

Per Cent for Art Project – Energy Upgrades 2017

Cyanistes caeruleus

THE CONCEPT

In keeping with the project as art commission-cum-useful object, the intention from the outset was to make bird boxes which are both beautiful and functional. The idea behind the work is that the birdboxes are small shrines to honour Blue Tits. As if from an imagined society which worships birds. The three symbols represent the life cycle of birds: Birth (a nest), Life in the air (a cross-section of a hollow bone) and Death (a final ascent).

The labour intensive handtool construction methods and fine finish are deliberately at odds with the usual nailed-together-expendable nature of common-all-garden bird boxes. Additionally, the boxes were made with the environment and sustainability in mind.

The boxes were constructed in consultation with British Ornithologist and Author, Moss Taylor.

THE LOCATION

The boxes are East facing to keep them out of the direct blast of the prevailing wind (South-Westerly) and the winter North winds.

There are no branches in front of the boxes so the bird's will have a clear flight path out and back.

The boxes have been attached to the trees so that the entrance holes are angled vertically or over-vertical to prevent water coming in and the entrance holes are 25mm in diameter: the recommend size for Blue Tits, *Cyanistes caeruleus* (also Coal Tits and Marsh Tits).

The boxes were put up approximately 3.5 metres high; beyond the reach of humans and within the 2 - 5 metre recommended height (this means they are also low enough to be accessible via ladder for clearing out old nests).

The three bird boxes were put at the furthest possible distance from each other on the proposed site to allow maximum territories for the inhabitants.

The bird boxes are attached to the trees with heavy-duty plastic-coated wire. Wound around three times, secured but not too tight as too harm the tree. Sections of recycled rubber bike inner tube are positioned between the wire and the bark to further protect the tree. The boxes will be inspected annually to ensure that the wire has not become too tight around the tree trunk.

THE CONSTRUCTION

The birdboxes are made from solid oak and with a light exterior finish of beeswax (no finish on the interior). The beeswax will allow the oak to age nicely helping the boxes become part of the natural surrounding environment as opposed to conventional external finishes which are generally not good for the environment and could prove harmful to the birds.

The boxes construction uses combination of through and lapped dovetails which have a high mechanical strength. They're held together with small amounts of non-toxic, exterior glue. The dovetails will allow the wooden components to seasonally expand and contract in unison (which nails or screws wouldn't) so the boxes should maintain their structural integrity.

The lids are hinged and held shut by hook and eye fixings so the boxes can be periodically opened and cleared out. The hinges and hook fixings are brass and the screws zinc passivated for external exposure so none should rust.

The inside of the front wall has a series of shallow, blind holes drilled into it and the surface roughed to allow the fledglings to climb up from the nest to the exit hole.

The walls, base and lid of the box are 15mm thick to ensure the box has ample insulation (measurements as recommended by the BTO - The British Trust for Ornithology)

The exit / entrance hole is 125mm up from the base, the recommended height; shallow enough that the young birds can climb up and out and deep enough that predators can't reach in to get the young birds.

The base has drainage holes drilled in it.

The interior dimensions are 100mm x 105mm (within BTO recommended sizes).

Nik Taylor, June 2018

Nik Taylor was commissioned to undertake this Per Cent For Art project following an energy upgrade project carried out at Siamsa Tíre in 2017. The energy upgrades have enabled Siamsa Tíre to reduce its carbon footprint and limit the environmental impact of the organisation. It was felt that the project should address an issue connected to these impacts, and biodiversity was selected as an appropriate theme.

*The upgrades were funded by the **Department of Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht**, and the **Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland** – funding for which we are most thankful. These improvements are part of the overall Greening Siamsa initiative.*