



Nest Type: Floating

Home of: Red-Necked Grebe (*Podiceps grisegena*)

For red-necked grebes, nest building is a mom-and-pop operation. These birds stay with the same mate for many years.

When it comes time to lay eggs, a pair of grebes work together to build a nest in a quiet corner of a lake or pond. The couple gather plant materials that float, such as reeds and dead branches, into a stack. They pile dead materials on top of them

and shape a shallow bowl at the top of the heap, forming a nest 1 to 4 feet in diameter.

When the nest is ready, the mom grebe lays three to five eggs in the middle. After a little less than a month, the eggs hatch. The baby birds hop into the water, and the family leaves the nest behind.

Other Minnesota birds that build floating nests include coots and gallinules.

Fun Fact: The male grebe often does more of the nest-building work than the female does.

Nest Type: Cup

Home of: Ruby-Throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*)

One of the world's tiniest birds' nests is the nest of the ruby-throated hummingbird. Fully formed, it's about as big around as a golf ball.

The female builds the nest. She starts by finding a tree branch in a secretive spot. She gathers soft materials such as dandelion seeds and sticks them to the branch

DOMINIQUE BRAUD

with tree resin or spider silk. Over the course of a week or so, she adds more soft materials along with other plant bits such as bud casings and pieces of leaves, weaving them together with spider silk. When the stack of stuff is big enough, she hops into the middle and shapes it all into a bowl shape by pinching the sides between her beak and her chest. For finishing touches, she glues bits of lichen around the outside, making it almost indistinguishable from the branch it's attached to.

Other Minnesota birds that build cup



nests include robins, yellow warblers, and goldfinches.

Fun Fact: The cup nest is the most common nest type in the bird world.

Nest Type: Dome

Home of: Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapilla*)

If you've ever seen a domed pizza oven, you know what an ovenbird's nest looks like. In the spring, mom ovenbird builds a nest in the dead leaves scattered on a forest floor. She starts by clearing the vegetation from a small area to make a shallow opening. She gathers other plant material such as grasses and tiny twigs into a circle around the chosen spot.

Standing in the middle, she weaves the plant parts together into a spherical shape. By the time she is done, she has woven a structure that reaches over her head to form an enclosed shelter a little



smaller than a volleyball with a hole in one side for coming and going. Before she lays her eggs, she lines the bottom of the nest with soft material such as animal fur.

Other Minnesota birds that build dome nests include magpies and marsh wrens.

Fun Fact: Despite the amount of effort that goes into construction, ovenbirds use their nest for only one season.

TOP: STAN TEKELA, BOTTOM: MICHAEL FURTMAN

Nest Type: Mud

Home of: Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)

Build a home out of mud and saliva? This bird is on it!

When they're ready to have a family, a barn swallow couple finds a hard vertical surface, preferably with a little ledge that provides a starting point for a nest and something hanging over the top that will protect it from rain. The birds fly about, gathering little beakfuls of mud and carrying them to the chosen spot.

First they build a flat platform by dropping bits of mud off and letting them dry into a claylike surface. They add more mud to create a bowl shape about as big around as a baseball. Peri-



odically they add pieces of grass or other plant material that helps the mud bits stick together. It can take up to 1,000 mud-gathering flights to build a single barn swallow nest.

Other Minnesota birds that build mud nests include phoebes and cliff swallows.

Fun Fact: Barn swallows move their heads rapidly when adding new bits of mud to their nest. This helps pop any air bubbles that might get trapped and weaken the structure.

Nest Type: Woven

Home of: Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*)

Among the most elaborate nests that Minnesota birds make is the hanging basket that a Baltimore oriole weaves. A female oriole starts by finding a forked branch toward the outside of a deciduous tree such as an elm or a maple. She gathers grass, hair, and other stringy stuff. She tangles some of the fibers around a twig to create a



TOP: STANT KEKELA, BOTTOM: MICHAEL FURTMAN.

starting point for the rest of the structure.

Bit by bit she weaves more strings into that knot and then into each other, much as a human basket maker would weave fibers to make a basket. Once the shape of the nest is defined, she adds

more fibers to the inside to strengthen it. Finally, she pads the bottom with soft materials such as feathers, milkweed silk, and moss.

Another Minnesota bird that builds a woven nest is the orchard oriole.

Fun Fact: The stretchy materials the oriole uses allow the nest to expand as the eggs hatch and the young grow bigger.




Nest Type: Mound

Home of: Common Loon (*Gavia immer*)

For Minnesota's state bird, nest building is just one thing on top of another—literally. In May or June, a male loon finds a spot on an island, a peninsula, or the edge of a lake or pond that is sheltered from the wind.

Together, he and his mate heap up reeds, underwater plants, and other vegetation, picking up the items with their bills and

tossing them sideways onto the pile. One of the parents climbs up into the middle of the stack and smooths out a hollow by pushing down with its body and pulling up plant materials around it until it is big enough to hold two of their eggs, which are a little bigger than chicken eggs.

Another Minnesota bird that builds a mound nest is the sandhill crane. 

Fun Fact: A pair of loons will often reuse their nest the following year.

LEFT: RICHARD HAMILTON SMITH, RIGHT: TAMMY WOLFE.



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