Building Animals

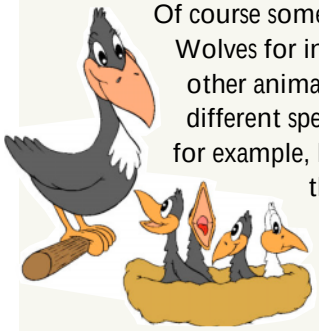
By Jenna Poole

Why do animals build homes?

Just like you and I, most warm-blooded animals (such as birds and mammals) build homes as shelter from the wind, rain and heat. Some species have to create a home safe and strong enough to last an entire winter as they hibernate. Polar bears for example, after eating their fill for the summer, begin "denning-up" in the snow and ice, where they remain undisturbed for months.

Animal homes also act as protection from predators, this is especially important when there is young to feed and keep safe. Other animals use their homes as traps to catch their prey. Spiders put many hours and a lot of energy into building a web to catch flies and other insects and will then probably spend it's whole life sitting on this web waiting.

Squatters



Of course some species do not build their own homes at all. Wolves for instance use the long-abandoned homes of other animals. Other animals invade the nests of different species leave their young in their care. Cuckoos, for example, lay their eggs in the nest of small birds (like the Reed warbler) and when the egg hatches the young Cuckoo will push the warbler's own young from the nest and take all the food for itself!

Building Materials

Twigs and other dead plant material are the favoured building materials of most birds for their nests high up in the canopy. The start of the breeding season is obvious to most of us when we start to see birds flying back and forth with beaks full of sticks. These sturdy platforms are often lined with soft feathers or scraps of sheep wool, and come in a range of shapes and sizes.

House martins are birds that tend to build their nests in the roofs of houses or barns and use a mixture of mud and sticks to construct a solid structure in which they can leaves their young until there are ready to fly themselves.

Some animals will not gather many additional materials at all, but will dig large and complicated tunnels and dens in the earth. Badger sets are excavated in carefully chosen sites according to food and water supply and security, and may contain many generations and up to 12 individuals.

A colony of bees will find a large hollow in the ground or a tree trunk and, using wax that they produce themselves, build massive amounts of combs to store the honey they produce for food. In a similar way, some wasps produce a paper pulp by combining their saliva with chewed wood to build their large, complex nests.