



Help nesting birds

Spring is in the air and that means lots of birds are preparing to build nests and raise their chicks. Birds' nests are built for incubating eggs (keeping them warm) and to ensure that young birds are safe and snug.

The design and materials used in a nest vary depending on the type of bird building it. For example, a woodpigeon's nest is an untidy pile of twigs in a tree or on a ledge. A long-tailed tit's nest is a beautiful and impressive-looking enclosed dome, which can take three weeks to build. Long-tailed tits hide their nests deep in hedges or bushes and construct them using lichens (plant-like organisms) cobwebs and moss. They line the nest with up to 1,500 feathers to keep the eggs and chicks warm and cosy.

Some birds, including owls, nest in tree hollows, and some on the ground. Puffins raise their chicks in burrows like rabbits; skylarks nest on the ground among plants and grass that is at least 20 centimetres tall.

Whether you have a garden or not, here are a few tips for you to help any nesting birds in your area.



HARD TO PLEASE
Male wrens build up to 12 nests for females to choose from.

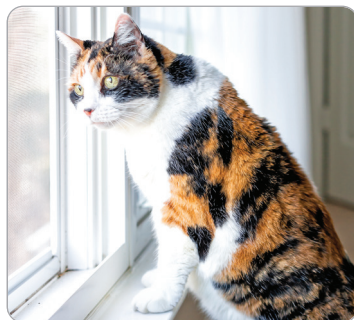


Feed and water them

Raising a chick requires lots of energy. Blackbirds and blue tits carry more than twice their own bodyweight to build the perfect nest. Help out by providing food and clean water. You can buy a bird feeder or put out unwanted scraps. Try fresh and dried fruits; grains and seeds, like oats or sunflower seeds; and unsalted nuts. You can also put out leftovers like uncooked fat (such as bacon rind) but hang it up so as not to attract rats or mice.

Keep them safe

Place food off the ground, preferably high up, or in an open area where birds can see predators. Fitting a bell to a pet cat's collar ensures they can't sneak up on birds. When baby birds are fledging (learning to fly), try to keep pets out of the garden. Keeping cats inside around sunset, sunrise and after bad weather (when birds tend to feed) helps too. In wild areas such as woods, which can be home to ground-nesting birds, put dogs on a lead in breeding season.



Leave nature alone

The RSPB bird charity advises people not to cut down trees or shrubs or trim hedges in spring or summer. Wait for autumn. Mowing lawns less also helps to attract insects, which birds eat. Don't clear moss from the lawn or between paving stones – birds use it to build nests, along with dead leaves and grass. If you groom your pet, put any hair you collect in a tree crack for the birds but make sure it doesn't have any flea or worm treatment on it.

Give them a home

You can buy wooden bird boxes – like little houses – from garden centres or from the RSPB. You can also make them but they have to be waterproof and built from wood. Robins and wrens like a large opening but sparrows and blue tits prefer a small hole. Ask permission before putting up a bird box. Place it high on a tree, wall or building facing between north and east. This shelters it and keeps it from getting too hot or wet.



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SCAN ME