

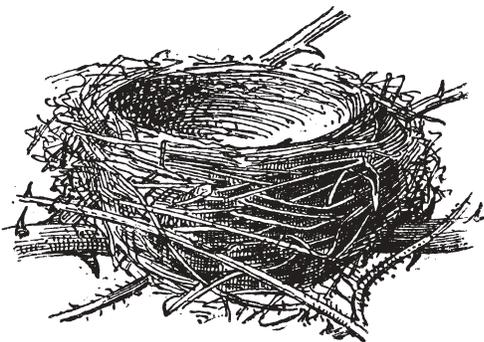


Studying Birds

NESTS

A nest is the place where a bird lays its eggs and raises its young. Most birds build a new nest each year, although some birds will reuse their old nest.

- * Take a walk and gather twigs, leaves, and anything else you think a bird might use to build a nest. Take them home and try building a nest yourself.
- * While out wandering, look for nests. They can be anywhere. Where did you find nests? What kinds of nests did you find? Did any nests have eggs in them?
- * In late fall and early winter, look for abandoned nests. Most birds have migrated at this time and abandoned their nests. If you find any nests, gently take them down and examine them.
- * Provide birds with nest material by putting out yarn and strips of fabric. One idea is to put them in a suet feeder. The "cage" keeps the yarn and fabric from blowing away while still available for birds to gather.
- * Put bird houses around your yard. Different birds prefer different kinds of houses so do some research. What kind of birds do you want to attract? What kind of birdhouse do they prefer?



FEEDING

It's easy to make your own bird food! If you want different types of birds to visit your yard, make sure you provide various types of food.

Homemade Suet Cakes

- 1/2 lb. suet or lard
- 1 c. crunchy peanut butter
- 2 1/2 c. sunflower seeds
- 1 1/2 c. millet
- 1 c. dried fruit

In a saucepan, melt together the suet (or lard) and the crunchy peanut butter over low heat. Pour the melted mixture over the sunflower seeds, millet, and dried fruit and mix well. Pour into a shallow baking dish (or whatever mold you wish to use) and place in the freezer for a few hours. Once the suet cake has frozen, you can cut it to different sizes to fit your suet feeder.

NOTE: Suet will melt in higher temperatures. In warmer weather, either keep your suet feeder in a shady spot or eliminate the suet and sub more peanut butter and sunflower seeds.

Feeding Hummingbirds

Dissolve one cup of white cane sugar (or beet sugar) in three to four cups of SPRING water and place in your hummingbird feeder. Store any excess in the refrigerator for up to one week. Change the mixture every four to five days (more often in hot weather).

BACKYARD BIRD WATCHING

Keeping a bird log is a fun and easy way to learn which birds live around your home and get to know them a little better. Hang a bird feeder in your yard (somewhere where you can easily see it from inside). Keep a bird guide next to your notebook and then start watching. It may take a little bit before the birds "find" your feeder but once they do it will become a hotspot of activity. It's fun to watch them for different traits. Some will grab seed and fly to a branch to eat. Some will sit at the feeder and eat. Some will try to take over the feeder. Others will gladly share. Make sure to note these activities in your bird log. It's fascinating to watch!

Once you are able to identify birds a bit better, then take a nature walk and see if you can identify them in other areas. Take your notebook and a bird guide with you (or put a bird identification app on your phone). Maybe you can identify some birds that you have not seen around your home.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

There is so much you can learn about this world by studying birds. Here are a few questions to get you started in your studies:

- * What is the purpose of a feather? What are the different kinds of feathers? How does each kind perform its own job?
- * Bird eggs come in various shapes and sizes. Why is this? What is the largest egg? What is the smallest? Why are some eggs a solid color while others are speckled?
- * What are the different parts of a bird? What makes them able to fly? What makes them different from other animals?
- * How and why do birds migrate? Do all birds migrate? Where do they go? How far away do they fly? If they stay in colder climates, how do they keep warm?

BOOKS

- * "100 Backyard Activities" by Colleen Kessler
- * "National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America"
- * "National Geographic Birding Essentials"
- * "Birds, Nests, and Eggs" by Mel Boring
- * "My Book of Birds" by Geraldo Valerio
- * "Handmade Bird, Bee, and Bat Houses" by Michele McKee-Orsini
- * "Drawing Cute Birds in Colored Pencil" by Ai Akikusa
- * "The Art of Botanical & Bird Illustration" by Mindy Lighthipe

BIRD BEAKS

You can learn a lot about a bird by looking at its beak. Some birds have long, thin beaks for drilling into trees. Some have pointed beaks with larger mouths (insect eaters). Some birds have sharp and stubby beaks (seed-eaters). Some have pointed beaks (worm-eaters). And some have curved beaks for tearing flesh (birds of prey). While out bird watching, see if you can find birds with the different beak shapes and take notice how its beak helps it to eat.

