

# The Best Nest

By Doris L. Mueller  
Illustrations by Sherry Neidigh



# The Best Nest

Long ago, the magpies' nests were the envy of all other birds. To help the other birds, Maggie Magpie patiently explained how to build a nest. But some birds were impatient and flew off without listening to all the directions, which is why, to this day, birds' nests come in all different shapes and sizes. This clever retelling of an old English folktale teaches the importance of careful listening.

It's so much more than a picture book . . . this book is specifically designed to be both a fun-to-read story and a launch pad for discussions and learning. Whether read at home or in a classroom, we encourage adults to do the activities with the young children in their lives. Free online resources and support at [www.ArbordalePublishing.com](http://www.ArbordalePublishing.com) include:

- For Creative Minds as seen in the book (in English & Spanish):
  - Bird Fun Facts
  - Bird Math
  - Is it Injured?
  - A Match the Nest Activity for:
    - ~ Magpie
    - ~ Killdeer
    - ~ Screech-owl
    - ~ Brewer's Blackbird
    - ~ Whip-poor-will
    - ~ Northern Oriole
    - ~ Common Grackle
    - ~ Robin
    - ~ Starling
    - ~ Meadowlark
    - ~ Mourning Dove
- Teaching Activities:
  - Reading Questions
  - Language Arts
  - Science
  - Mathematics
  - Geography
  - Coloring Pages
- Interactive Quizzes: Reading Comprehension, For Creative Minds, and Math Word Problems
- English and Spanish Audiobooks
- Related Websites
- Aligned to State Standards (searchable database)
- Accelerated Reader and Reading Counts! Quizzes
- Lexile and Fountas & Pinnell Reading Levels

eBooks with Auto-Flip, Auto-Read, and selectable English and Spanish text and audio available for purchase online.

Thanks to Anne Hobbs, Dr. Miyoko Chu, and Katherine Smith of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology for verifying the accuracy of the information in this book.

**Doris L. Mueller** (pronounced Miller) has been a teacher and professor at every level from kindergarten through graduate school. Her previous books include a picture book, *Small One's Adventure*, a middle-grade novel, *Marryin' Sam*, and a biography, *M. Jeff Thompson: Missouri's Swamp Fox*. Doris recalls that whenever she failed to listed to instructions, her mother would tell her an Old English Tale of how, when the magpie tried to teach the birds how to build a beautiful, strong nest like hers, all but one failed to attend to her instructions and went off to build inadequate nests. She retold the story, substituting birds native to the US, and added factual information telling how various birds build their nests.

**Sherry Neidigh**, a graduate of Ringling School of Art and Design, has been freelance illustrating for over twelve years. Sherry's love of animals and nature comes through in her bright, colorful art. In addition to illustrating *The Best Nest*, *Count Down to Fall*, and *Deep in the Desert* for Arbordale, Sherry has illustrated several trade and education titles including *Who Needs That Nose?* and *If I Had a Tail*.



