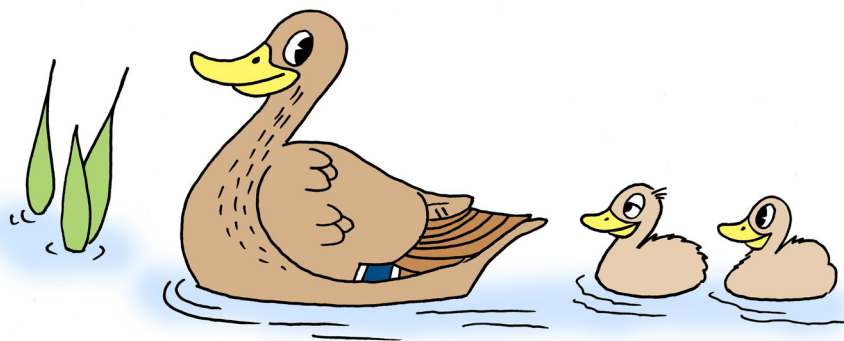


Kids' Birdwatching Week

Signs of nesting



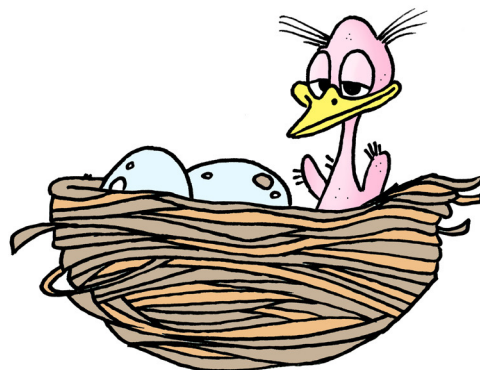
Kids' Birdwatching Week

– Additional information on the signs of nesting

■ An attentive walker can spot the nests of the most common bird species quite easily. If you have nest boxes in your yard, it is easy to see if parent birds visit them. However, it is not necessary to find nests or nest boxes – there are other ways to tell if a bird is nesting.

Signs of nesting

1. A bird sings
2. A bird gathers or carries nest material (e.g. twigs, grass, moss)
3. A bird builds a nest (e.g. a woodpecker pecks a hole in a tree)
4. A bird often goes to a possible nest site (e.g. under the eaves of a house)
5. A bird incubates (sits still) on its nest
6. A bird carries food (e.g. worms)
7. A bird warns or attacks towards a predator (e.g. a crow) or a person
8. Sounds of chicks from a nest or a nest box
9. Young birds that have already left their nest



1. A bird sings

■ Many male birds sing during breeding season. It is not to delight people, however, but to give an important signal to other birds. The male sings to attract a female partner, and at the same time, to tell others that the nest site is taken.

Some singing birds repeat the same, short phrases many times (e.g. the Great Tit, the Chaffinch), others have a longer and more varied warble (e.g. the Blackbird, the Thrush Nightingale). Bird song often sounds beautiful to human ears, except maybe for the crow's song!

HOW TO FIND IT: Be still and silent, and listen. Birds make noises for many reasons, but the sounds related to breeding are often continuous or repetitive, and they last longer than e.g. the short and sharp alarm calls (see sign of nesting number 7).

TIP: Most birds do their most vigorous singing in the morning.

