

The Attitudes of Housing Occupants to Integral Bird and Bat Boxes

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Photo by Sarah Roberts, Isle of Wight

A Short Summary

This research aimed to investigate householder attitudes towards integral boxes for birds or bats in order to better inform housing developers and other interested stakeholders involved in establishing or promoting the inclusion of integral boxes into housing developments.

To help frame the research, initial semi-structured interviews took place with 4 staff members at a national housing developer and 2 members of staff at a national nature conservation organisation, in order to assess current perceptions, potential issues and concerns. The main project fieldwork then took place at 4 locations in the UK, where visits were made to estates where housing was known to include integral boxes (2 further sites were investigated but found to be unsuitable).

At each of the estates, householders in homes with or without boxes were interviewed to explore their perceptions of integral boxes and included questions on demographic details, nature connectivity, individual home preferences and box satisfaction. In depth questioning, in the form of a 15-20 minute questionnaire, was conducted (N=37) with the majority of information gathered through a short questionnaire (N=105).

Key results (focussing on the bird boxes):

Housing developer/nature conservation staff interviews:

Overall, the staff interviewed said they were unaware of buyer responses to the presence of integral boxes in houses. There were a few potential concerns noted: noise, excrement aesthetics and maintenance, however, staff generally accepted they did not know what the response would be.



There were some developer concerns about integrating a change into building practices that would have a cost and they weren't sure would work. This potentially needs to be resolved by the conservation community providing more evidence, and potentially conducting more research into this area.

It was also noted that some integral bird boxes are being installed for use by swifts although it may be used by other species. Swifts have become a flagship species for integral boxes and non-target species inhabiting boxes may not be received in the same way by householders or developers.

Householder interviews

The person who considered themselves the main decision-maker was interviewed in each house.



Overall (N=142) – 75% considered integral boxes a good/very good idea, the rest were neutral and less than one percent (one person) thought they were not a good idea.



Of people with boxes (N=71) – 69% were happy/very happy with them, 1.4% (1 person) was very unhappy and the rest were indifferent.

The decision to buy a house is unlikely to be influenced by the presence of an integral box (85%) however if it did influence the purchase it was only ever positive (15%).

There was no discernible differences in perceptions by people of different wealth (indicated as a proxy by the number of bedrooms in the house), age, gender or whether there were children in the house.

When asked, 73% of people would recommend a house with an integral box to a friend, the remainder didn't know and nobody said they wouldn't.

Only 3 people with boxes had problems: 2 people had seen excrement but this problem did not cause any concern for them; 1 person had previously had sparrows in his attic (in a previous home) and was the only person to state that boxes would be a bad idea.

Not enough information could be gathered to make solid statements about the reception to integral bat boxes as they were few in number and none were known to be inhabited by bats. It is recommended that a separate assessment of integral bat boxes is conducted.





Photo by Sarah Roberts, Cornwall

Notes:

- Stated neutrality is hard to assess, but it does suggest there wouldn't be any actionable objection to integral nest boxes.
- Perceptions are more positive when people are informed about the benefits of nest boxes prior to occupation.
- The presence of a box may not influence people to buy a house but there was no indication it would be a deterrent.
- Assessment of recommendation to a friend – the “didn't know” answer may be linked to the fact that the presence of a box was unlikely to be influential in the person's own house purchase.
- During the interviews it was noted that a common response to the idea of problems with the box would be that people would just block up the hole. It is unknown whether householders would consider the boxes their responsibility or that of the management if problems occurred.