

Conure Sleepboxes — What, Why, and When

By Marcy Covault ©2006

What are these funny-looking wooden boxes that I call “sleepboxes” and that I send people with their pet conures? Why the heck do I use them? Are they appropriate all the time, for all birds?

Conures LOVE something to sleep in, and these boxes provide more seclusion and security than sitting on an open perch, hanging on the side of the cage, or having the rear exposed because of an open back to the sleep tent.

I developed the sleepbox originally because I had a sun conure hen that would not quit laying. The box was relatively roomy, probably about 12” square. It was open-fronted and positioned to be exposed to the light source during the day. It therefore provided no dark and cozy nesting place (as it was only dark at night), and it worked beautifully.

Because I read several tragic stories about various fabric sleep tents—from suffocation within inner layers that the bird had chewed through, to strangulation or hanging toes in threads that the bird “worked on”—I decided to try the sleepbox in non-breeder cages. On later versions, I put a partial block at one end so that the birds could take a nap and stick their heads into the corner out of the light.

I am very aware that for some species and some individuals, any closed-in area will stimulate nesting. Truly open-fronted may work for those birds if there is a light source that shines into the box all day. However, some may be incorrigible about nesting.

I have had breeding age conures that have not started laying with a sleepbox in their cage—they are protective, just as they would be of any sleeping arrangements, including sleep tents.

BUT, for parrotlets raised with the conures, I have had a 6-month-old hen lay in the sleepbox, so I do not use it when I have parrotlets in the cage. As another example, at one time I raised Bourke’s parakeets in a smaller, but similar type box. The sleepbox would be no deterrent to nesting for those guys! I suspect cockatiels would lay in these, as would some other determined species for whom a dark, deep nestbox is not a preferred requisite for reproduction.

When my suns have had two clutches, I remove their nestbox and give them a sleepbox, and they stop nesting until I give them back their nestbox to begin the next season—at which time, within a couple of weeks, they will begin laying a new clutch.

I use the sleepboxes in all pre-cage brooders (which have light access) and also in weaning cages for young conures. I include a perch on the front of the sleepbox so they can sit in the entrance, and the piece of wood across the lower front will *sometimes* hold in shavings—but can be messy if they gleefully throw them out. I debated about a mat inside for softness, but the concern about chewing and catching toes in threads overrode my need to provide a cushion—it doesn’t seem to be something the birds are concerned about.

Two early sleepboxes



Later sleepboxes:
Outside cage mount



Inside cage mount



Smaller Single Py Box



Because youngsters like to have a snug place to nap during the day, these have worked out well. When the babies first go to weaning cages, the sleepboxes are on the bottom of the cage. As the babies climb and prefer perching higher, I hang the sleepbox higher in the cage.

Dimensions can vary somewhat, depending on species, how many birds will “share” the box, and what a person’s setup is like. For a single sun conure or a small clutch of young Pyrrhura conures, using 1/2"-5/8" plywood, the size could be approximately 8-1/2 – 9" L x 5" W by 6" H, with 3" W closed in front for a dark corner and for a single py, about 3-1/2" W x 4-1/2"H x 8-1/2"L with 2" front.

When I send a sleepbox with a pet conure, I’ll secure it to the bottom of the pet taxi with a screw so that if the pet taxi got jostled, the carrier would not move, since it is significantly heavier than the bird and could injure the bird. This also gives the conures a familiar, secure place to go and I believe it lessens the stress of shipping.

I’d think that a square parakeet or cockatiel box could be adapted. Someone with an inexpensive table saw and a little imagination can tailor these and probably think of more variations. If I had more time and was “crafty,” I’d probably get some kid-safe paint and personalize the sides with name, flowers, etc.

So, how do you clean these if you can’t wash them in the clothes washer or dishwasher? I do not immerse them in water. I use a plastic or stainless steel scrubber and soap, rinse well, towel dry, and put them in the oven for 30 minutes at 250 degrees.

Can birds get hurt on these? Well, wood can splinter, and if the hangers are not secured well enough, the box could fall on a bird. As with anything in our birds’ environments, there are caveats insofar as usage, most of which have to do with our mechanically secure handling of things in their cage area and also with the individual bird’s propensity insofar as chewing, etc. I think they are safer than most of the sleep tents, but I also think they would need to be tested with other species of birds to recommend them for other than conures!

Off-season sleepbox for pair of sun conures, flush front, outside cage mount



Outside cage mount



Sleepbox in pet carrier for shipping



Sun parents visiting youngsters in plexibrooder with sleepbox



Babies in weaning cage—sleepbox on bottom



Sleepbox hung in cage

