



Aiden - Restoring habitat for birds through nest boxes

What was your goal and what did you achieve?

My project is about restoring habitat to barn owls or any birds that have lost habitat due to urbanisation or farming.

A couple of years ago I went to my uncle's farm. We went for a night walk and we heard these Barn Owls calling. It was in the hay shed and they'd fallen down because they'd moved the hay bales and died, well there was one left but it died too unfortunately.

So my idea was I could build a Barn Owl bird box, so instead of going into the hay shed they could go into a safe place to live. Then I built some other bird boxes for my local park.

How did you learn to build them?

I got lots of facts from BirdLife SA and I contacted David Paton and talked to him about it, and the local council, and James Smith, he's the author of Wildlife of Greater Adelaide.

He works for the council, and he gave me some advice. I designed them and my dad gave me some help and we put them together. There are some prototypes as well.

The large one is going to be installed on the Yorke Peninsula, at Cunliffe at my uncle's farm. It will be attached to the back of the hay shed facing open countryside which encourages them to breed and live there because they can see more open space, and if they're stressed they can escape easier.

Who else helped with your project?

My dad who helped me build the Barn Owl bird box, my uncle who owns the farm, from the community, Mark Hannan from local council, James Smith, who has a private business installing boxes. I made one of my boxes a while ago, for Crimson Rosellas, and it had a perch like the Barn Owl one, but I spoke to James about it and he said cut the perch off because it entices feral birds to nest there.

And the bark on the outside is for them to grip something when they go out, because they make indents but I wanted to make something more natural and it looks a lot better. I've promoted my project to my class.

Biggest success?

Getting it all done in time, and organising the Crimson Rosella bird box to be installed in my local park.

Next steps?

By the end of next month, the installation of the Barn Owl bird box and the installation of the beige bird box for the Crimson Rosellas next year and they've already got quite a few things, they've got a pond and things like that so I'm not sure what my plan is for next year.

What did you enjoy most?

Sitting back and seeing it all finished.

Did you face any challenges?

Getting the actual wood. I used marine ply, which is expensive but I got a discount. The initial price for this was \$200, but then we looked at other prices for construction ply, which is a similar price, but marine ply is what they make boats out of, because Barn Owls struggled in Kadina and Cunliffe because it is very cold and it rains every now and again, and when it rains, it rains hard and comes horizontally so Barn Owls suffer from getting chilled eggs, so any cold or wet days they chill very easily.

So my idea was to try and make it so they don't get chilled. And for heat, there's a false roof that absorbs all the heat, and below is cool.

How will you know if your nest boxes are being used?

I'll take a trip once a term up to my uncle's farm and look at if there's anything in there. Most birds breed seasonally, but Barn Owls breed on food availability - they can breed up to 7 times. And a couple of them can kill 3500 mice in a year. In other countries they use Barn Owls to keep down mice and other pests.

Your advice to other students?

The more time you spend planning..... just get out there and do it, it feels a lot more easy once you're out there. Make a plan, don't wait, just go out there and do it.

This case study was transcribed from an interview. These are Aiden's words and opinions.