



Photo by Leonard Billie.

Which NEST is BEST?

Spring and summer remind us that we are surrounded by diverse and vibrant ecosystems teeming with life. These seasons bring a rush of activity among every living thing. Birds are probably some of the showiest and noisiest of all. With their various songs announcing territories, attracting mates, and communicating in general, birds are especially hard to ignore at this time of year.

Soon after the chorus begins, mating season arrives and birds start seeking out ideal locations for nesting. This brings out a flurry of activity as various nesting materials are procured. Grasses, twigs, baling twine, spider webs, mud, lichen, and mosses are just some of the materials birds gather to create nests.

Nest types

Cavity nests are constructed in natural or excavated cavities in trees, cliffs, or even man-made nest boxes.

Platform nests are often located atop tall trees, rock outcrops, or man-made structures such as utility poles or communication towers.

Cup nests are bowl-shaped structures typically constructed of twigs, grasses, and other plant materials, and lined with softer materials like feathers or moss.

Burrow nests are excavated in sandy or muddy banks, or simply underground.

Pendant nests are skillfully woven with grasses and hang from trees like little purses.

Scrapes are just shallow indentations in sand, dirt, or rocks. No muss, no fuss.

How to help your feathered neighbors

As stewards of rural landscapes, there are several steps we can take to support birds and their nesting activities.

Create habitat: Preserve and maintain diverse habitats on your property by planting a variety of trees and shrubs that provide suitable nesting sites for a variety of bird species. Visit <https://bit.ly/audubon-friendly-yard> to learn more.

Avoid disturbance: Minimize disturbance to nesting areas during the breeding season by keeping human activity, such as construction and recreational activities, away from known nesting sites. Make sure to keep pets away from nesting sites as well.

Provide nesting structures: To enhance nesting opportunities, install nest boxes or platforms designed for specific bird species. For more information, visit <https://bit.ly/bb-bird-homes>.

Control invasive species: Manage invasive plants and animals that may compete with native birds for resources or disrupt nesting habitats. Visit <https://bit.ly/audubon-native-plant-benefits> to learn more.

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Jacelyn Downey is an educator with Audubon Rockies. She recommends trying to find nests in the winter months when all the green foliage has fallen away, leaving nests exposed and easy to find. When she isn't busy spying on birds in their nests, you can reach Downey at jacelyn.downey@audubon.org.

Matching birds to nests

The types of nests that birds construct are diverse and uniquely suited to each species. How nest savvy are you? **Can you match the bird to the nest?** Write the corresponding letter next to the correct nest to test your knowledge. (See below for answers.)



A

Tree swallow: These iridescent aerial acrobats often use nest boxes when natural tree cavities are scarce. Mountain bluebirds, northern flickers, and downy woodpeckers also use these types of nests.

Photo by David Boltz.



B

Blue heron: Waterfowl in trees? Yes, blue herons form rookeries with multiple birds constructing platform nests in a given area, usually near water. Bald eagles and ospreys also build platform nests.

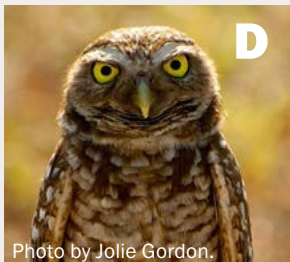
Photo by Jerry Waters.



C

Eastern kingbird: This insect-eating bird expertly catches its prey mid flight before resting in a cup-shaped nest. American robins, many sparrows, and hummingbirds also build cup nests.

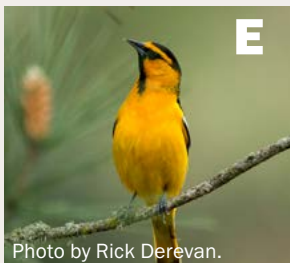
Photo by Caroline Samson.



D

Burrowing owl: Unlike most other owls, this bird hunts for its prey during the day and burrows underground to nest. Belted kingfishers and cliff swallows also burrow into cliffsides.

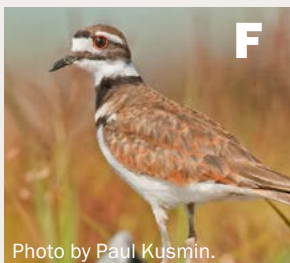
Photo by Jolie Gordon.



E

Bullock's oriole: Showy male Bullock's orioles are bright orange, black, and white. Females are buffy yellow, allowing them to camouflage while in their hanging nests. Warbling vireos also weave hanging nests.

Photo by Rick Derevan.



F

Killdeer: You'll hear killdeer cry out long before you spot their scrape nests, hidden in plain sight. Killdeer also use a broken-wing trick to distract would-be predators away from eggs and young hatchlings. Peregrine falcons build scrape nests as well, though on cliffs rather than on the ground.

Photo by Paul Kusmin.



1

Photo by Jacelyn Downey.



2

Photo by Jacelyn Downey.



3

Photo by Jacelyn Downey.



4

Photo by Jacelyn Downey.



5

Photo by Jacelyn Downey.



6

Photo by Jacelyn Downey.

Answer Key: 1-D, 2-A, 3-F, 4-C, 5-E, 6-B