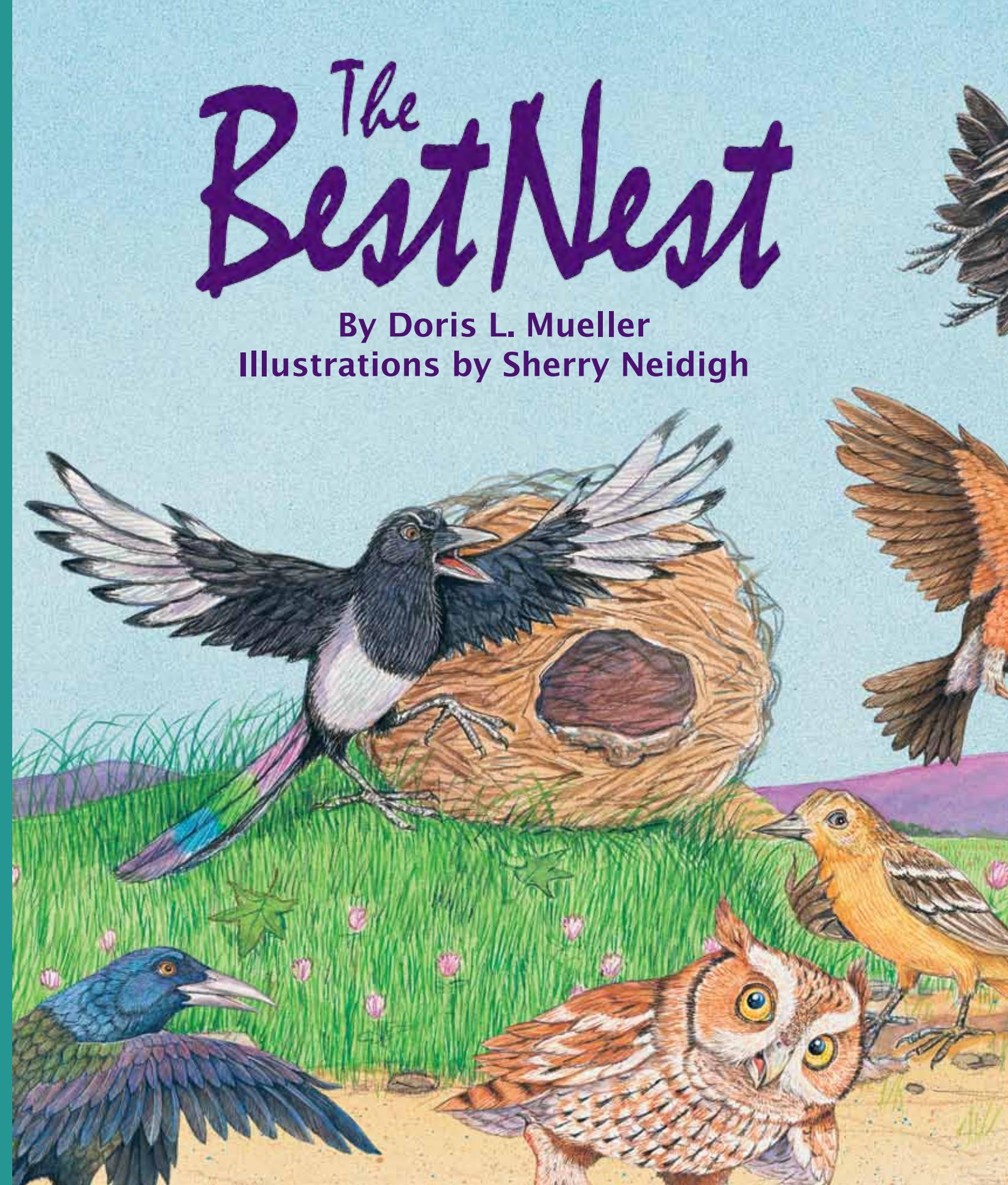
**Doris L. Mueller**



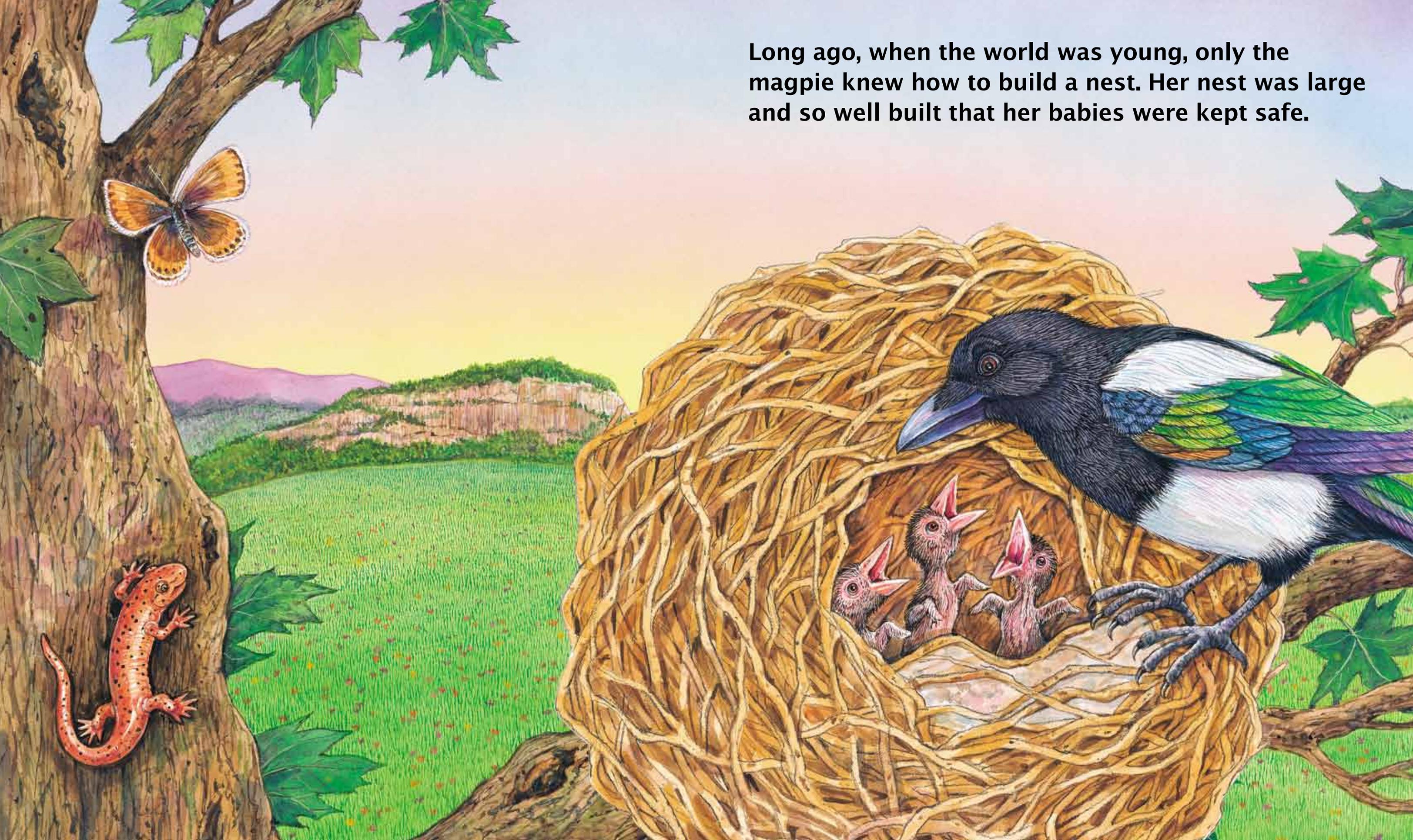
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