2. A bird gathers or carries nest material

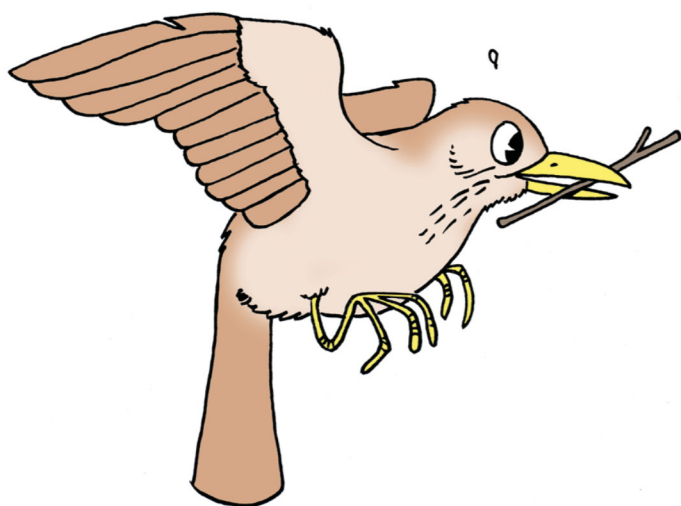
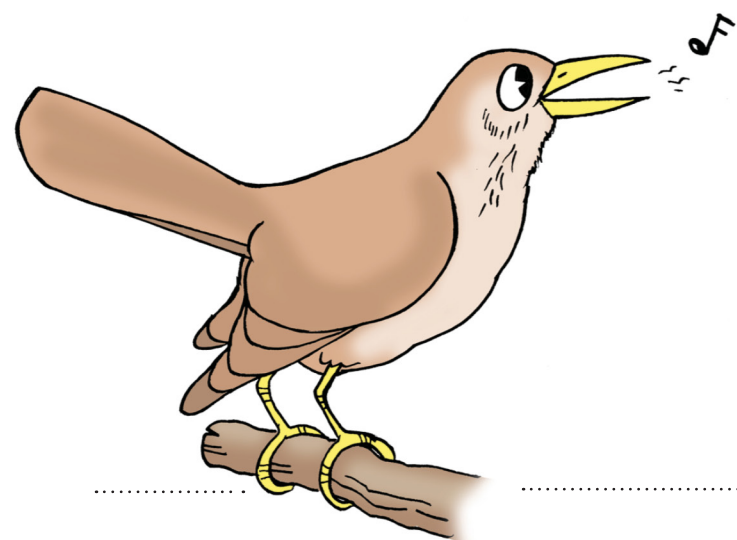
■ Most birds build their nests from natural materials around them. They have to do many trips to gather all the material needed, so birds carrying nest material are quite easy to spot.

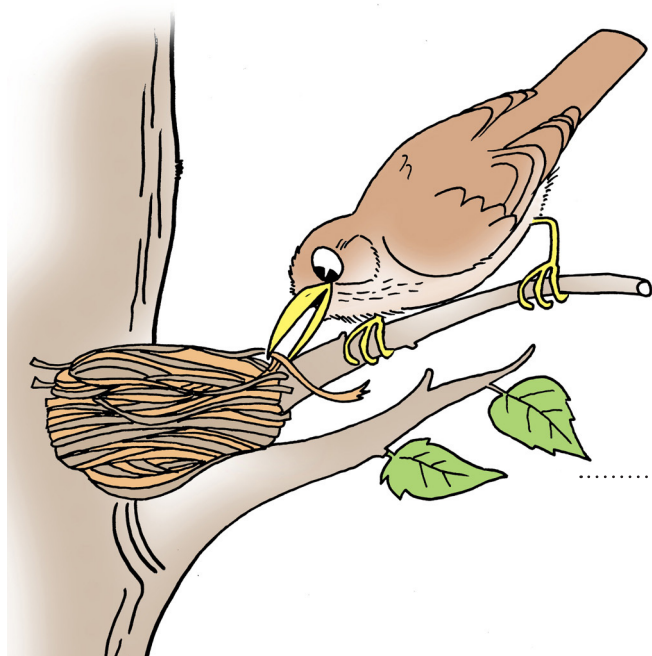
Typical materials include:

- Sticks and twigs (used by e.g. the Hooded Crow and the Common Magpie)
- Grasses and other such vegetation (e.g. the Pied Flycatcher, water-birds)
- Moss (e.g. tits)
- Mud (e.g. swallows)
- Animal hair and small feathers (e.g. tits)

HOW TO FIND IT: Look closely at the beaks of flying birds and the birds bustling about on the ground. Does the bird have something in its beak? Is it collecting something from the ground?

TIP: On the day before your trip, leave some brushed dog hair on the ground or on branches at the edge of a forest, for example. If there is less hair or the hair has disappeared the next day, leave some more, and come to see if the birds come back during your trip.





