

Bird Architects

By Michèle Dufresne



1 **Most birds build a new nest each year.**

They use mud, leaves, and even saliva to build a safe place to lay their eggs and keep their babies safe.

2 **Giant Haystacks**

The sociable weaver is a bird that builds a massive structure that looks like a hay bale. The nest is more like an apartment building, with more than 100 birds working together to build and maintain it. The thatched roof protects the birds from the desert heat during the day and the cold at night.

3 **Camouflaged**

The male and female golden-headed cisticola (*sis-TIC-ola*) collaborate to make their nest. These clever birds collect spiderwebs and use the threads to sew leaves together into a special covering. The male bird uses its beak to pierce the leaves. It then passes the thread to the female, who works from inside the nest. The leafy covering helps to camouflage the nest from predators.

4 **Layers of Spit**

Edible-nest swiftlets make their nests in hard-to-reach places, such as roofs and cliffsides, and high on the walls of caves. The tiny teacup-size nests are just big enough to hold two eggs. But instead of twigs or leaves, the nests are made of layers of saliva! The birds spit onto the rock and wait for the saliva to harden into a tough white substance, then they add another layer. In some parts of the world, people collect these nests and dissolve them into soup. Some of them believe that eating the soup will make them healthy. Others may just be trying to get rich—a pound of these bird nests can cost more than \$1,000!



Sections of a swiftlet's edible nest

5 **Mud Igloos**

Cliff swallows build their nests tightly together, on top of one another, along cliffs and in the eaves of buildings. The female and male birds work together to gather pellets of wet mud in their beaks. The pellets are laid down one by one until they harden into a rounded dome, making a strong nest that looks like an igloo made of mud. The birds then make a tiny opening at the top that they can barely fit into.



6 **Big and Small**

The bald eagle makes an unusually large nest. The female and male build the nest far off the ground in very tall trees or on high cliffs. They start by layering branches and sticks together. The mother or father eagle will stay with their young, while the other parent hunts for food to bring to the nest. Bald eagles work on their nests a little more each year, adding layers until it's so big that a human could sit in it.



7 Female hummingbirds make their nests in trees and shrubs. The tiny cup-shaped nests are so small that they sometimes look like the knot of a tree. They are made by weaving together spiderwebs with feathers and leaves.



Inside their tiny nests, hummingbirds lay the tiniest eggs of any bird; they're even smaller than a jelly bean! As the babies hatch and grow, the sides of the nest stretch to make space for them.

8 All around the world, birds build different kinds of nests to best suit their needs. No matter what material they are made of, all nests are built for one purpose: to protect eggs and hatchlings.

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Test Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. Which of the following is the main idea of the passage “Bird Architects”?

- a) Birds use different materials to build their nests and to protect their offspring.
- b) Birds use spiderwebs to build a strong nest.
- c) Birds make their nests bigger than they need to make room for their offspring.
- d) Birds make a new nest every year to protect their eggs.

2. What does the word *clever* mean as it is used in the paragraph below?

These **clever** birds collect spiderwebs and use the threads to sew leaves together into a special covering. The male bird uses its beak to pierce the leaves. It then passes the thread to the female, who works from inside the nest. The leafy covering helps to camouflage the nest from predators.

- a) cautious
- b) skillful
- c) curious
- d) hopeful

3. How do the cisticola and the hummingbird build their nests in a similar way?

- a) The male and the female birds work together.
- b) The nests look like teacups.
- c) They use spiderwebs in their nests.
- d) They make their nests in layers.

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Test Questions (continued)

4. How does the phrase *like an igloo* help the reader understand the text in the section “Mud Igloos”?

- a) It provides information on the shape of their nest.
- b) It provides information on the materials they use to build their nest.
- c) It provides information on where they build their nest.
- d) It provides information on the size of the nest.

5. Select the comparison statement below that is a true statement about birds.

- a) The cliff swallow and the eagle are similar because they reuse their nests.
- b) The sociable weaver and the hummingbird are similar because they collaborate.
- c) The nests of the hummingbird and the sociable weaver are similar in size.
- d) The swiftlet and the eagle are similar because they build their nests in layers.