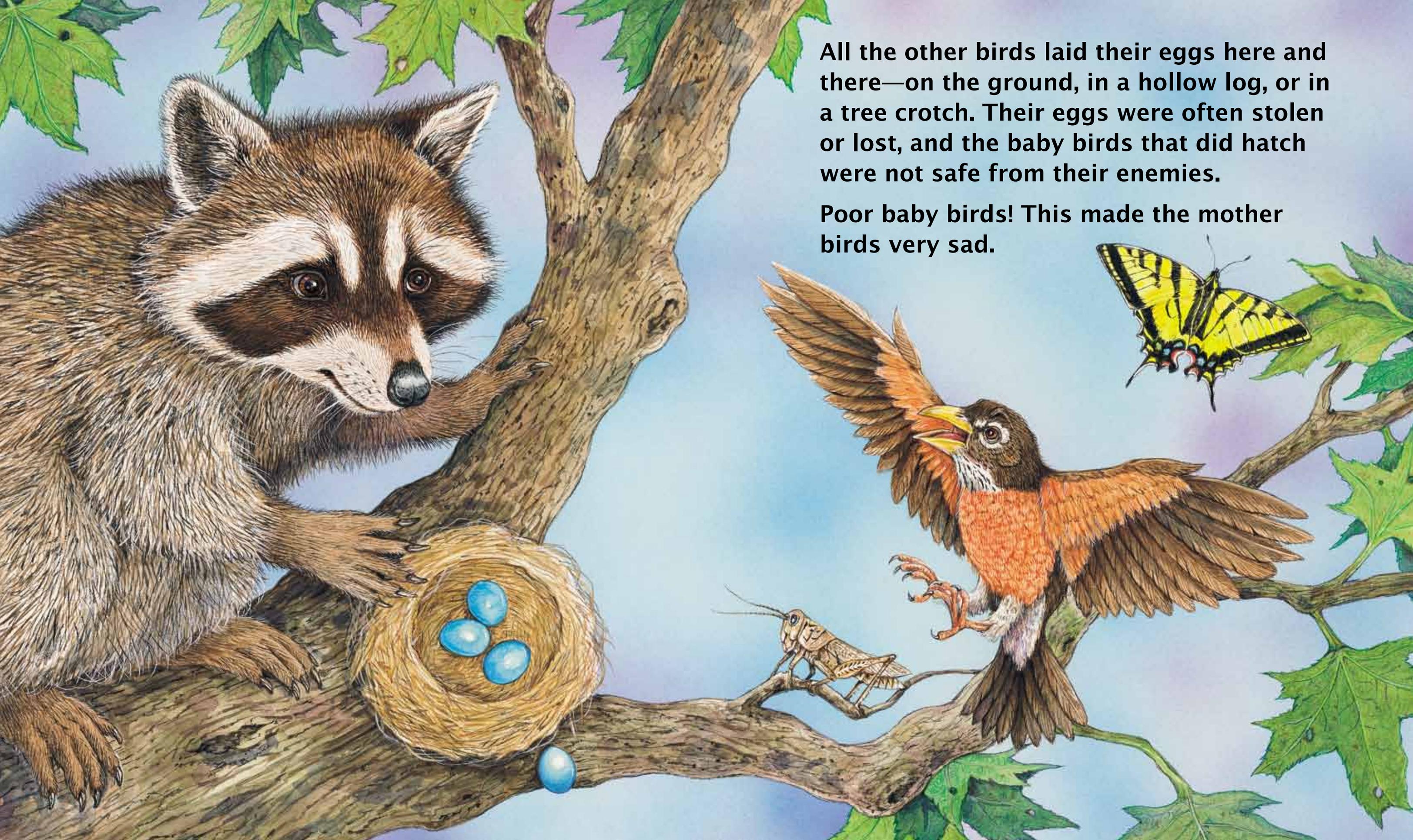
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Long ago, when the world was young, only the magpie knew how to build a nest. Her nest was large and so well built that her babies were kept safe.