3. A bird builds a nest

■ While most birds seek to hide their nests, some birds are open about their nest construction. The easiest ones to observe are woodpeckers excavating holes in trees, corvids building their nest out of twigs, and waterbirds piling up material for their nest.

HOW TO FIND IT:

- **Woodpeckers:** Listen for a knocking sound and follow it.
- **Corvids:** Observe the trees and follow the birds that carry twigs.
- **Waterbirds:** Observe the birds from a birdwatching tower, for example, and follow (with your eyes) the birds that are carrying nest material.

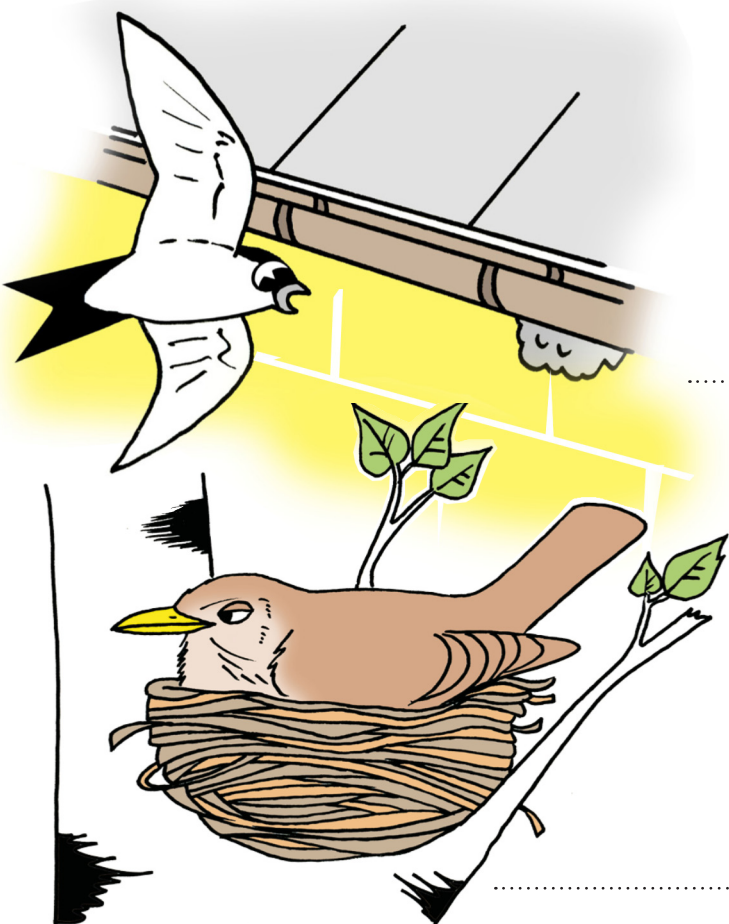
4. A bird often goes to a possible nest site

■ Even if a nest is impossible to see, a bird can reveal its location by its behaviour. If a certain place has constant traffic, i.e. a bird or birds are frequently going back and forth to a possible nest site, there is most likely a nest there.

Typical species:

- Swallows (under the eaves of houses, inside old barns and other outbuildings)
- The House Sparrow, the Tree Sparrow, the Spotted Flycatcher and the White Wagtail (between rocks, in a woodpile, in wall cavities, in a vent, in the horizontal tube of an electric pole etc.)

HOW TO FIND IT: Look at the birds' behaviour – does a bird or birds often visit the same place?



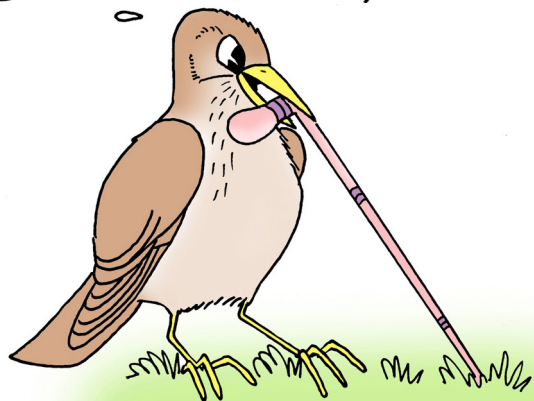
5. A bird incubates on its nest

■ An incubating bird is usually difficult to observe, because they try to hide themselves as well as possible.

