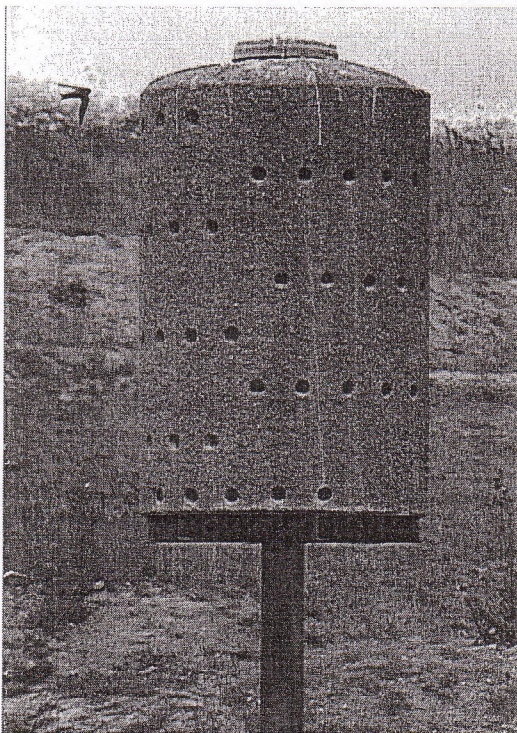


SAND MARTIN BARRELS

Sand Martin barrels are a novel way of providing artificial nest sites for sand martins and have been developed for use in situations where the construction of an artificial bank is not appropriate. With help from Grampian FWAG, an Aberdeenshire farmer, John Strachan, has pioneered his own version of this innovative construction.



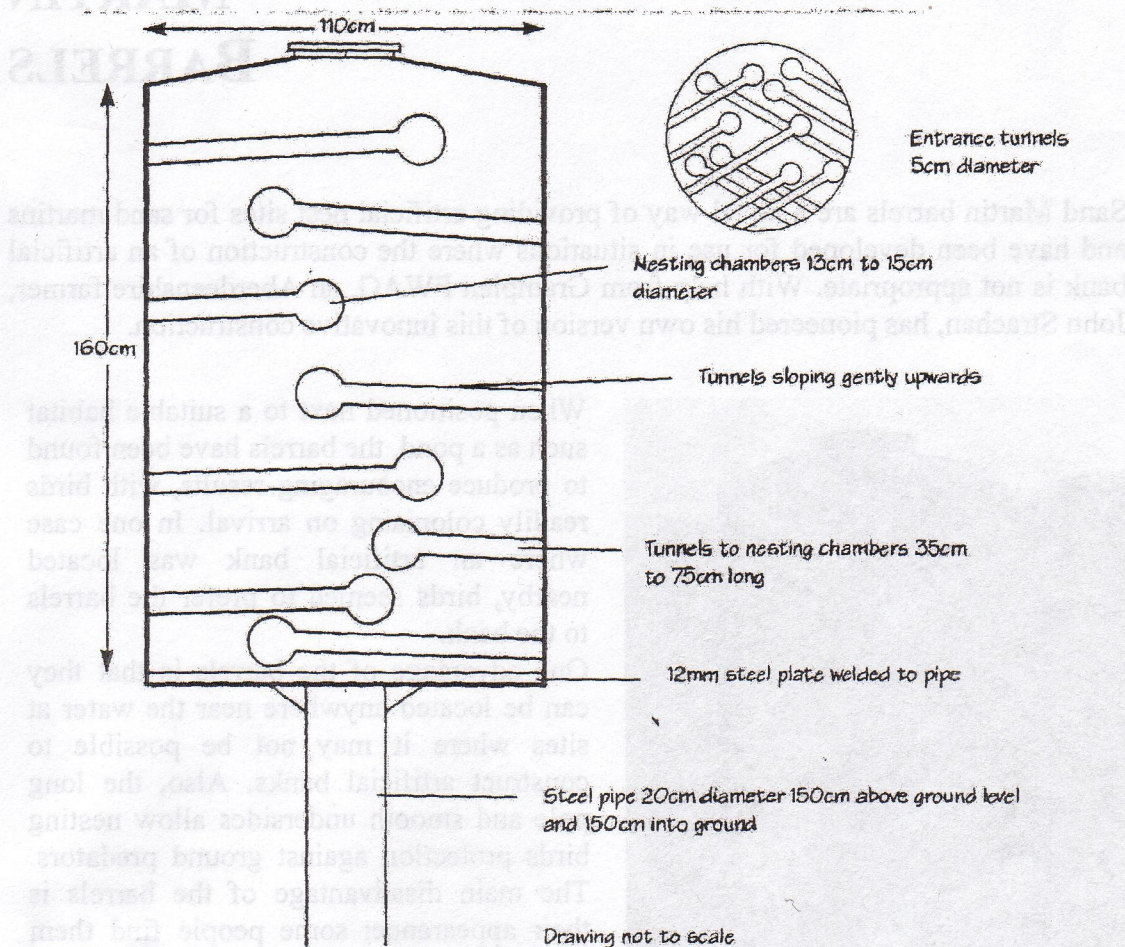
When positioned next to a suitable habitat such as a pond, the barrels have been found to produce encouraging results, with birds readily colonising on arrival. In one case where an artificial bank was located nearby, birds seemed to prefer the barrels to the bank.

One advantage of the barrels is that they can be located anywhere near the water at sites where it may not be possible to construct artificial banks. Also, the long pole and smooth undersides allow nesting birds protection against ground predators. The main disadvantage of the barrels is their appearance; some people find them unsightly!

DESIGN INSTRUCTIONS (see diagram overleaf)

- Using a jigsaw, cut entrance holes in a barrel.
- Then cover the barrel with Evostick and rough sand (in Grampian FWAG's case, the rough sand was prepared by putting it in an Aga for a day, then sieving through a flour sieve to remove the very fine sand).
- Line the barrel interior with very strong waterproof paper to prevent the cement mixture running out.
- Place the barrel on a stand, which has been concreted into the ground at the chosen location.
- Fill the barrel with a 15:1 mixture of fine builders' sand and cement and allow to dry for 10-14 days.
- When dry, bore the entrance tunnels using a 5cm diameter pipe sharpened from the inside out. Scrape out nest chambers using a 2cm diameter iron rod, the end of which is bent over, sharpened and flattened, and fill the tunnels with

rough dry sand. Take care that small stones are excluded from the cement mix when filling the barrel, as this makes excavation very difficult for the birds.



The barrels are covered each winter with black polythene to protect them from the frost.

Many types of barrel or square tanks could be used. In the Grampian FWAG/John Strachan design, a second-hand concentrated fruit juice barrel formed the construction. The entrance tunnels and nesting chambers are cleaned out at the end of each nesting season and refilled with fresh sand. It may be necessary to treat the holes with a pyrethrum-based insecticide as parasite build up is a particular problem in sand martin colonies. If parasite infestation becomes severe, this may lead to the death of chicks in the nest or desertion of the site.

Cost of materials is estimated to be around £250 per barrel.

The Environment Agency has produced a booklet on behalf of London Biodiversity Partnership called 'Best Practice Guidelines – Artificial Bank and Creation for Sand Martins and Kingfishers' which features sand martin barrels and banks. For a copy contact David Webb at the Environment Agency tel. 01276 454300 (David.Webb@environment-agency.gov.uk) or William Moreno at London Wildlife Trust tel. 0207 9215479

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