All the other birds laid their eggs here and there—on the ground, in a hollow log, or in a tree crotch. Their eggs were often stolen or lost, and the baby birds that did hatch were not safe from their enemies.

Poor baby birds! This made the mother birds very sad.

One day a mother bird said to her friend, "Let's ask Maggie Magpie to show us how to build a nest." So off they went to the magpie and said, "We know how clever you are and that you have a strong nest to hold your eggs and protect your babies. We want to learn how to build a nest just like yours. Then our eggs and chicks will be safe too. Won't you please teach us?"



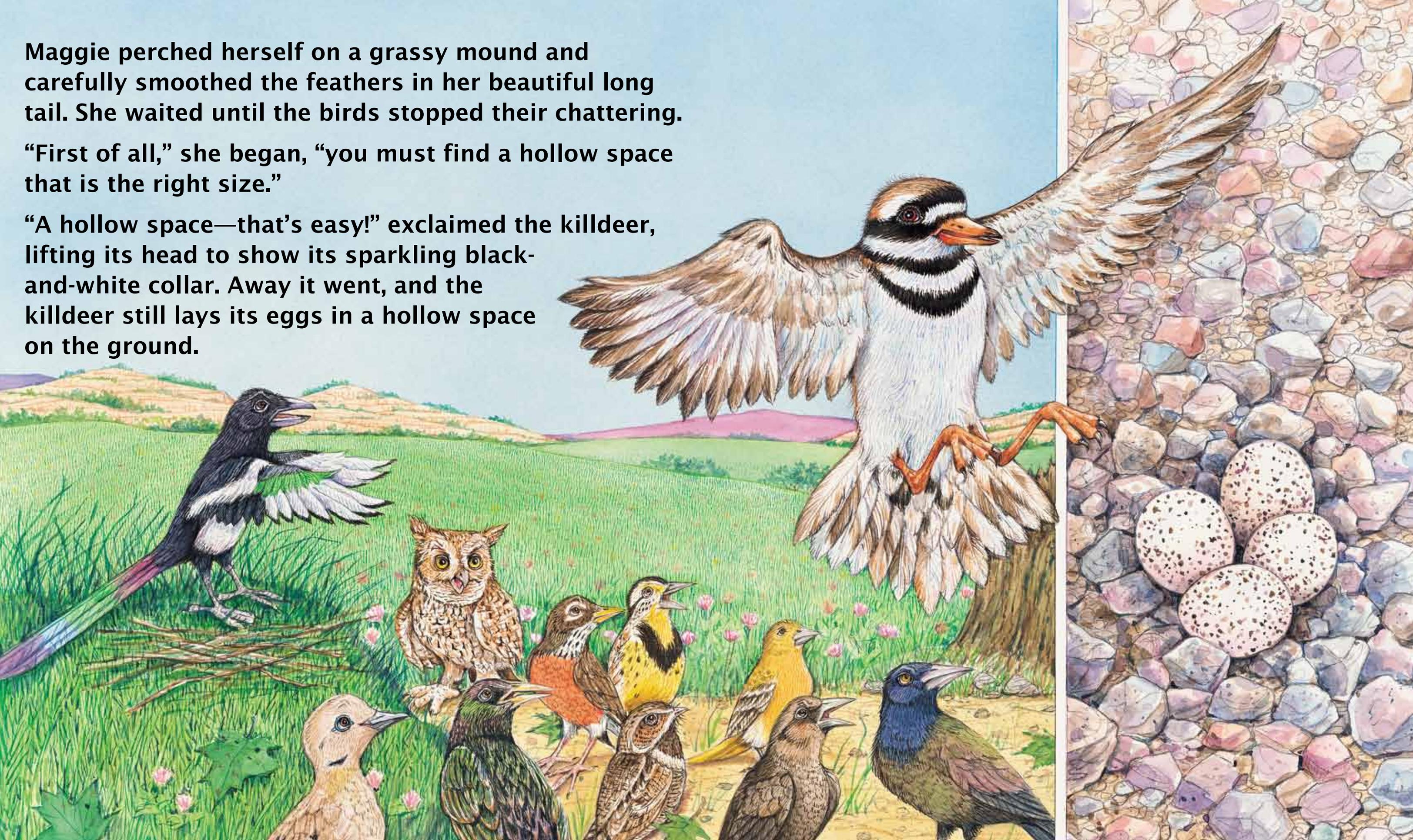
Maggie puffed up her feathers. "I'll be glad to." At once she flew about, busily collecting materials. Twittering and chirping, the other birds arranged themselves on the ground so they could see and hear.



**Maggie perched herself on a grassy mound and carefully smoothed the feathers in her beautiful long tail. She waited until the birds stopped their chattering.**

**“First of all,” she began, “you must find a hollow space that is the right size.”**

**“A hollow space—that’s easy!” exclaimed the killdeer, lifting its head to show its sparkling black-and-white collar. Away it went, and the killdeer still lays its eggs in a hollow space on the ground.**



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## Bird Fun Facts



Scientists sort animals into different classes. All the animals in this book are birds. While all birds have **feathers**, not all birds can fly (penguins do not fly). Birds **lay eggs**, **breathe air**, and are **warm blooded**.

Most birds build a nest that is hidden (**camouflaged**) or is hard for predators to reach. A nest may be made out of different things; you might even find dog hair or ribbons woven into nests.



male oriole



Quite often **male** birds have bright feathers or coloring to attract a mate. It is usually the **female** who builds a nest, but sometimes the male or both male and female will build the nest together. Birds don't really need to learn how to build their nests; they are born knowing how (**instinct**).

female oriole

## Bird Math



**Robins** lay two broods of three to six eggs.



**Screech Owls** have only one brood a year but they lay between two and seven eggs, depending on the type of screech owl.



**Killdeers** have one or two broods a year with three to five eggs in each brood.

Which bird might lay the most eggs in a year? How many eggs?  
Which bird might lay the fewest eggs in a year? How many eggs?  
Why do you think birds have so many babies at a time?

### Is it Injured?

If you see a fledgling on the ground, that does not mean it is injured or abandoned. It might just be learning how to fly or to find its own food. If it has no visible injury, you should keep pets away and leave it alone. Observe the bird from inside or far away so that the parent birds can reach it.

You should get help for the bird only if you can see a visible injury, you know for sure that the parents are dead, or the bird has been alone for over eight hours and it is now dark. It is illegal to care for migratory birds and most songbirds and you need to get the bird to an avian (bird) vet or a bird rehabilitator. Check the phone book or internet to find one in your area. Don't try to feed the bird.



## Match the Nest Activity

Read the descriptions and match the nests to the correct birds.