The easiest ones to spot are waterbirds, such as swans, grebes and gulls.

HOW TO FIND IT: Pay attention and look for:

- Waterbirds sitting still (see if the bird seems to be sitting on a nest)
- Bird nests on trees or elsewhere (try to discern if there is a bird sitting there by using binoculars, for example)



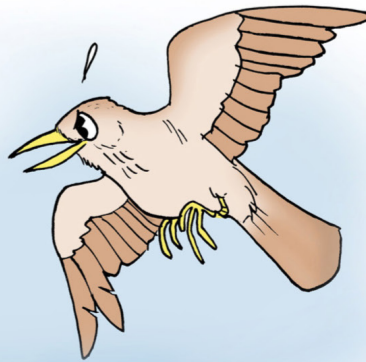
6. A bird carries food

■ Chicks that stay in their nest after hatching have to be fed tens or even hundreds of times a day. Parent birds that have nestlings to feed are therefore constantly searching for food and carry food to their nest almost non-stop.

Typical foods:

- **Most landbirds:** insects, caterpillars, earthworms and other small creatures.
- **Birds of prey:** prey typical of the species, e.g. mice.
- **Waterbirds:** the chicks often leave the nest soon after hatching and usually look for their food themselves. Fishing birds, such as loons and grebes, feed their young with small fish.

HOW TO FIND IT: Look closely at the flying (or swimming) birds. Does the bird have something in its beak?



7. A bird warns or attacks towards a predator or a person

■ Most birds emit alarm calls when a person or a potential predator is too close to their nest/chicks. Their intention can be to warn the other birds, to let the predator know that it has been seen, and/or to draw the predator's attention to the parent bird instead of the nest/chicks.

Small bird species often have clear, sharp and short alarm calls, e.g. "it-it-it!" When one of them starts calling, the other birds nearby often join the choir. Thrushes and woodpeckers, among others, also often give loud alarm calls.

Many parent birds also defend their nest and chicks by flying at the intruder and harassing it. The most common nest robber is the Hooded Crow, which may be chased after by several birds, with a noisy accompaniment. Few birds dare to attack towards humans, but especially terns, gulls, corvids and Fieldfares may do so. The attacks are practically always false attacks, meaning the bird will not actually strike the human. They can e.g. defecate on the disturber, however. Large waterbirds may spread their wings, come towards you and hiss. (If the situation feels threatening, back off a little.)

HOW TO FIND IT: Listen for possible alarm calls and keep an eye on the birds' behaviour. Nervous or harassing behaviour of parent birds, intense calling and especially the chasing of a nest robber are often easy to observe.

8. Sounds of chicks from a nest or a nest box

■ Nestlings chirp particularly when a parent bird is bringing them food. Some birds, especially young woodpeckers, make constant noise ("ki-ki-ki-ki...").

HOW TO FIND IT:

- If you see a parent bird going to a nest or a nest box (especially with food in their beak), listen closely.
- If you hear young woodpeckers chirping in the forest, follow the sound and try to find the nest.

9. Young birds that have already left their nest

■ Many young birds are easy to spot once they have left their nest.

Particularly the young of waterbirds typically follow their parents for many weeks, some even until their autumn migration.

The parents of many landbird species continue to feed their young after they have left the nest, and the young birds can be seen alone or with the parents. These young birds are the same size as adult birds, but often paler in colour and looking a bit "bewildered". When a parent bird comes to bring food, young birds often beg for it by opening their beaks wide and flapping their wings, sometimes also by making sounds.

HOW TO FIND IT: Pay attention and try to spot e.g.:

- Waterbird broods.
- The young of small birds that are waiting or begging for food from their parents in bushes, in yards, on tree branches etc.

