, taking note of the established habitat trees. How many hollows are present?

Extension 2: Citizen Science
Upload your animal data. Once your nest box is being used, identify the animals using it and add your data to the online database, the Atlas of Living Australia.

Community Engagement

Use The National Landcare Directory to find a landcare group or other community environmental 'care' group near you. They will have a lot of expertise in understanding local wildlife and their habitat.

Look to the Junior Landcare Community Page for organisations to contact to help support your investigations.

Use this Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network map to find a City Farm or Community Garden near you to get some ideas for your project.

Curriculum and Framework Links
Add curriculum and framework links from the learning activity document

SCIENCE
Year 2: ACSSU030, ACSHE035
Year 3: ACSSU044, ACSIS054
Year 4: ACSHE062, ACSIS064
Year 5: ACSHE083
Year 6: ACSSU094, ACSHE100
Year 7: ACSHE120
Year 8: ACSHE135

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
Year 2: ACHASSI042
Year 3: ACHASSI052, ACHASSI059, ACHASSI060
Year 4: ACHASSI080, ACHASSK088, ACHASSK090
Year 5: ACHASSI102, ACHASSK120
Year 6: ACHASSI122, ACHASSI130

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGIES
Year 2: ACTDEK003

Year 3 & 4: ACTDEP017
Year 5 & 6: ACTDEP019
Year 7 & 8: ACTDEK032

HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION
Year 2: ACPPS018, ACPPS022, ACPPS023
Year 3 & 4: ACPPS036, ACPPS040, ACPPS041
Year 5 & 6: ACPPS054, ACPPS059
Year 7 & 8: ACPPS073, ACPPS078

ETHICAL UNDERSTANDING
Exploring values, rights and responsibilities.

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CAPABILITY
Social awareness

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS
Outdoor Learning

CROSS CURRICULUM PRIORITY
Sustainability

MY TIME, OUR PLACE: FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL AGE CARE
Outcome 2 and 4