

## Adapted from "The Nestling: The Bird's Home"

*by Olive Thorne Miller*

Each bird mother has her own way of making a nest; but there is one thing almost all of them try to do, and that is to hide it.

They cannot put their little homes out in plain sight, as we do our houses, because so many creatures want to rob them. Squirrels, snakes, rats, larger birds, cats, and many others like to eat the eggs of the young birds.

So, most birds try to find good hiding places. Some tiny songbirds go to the tops of the tallest trees and hide their nests among the leaves. Orioles hang their swinging cradles at the end of a branch where cats, snakes, and curious children cannot reach. Song sparrows tuck their little homes in bunches of weeds on the ground. Bobolinks hide their nests deep in the grass.

After a safe place is found, the mother bird has to get something to build her nest. She hunts all about and gathers small twigs, grass stems, or fine roots. She pulls narrow strips of bark off grapevines and birch trees; or picks up strings, horsehairs, and many other things. Robins and swallows use mud. As she goes on building, the mother bird gets inside the nest and turns around and around to make it fit her form so it is smooth and comfortable for her to sit in.

Once a nest is made, it must be lined. Some birds go to the chicken yard and pick up feathers, while others find horsehairs. Other birds pull off the soft parts that grow on plants, get bits of wool from the sheep pasture, or use old leaves from the woods to make their nests soft and warm inside.

Some other nests are not nests at all, but platforms, and it seems as if the eggs could roll right off. Other nests are deep burrows or holes in the ground, where no one can get in. Still nests are dainty baskets hung between two twigs or tiny cups of felt with moss outside.

Each species of bird builds in its own way. There are as many different ways to make nests as there are kinds of birds to make them.

After all the trouble the birds take in building a nest, they rarely use it a second time. If a pair of birds has two groups of young in one season, they almost always build a new nest for each family.

A few birds, such as eagles, owls, and sometimes orioles, repair their homes to use again. Woodpeckers sometimes nest in these old holes, but generally, after the young birds have flown, the nest will not be wanted again.

When the nest is finished, the mother lays the eggs in it, one by one. We all know how pretty birds' eggs are. Some are snowy white, some are pink, and some are blue. Many have tiny dots and specks on them, and a few are covered with strange-looking streaks and lines. But pretty as they are, I think no one would be so cruel as to take them away from the poor little mother if he remembered that her young ones are inside the eggs and that she loves them as his own mother loves him.

I have heard people say that birds do not care for their eggs. Let me tell you what a little chickadee mother did when a man tried to steal the eggs out of her nest.

The nest was in a hole in an old stump, and a man was trying to remove the mother's eggs. The man could not get his hand in, so he had to take them out one at a time with a little scoop.

At first, the mother flew at him and tried to drive him away. Then chickadees and other birds who lived nearby came to help her. All the birds cried out and flew around the man's face, so that the man had to use one hand to keep the angry birds away from his eyes. But still he continued taking out the eggs.

At last the little mother was so wild with grief that she dashed into the hole and sat in the doorway, right before his face. The man could not get another egg without hurting the mother bird, and not wanting to harm her, the man left the mother and her eggs alone.

- 1 Which statement from the text explains why birds hide their nests?
- A "They cannot put their little homes out in plain sight, as we do our houses, because so many creatures want to rob them."
  - B "After a safe place is found, the mother bird has to get something to build her nest."
  - C "She hunts all about and gathers small twigs, grass stems, or fine roots."
  - D "As she goes on building, the mother bird gets inside the nest and turns around and around to make it fit her form so it is smooth and comfortable for her to sit in."
- 2 Which statement from the text describes a good hiding place for a nest?
- A "Orioles hang their swinging cradles at the end of a branch where cats, snakes, and curious children cannot reach."
  - B "The mother bird gets inside the nest and turns around and around to make it fit her form so it is smooth and comfortable."
  - C "Some birds go to the chicken yard and pick up feathers, while others find horsehairs."
  - D "After all the trouble the birds take in building a nest, they rarely use it a second time."
- 3 Based on the selection, which would be used to line a nest?
- A grapevines
  - B feathers
  - C rocks
  - D twigs

- 4 According to the text, which birds sometimes use the same nest after a few repairs are made?
- A chickadees
  - B sparrows
  - C robins
  - D orioles
- 5 Which statement from the text supports the idea that mother birds care about their eggs?
- A "We all know how pretty birds' eggs are."
  - B "Some are snowy white, some are pink, and some are blue."
  - C "At first the mother flew at him and tried to drive him away."
  - D "But still he continued taking out the eggs."

**Answer Key**

- 1 A
- 2 A
- 3 B
- 4 D
- 5 C