### a. Magpie

The magpie builds a large bulky bowl of mud and grass surrounded by a latticework of sticks that point in all directions. The nest, which has a side entrance, is located high in trees.



### b. Baltimore Oriole

The oriole carefully weaves a deep hanging pouch of plant fibers, hair, yarn, or string, and attaches it to a tree branch. This pouch, or sack, has a top opening. The nest is lined with hair, wool, or fine grasses. The female usually builds the nest while her mate stays nearby and sings. It can take from five to eight or more days to build this intricate nest.



### c. Starling

This bird makes a sloppy nest. The male starts to build the nest in a hole in a tree or other opening, but the female often removes what he has done and adds her own materials. She fills the hole with grass, twigs, or dry leaves.



### d. Common Grackle

The female builds a loose nest of weeds and grasses, with some help from her mate in the early stages. Sometimes she reinforces the nest with mud on the inside and lines it with grass or feathers.



### e. Mourning Dove

This bird often finds a deserted nest, and the male brings sticks to the female to place in the nest. The female builds a careless platform of sticks with little, if any, lining of grass or weeds. The nest is so loosely made that it often falls apart in a storm.



6.



7.



8.



9.



10.



11.

### f. Whip-poor-will

This bird makes no nest; it lays its eggs on the ground on dead leaves.



### g. Meadowlark

The female does all the work on the nest. First, she finds a depression in the ground that pleases her. She forms the base of the nest, lining it with coarse dry grasses and an inner lining of fine grasses. Then she builds a dome-shaped roof of grasses which she weaves into nearby plants.



### h. Brewer's Blackbird

Her nest is on the ground, in shrubs, or in trees. She uses twigs or grasses made stronger with mud or cow dung.



### i. Robin

The robin builds her nest early in the spring and may place it in an evergreen shrub or tree fork. Her nest is a deep cup, which she shapes by sitting in it and pressing her breast against the edges. The nest is made of grass, weed stalks, and strips of cloth or string worked into soft mud. It is lined with fine grass.



### j. Screech-owl

The female lays her eggs in a natural opening or a hole in a tree.



### k. Killdeer

The male scrapes several hollows in an open stretch of ground, and the female chooses one of them. She adds a few pebbles and bits of grass or woodchips to line the depression.





To my mother: who first told me stories—DLM

For my Boy Scout nephew, Nick, and in memory of my dad, James Neidigh, for his love of carving birds—SN

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Publisher's Cataloging-In-Publication Data

Mueller, Doris L.

The best nest / by Doris L. Mueller ; illustrated by Sherry Neidigh.

p. : col. ill. ; cm.

Summary: In this retelling of an old English folktale featuring birds native to the U.S., Magpie patiently explains to the other birds how to build a nest.

Some birds are impatient and fly off without listening to all the directions, however, and that is why, to this day, birds' nests come in all different shapes and sizes.

Includes "For Creative Minds" section.

Interest age level: 004-008.

Interest grade level: P-3.

ISBN: 978-1-934359-09-9 (hardcover)

ISBN: 978-1-934359-25-9 (pbk.)

1. Birds--Nests--Juvenile fiction. 2. Magpies--Juvenile fiction.

3. Listening--Juvenile fiction. 4. Birds--Nests--Fiction.

5. Magpies--Fiction. 6. Listening--Fiction. 7. Folklore. I. Neidigh, Sherry. II. Title.

PZ8.1.M84 Be 2008

398.24/52/8256 [E]

2007935084

Lexile Level 510

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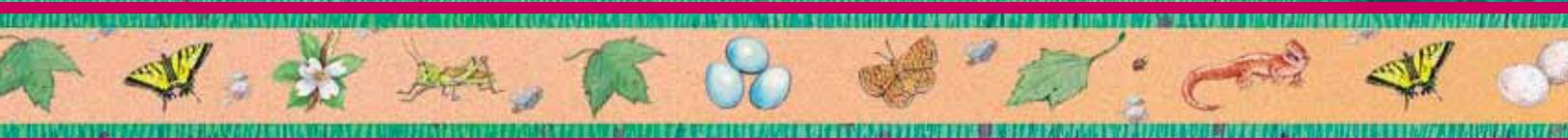
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Arbordale Publishing

formerly Sylvan Dell Publishing

Mt. Pleasant, SC 29464

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