Birds Nests

Raccoon Creek Explorers Activity #26

Supplies:

- Eggs or small rocks that you can pretend to be eggs
- Assorted natural materials that you can find outside (rocks, sticks, grass...)
- Bucket or other container to collect materials

Vocabulary:

Nesting Material: anything that birds may use to construct a nest

Forage: A person or animal searching widely for food or provisions

Clutch: The total eggs a bird lays per each nesting attempt

Background:

Birds build nests as a place to lay their eggs and grow their young. Different types of birds lay their nests in different areas including in bushes, trees, on the ground, rocky ledges, and even tucked along windowsills and building ledges. Birds will forage for different materials for the nests to be made of. These nesting materials serve multiple functions. They can be used to cushion eggs from the ground and parent's weight, they help to insulate eggs from temperature change, they hold the clutch together for heat efficiency, protect the nest from the elements, and they can also serve as camouflage in some nests to keep them out of site from predators. Nests are made of all types of materials including sticks, dead leaves, grass, yarn, hair, feathers, moss, mud, rocks and any other small material that that can be molded or woven together to form a nest.
Some birds will have more than one nesting attempt per year and build multiple nests in new locations. have a new nest for each clutch can reduce the chance of nest parasites.

In this activity, we will be observing birds nests in nature and what they are made of, and then we will trying to recreate a nest of our own.

Let's Get Started:
1.) Go outside and see if you can find a birds nest anywhere. Observe the materials it is made of carefully from a distance as to not disturb the nest. If you can't find a nest look up images online.

2.) Find and collect different materials you can pick up easily and put them in your bucket. Think about the purpose each material would serve in building a nest.

3.) Use the materials you collected to try to build a nest that holds at least 1 egg. This is an open ended process. There is no single correct procedure to follow.

4.) Test your nest. Blow on it, pick it up, and place an egg inside.

Reflect:
Where did you find a birds nest located? Where are other places you could find nests?

What materials did you observe nests being built of? What materials did you build your nest out of?

When testing your nest, did it fall apart, or stay together? If it fell apart, how can you change it to make it sturdier?

Apply:
What could different materials in nests be used for?

Are birds nests only made of natural materials or can they be made of artificial ones like string, plastic, and cloth?

If you redid your nest, what materials would you use this time (natural/artificial), would you use something to bind or glue the materials together better?

Wrap-Up:
You may have found that building a nest is surprisingly difficult. First birds don't have the luxury of having a bucket to collect materials. They have to take multiple trips back and forth to carry one twig at a time. Dry materials may also fall apart if blown on or picked up. Birds will weave together materials or bind them with mud or their own saliva to help support the nest. Birds in different climates will have different ways of building a nest. In colder areas nests will need insulating materials like grass to keep their eggs warm, whereas in warmer areas, bird might use rocks and seashells because the gaps in between them allow better air flow to keep eggs cool. Thus there are many forms nests could take in nature.

Raccoon Creek Partnership