

This is the season to build a nest!

Birds make their nests from all sorts of materials that they gather from the place in which they live.

Moss, spider webs, damp mud, roots, grass, animal hair, twigs, feathers, dry leaves and even tennis ball fluff.....

Bird's nests come in all shapes and sizes and are built in many different places. Up trees, on the ground in grassland and open heathland, in and on buildings, in holes in riverbanks, on cliff tops and on ice. Whatever the habitat birds find a place to lay their eggs.

Nests help keep the eggs and chicks safe.



Why not have a go at building your own nest this spring and discover just how skilled our feathered friends are.

- Search your garden or local walking route to see what materials there are about. Remember only collect things that are no longer living. Please don't pick or pull up plants.
- Once you have gathered together all your available resources have a go at building a nest. You could try using clay or damp mud to hold it all together or use grass and twigs to form a base.
- If you take any pictures of your nests that you would like to share please send them to education@ashdownforest.org.uk We would love to see how you get on.
- Remember if you are out walking at this time of year stick to the paths to avoid disturbing ground nesting birds.

If you would like to find out more about some of the birds that nest on the Ashdown Forest read the sheet below.

Birds of Ashdown Forest

Look up some pictures of these bird species so you can identify them.



Dartford Warbler

These small birds spend much of their time in the safety of the spiky gorse bushes on the heathlands where they find lots of spiders to eat.

They nest close to the ground often inside gorse bushes. They make their nest with grass which they then line with soft roots and feathers. The prickly gorse helps keep their nest safe from predators.

Woodlark

You may hear this bird out on the open heathland singing high above you. In summer they hunt for beetles, caterpillars and spiders to feed their young.

Woodlarks hide their nests near the ground under heather bushes or grass tussocks.

Nightjar

This bird hardly builds any nest at all but instead finds a gap on the floor in-between the heather plants. The bits and pieces of old plants on the heathland floor help camouflage the eggs so that the nest sites are almost impossible to find.

If you want to see a Nightjar you will need to be out on the heath at dusk in early summer.

You can listen to the nightjars incredible call on our audio trail <https://www.ashdownforest.org/enjoy/AudioTour.php>.

Wren

This tiny bird makes a domed nest from moss, dry grass, leaves and bracken. As well as a place to lay their eggs, nests are sometimes used as roost sites in winter. Several birds can squeeze into a single nest to keep warm.

At the start of the season the male bird can make several nests for the female bird to choose from. Once she chooses her preferred nest she lines it with feathers to make it soft and warm.

Stonechat

Stonechats nest on or near the ground amongst heather and gorse bushes on the heathland. The female builds a nest from grass and moss and lines it with hair, wool and feathers.

If you walk on the heathland you might see the Stonechat sitting on top of a bush flicking its wings out. One of its calls is like the sound of two stones being knocked together.

Swallow

These birds are summer visitors to our country. You may see them swooping about hunting for insects often over farmland and grassland.

Swallows like to nest on ledges in barns, sheds and outbuildings. They make their nest by collecting damp mud from the edge of ponds and puddles. They build up a cup shaped nest by sticking blobs of mud and grass together.

Hobby

Hobbies are small falcons. They specialise in hunting dragonflies and small birds. To catch a dragonfly you need to be fast and agile. They can sometimes be seen hunting over the heathland ponds and bogs. They are another bird that spends the winter in Africa. They return to the UK in late March / April.

They don't tend to build their own nest but instead make use of the stick ones one made by a crows.