

**BIRDNESTING: BEING A  
COMPLETE DESCRIPTION OF THE  
NESTS AND EGGS OF BIRDS  
WHICH BREED IN GREAT BRITAIN  
AND IRELAND**

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**Birdnesting: Being a Complete Description of the Nests and Eggs of Birds which Breed in Great Britain and Ireland by Edward Newman**

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**EDWARD NEWMAN**

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**BIRDSNESTING:**  
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A COMPLETE DESCRIPTION  
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NESTS AND EGGS  
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BY EDWARD NEWMAN,

AUTHOR OF 'THE INSECT HUNTERS,' 'A FAMILIAR INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY  
OF INSECTS,' 'A HISTORY OF BRITISH FERNS,' ETC., ETC.



Nest of the Longtailed Tit.

LONDON:  
EDWARD NEWMAN, 9, DEVONSHIRE STREET, BISHOPSGATE.  
1861.

PRICE ONE SHILLING.

Connubial leagues agreed, to the deep woods  
They haste away, all as their fancy leads,  
Pleasure, or food, or secret safety prompts;  
That Nature's great command may be obey'd;  
Nor all the sweet sensations they perceive  
Indulged in vain. Some to the holly hedge  
Nesting repair, and to the thicket some;  
Some to the rude protection of the thorn  
Commit their feeble offspring. The cleft tree  
Offers its kind concealment to a few,  
Their food its insects, and its moss their nests;  
Others, apart far in the grassy dale,  
Or roughening waste their humble texture weave.  
But most in woodland solitudes delight,  
In unfrequented glooms, or shaggy banks,  
Steep, and divided by a babbling brook,  
Whose murmurs soothe them all the livelong day,  
When by kind duty fix'd. Among the roots  
Of hazel, pendant o'er the pensive stream,  
They frame the first foundation of their domes;  
Dry sprigs of trees, in artful fabric laid,  
And bound with clay together. Now 'tis nought  
But restless hurry through the busy air,  
Beat by unnumbered wings. The swallow sweeps  
The slimy pool, to build his hanging house  
Intent. And often, from the careless back  
Of herds and flocks, a thousand tugging bills  
Pluck hair and wool; and oft, when unobserved,  
Steal from the barn a straw; till soft and warm,  
Clean and complete, their habitation grows.

THOMSON'S SEASONS.

## P R E F A C E .

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In preparing these notes for the press I have kept one object constantly in view, and that is utility: it is a very difficult task entirely to exclude the ornamental, whilst carefully retaining all that is useful, especially on such a subject as birdsnesting, where the mere mention of a name often calls up a host of recollections that require nothing more than a little word-painting to render them attractive to every reader. But this difficult and self-denying task I have achieved, in the belief that the better class of schoolboys who will make this little book the companion of their half-holiday rambles, will open it for information only. The limp cloth cover will then last a very long time, and the book may be bent in any manner without receiving the slightest injury; but I particularly recommend that it should be folded lengthwise, and that a breast-pocket should be made in the jacket, on the left side purposely to receive it.

With regard to classification, we have at present no systematic list of British birds that makes any pretensions to a natural arrangement; indeed, I believe the plan usually followed, and variously called the Quinarian, artificial, or Vigorsian method, is the worst that could be invented, since it is at direct variance with habits, manners, economy and physiology: this arises from the fact that its inventor paid little or no attention to the living bird; but, shut up among dried and shrivelled skins, worked out their classification with rule and compasses, exactly as he would a problem of Euclid. This will explain to you why the dove, which is always on the wing, is placed next to the pheasant, that is always on the ground; why the plovers and sandpipers, which are alike in appearance, which lay four eggs of a remarkable shape, beautifully coloured, and carefully arranged, with their small ends together, in a depression in the ground, without taking the trouble to make a nest; why these are separated from each other by the herons, which build enormous nests in trees and lay pale blue or white and unspotted eggs. I merely allude to this subject, because directly you begin to understand the nests and eggs of our English birds you will doubtless wonder at the manner in which the species succeed each other in the following list, which is strictly artificial, and is only followed by me because previously adopted by Mr. Yarrell, the author of the most complete work on British birds.

