

Our Feathered Friends – Amazing Nest Builders

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(A class two, springtime main lesson)

In Australia we are blessed with an amazing array of colourful bird life and if we observe closely we can discover a fascinating diversity of building materials, building sites and building techniques that birds employ in their nest building.

Why Class Two?

The children's growing consciousness leads them naturally to begin to differentiate between various members of the bird family. The name "small bird" might satisfy a 5/6 year old, but the name "blue-wren" or "fire tail finch" better meets the growing awareness and kindles the imagination of a 7/8 year old explorer.

Nest 'hunting' can also provide a focus and an added dimension to class two studies of the local environment – as well as linking to other nature/social studies topics in classes three and four. The nest building theme can serve as a prelude to the class three house building activities. The children can discover that, although there is great variety of material and technique for 'house' building within the bird kingdom, there is actually very little variation within each bird type.

(For example: magpies will always build a nest of similar size and design – made from small sticks.)

For the children this practical knowledge can add potency to ideas of human freedom/choice that arise in the study of human house building (Class 3) and human and animal studies (Class 4/5).

Why spring time?

It's when it's all happening of course!

In Mount Barker, South Australia, the optimum month to discover bird nest 'action' is September. Although many birds have completed building their new nests by early September, I have found that the whole of September offers the added delights of discovering eggs, new hatchlings and fledglings about to leave home.





The children and I, after much fun-filled 'house hunting', drawing and recording, managed to come up with twelve general types of nest (considering design, site and materials).

- 1 – Twig nest (wattle-bird, noisy myna, pigeon, tawny frog-mouth)
- 2 – Stick nest (magpie, raven, currawong, heron, birds of prey)
- 3 – Plant fibres i.e. grass/bark/root – in a cup shape (many small birds)
- 4 – Cobwebs (willie-wag-tail, grey fantail)
- 5 – Roof and walls/side door (fairy-wrens, finches)
- 6 – Hanging baskets (thorn-bills, silver-eyes, some honey-eaters)

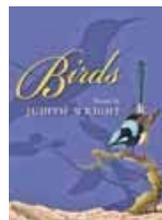


- 7 – Mud bricks (magpie, lark, chough, apostle-bird, swallows)
- 8 – Tree hollows (parrot/cockatoo clan, owls, kookaburras, kingfishers, some ducks, most pardalotes)
- 9 – On ground (plovers, quail, some ducks)
- 10 – Floating (swans, water hens, grebes)
- 11 – Underground:
 - a. tunnels (bee-eaters, some pardalotes, some kingfishers)
 - b. burrows (fairy-penguin, shearwaters)
- 12 – Mound-builders (brush-turkey, mallee fowl)

As the last main lesson of term three, these studies added to the joy and gave a particular focus for us within the wider experience of nature renewing itself as we built towards our Spring Festival. Each day had an element of anticipation and each of our four or five 'hunting expeditions' had a quality of treasure hunting.

The children carried on their nest hunting outside of school time so many exciting findings were reported each morning at school.

'Spin-offs' for us included the forming of a class bird watching club and also the building of nesting boxes as a class three building project the following year – gifts for our fabulous, flighty, feathered friends. ♦



Note: a great resource is *Birds: Poems* by Judith Wright, ISBN: 9780642107749, National Library of Australia, April 2010, 88pp, pb, 215x160mm