

the NATURALIST CORNER

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Brought to you by Peggy Potts
Coastal Master Naturalist

Feather Your Nest By: Peggy Potts

As a graduate of the Coastal Master Naturalist Program offered through the Clemson University Cooperative Extension, I would like to share my excitement and enthusiasm about the many wonders of nature that can be enjoyed and experienced in the lowcountry. Through this monthly column, I will share my observations, sightings, and characteristics about a variety of nature topics, such as common insects, migrating birds and butterflies, wildflowers and plants and more. Basically, anything in nature is fair game to learn about and explore.

I also encourage you to share your observations and experiences so that we can learn about our natural world together. Please feel free to send in pictures and/or information of anything you find interesting by emailing me, Peggy Potts, at ppotts@charlestoncounty.org.

It's finally Spring and the songs of the birds are calling us to come outside! We can hear them all around because many of them are busy scouting for a spot to build their nests or have already found that special



place. Birds nests come in a variety of shapes and sizes depending on the species of bird; and, some birds do not make nests at all but lay their eggs directly on the ground in a shallow area. Others construct their nests from grass, leaves, mud, or from materials they find like paper, yarn and even pet fur. Most birds nest only once per year, but some species like the Robin can have up to 5 nests during a single breeding season. Robins' nests are usually located in the fork of a bush or tree, made of grass, and twigs and held together with a layer of mud. Like everything else there are a few myths about nesting birds such as: If you return a baby bird to its nest the parents will smell your scent and reject it. False, parent birds do not recognize their young by smell. If you find a baby bird on the ground you can return it to its nest. However, if it is a fledgling and is capable of hopping or flitting, its parents are most likely close by and watching out for it so it is best to leave the bird where it is.

Birds use nests all year long. False, Birds only use nests as a place to incubate eggs and raise their young. Once the chicks leave, the birds do not continue to use the nest. One size fits all. False, for cavity nesting birds, purchase or build a nesting box with a target species in mind.

If you are lucky enough to come upon an empty nest, here are some things to consider in trying to identify the bird: Where is the nest located (is the nest on the ground, in a tree or shrub, or on a building)?

What is the shape and composition of the nest (is it a cup, an enclosed dome, a platform, hanging pouch, or made up of mostly sticks)? If the nest contains eggs, what is the size, shape or color ?

With this information most field guides can help you narrow down the owner's identity. Nest descriptions of a few common backyard birds include:

The Black Capped Chickadee's nest which is mossed based and lined with fur; the Carolina Wren's nest that is typically dome shaped and lined with fine grasses, hair and feathers; and, the Ruby Throated Hummingbird's nest with a tight cup that saddles the nest site of a horizontal surface.



As intricate and beautiful as each nest can be, their main purpose is to provide a safe place for eggs and young birds to develop. They are custom designed for each species. So listen closely and follow the songs of the birds, and you may happen upon a nest of your own to admire and explore.

Charleston County Greenbelt

You might find birds nests in almost any site with trees and shrubbery, but check out Roxbury Park located off of SC-174. The Greenbelt Program provided funding for this park which is owned and managed by the Town of Meggett. Visit Roxbury Park's website for information about hours of operation and more at www.roxburypark.org. Visit the Greenbelt Program website at <http://charlestoncountygreenbelt.org> and follow us on Instagram and the County's Facebook page. Don't forget you can earn "Lifestyle Loot" through the Wellness Program when you visit a Greenbelt site and post pictures using #ccgreenbelt.