In many birds the range of variation in the colour of the eggs is so great that it is difficult to give any definition which shall be sufficiently

comprehensive to include them all; in such cases I have only noticed the more remarkable varieties, as in the tree pipit; the nest of this bird, as well as that of its congener, the meadow pipit, are built on the ground, and the two species use very nearly the same materials: the birds themselves are also nearly alike, and both are familiarly known by the name of "Titlark;" so that, even after taking infinite pains, it is difficult to avoid confusion in naming the eggs of these two birds; the eggs of the meadow pipit, however, vary but little. Again, in two closely allied species, the guillemot and Brunnich's guillemot, the diversity of colour appears almost endless, and each bird produces the same variations, or nearly so.

On the subject of authority great care should be taken not to place implicit credence in any author's descriptions: almost every author has committed grave errors: for instance, Mr. Selby describes the nest of the sedge warbler as suspended between reeds in the same manner as that of the reed wren; Mr. Yarrell says it seldom depends on reeds for support; Mr. Hewitson says it is occasionally found among reeds, like that of the reed wren, but in a less elevated position: thus the first of these accomplished authors makes a very great mistake, to which the second and third only give a modified correction: the bird rarely frequents reeds, and never suspends its nest amongst them.

On this and all questions of doubt or difficulty I have had the great advantage of the constant assistance of Mr. Bond and Mr. Doubleday, than whom this country has never produced more accomplished ornithologists or gentlemen who practically understand our British birds so well. To these gentlemen I am indebted for a few additional corrections, with which I have been favoured since the following pages have passed through the press.

Having directed my reader to the nests in their natural localities, and instructed him how to find and how to distinguish them, a very important subject yet remains. It is necessary to know how to treat the eggs when once they have been acquired: for this purpose I must refer to Mr. Newton's admirable 'Suggestions for forming a Collection of Birds' Eggs,' without which it appears to me almost impossible to acquire and preserve a collection with that system and good order which will alone render it really valuable.

In conclusion, I would particularly recommend that in every case where it is practicable the nest as well as the eggs should be preserved. I use the expression "practicable," because I am well aware that the nests of our larger birds can only be preserved where there is no restriction on the score of space; but among our smaller birds no such objection exists, and nothing is more easy than to preserve these lasting monuments of "instinctive genius."



## BIRDS' NESTS AND BIRDS' EGGS.

" It wins my admiration  
 To view the structure of that little work,  
 A bird's nest. Mark it well, within, without;  
 No tool had he that wrought, no knife to cut;  
 No nail to fix; no bodkin to insert;  
 No glas to join; his little beak was all,  
 And yet how neatly finished! What nice hand  
 With every implement and means of art,  
 And twenty years' apprenticeship to boot,  
 Could make me such another? Fondly then  
 We boast of excellence whose noblest skill  
 Instinctive genius shames."

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## ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS

MOST OBLIGINGLY SUGGESTED BY FREDERICK BOND, Esq., OF KINGSBURY,  
AND HENRY DOUBLEDAY, Esq., OF EPPING.

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In these memoranda the reader will observe that the word *add* signifies that the following paragraph is an addition to the text: where the word *add* does not occur, the new paragraph is to be substituted for the old one.

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SPARROWHAWK, p. 6.

*Eggs*, 4—6. Blueish white, with red-brown blotches.

BARN OWL, p. 8.

*Add*. The colour of the egg is omitted: it is white and unspotted.

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER, p. 8.

*Eggs*, 4, 5. Gray-white, with pale raw sienna spots; rarely pale blue, unspotted.

MISSIL THRUSH, p. 10.

*Add*. Mr. Bond thinks the missel thrush sometimes uses mud; neither Mr. Doubleday nor I have ever found this to be the case.

RING OUZEL, p. 11.

*Add*. This bird also occasionally uses mud; and the word "only," in describing the situation, should stand "principally," as there are well-authenticated instances of its nesting in the south.

WHINCHAT, p. 12.

*Eggs*, 5, 6. Delicate blue-green; rarely with fine red-brown specks.

WHEATEAR, p. 12.

*Situation*. In the chinks of stone walls or under stones on moors and mountain wilds, and in old rabbit-burrows.

*Eggs*, 5, 6. Pale green; rarely spotted at the larger end.

REED WREN, p. 15.

*Materials*. Dried grass, moss and wool, as well as the dried flowering scapes of the reed.