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Cover Photo: Bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) landing in its nest, Kodiak Island, Alaska, June 2002.  
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Getting Ready for Grade 4™

Nature in Summer



# Birds

written by Alice Lee Folkins

Summer Reads™ 

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Dear Fourth Grader,

I am a teacher who has studied how children learn to read well. What I have learned has been used to write SummerReads and programs like QuickReads® and Ready Readers.

The best way to be ready for fourth-grade is to read every day of the summer. You can choose to read a chapter or a book from SummerReads. But be sure to read it at least three times on the same day. Here's how to use SummerReads:

1. Start by reading it yourself. Mark the words that you don't know.
2. Next, ask someone to read with you. Get that person to help you with any words you don't know. You can even go to the computer to [www.textproject.org](http://www.textproject.org) and hear a recording of the books.
3. Last, you're going to read by yourself to answer the questions at the end of the book. You can go to the computer to find the answers.

Have a reading-filled summer!

Elfrieda (Freddy) Hiebert, Ph.D.

Inventor of the TEXT model

**Birds****Introduction****Birds**

No matter where you live, you can see and hear birds this summer. Even if you live in a tall apartment building in a busy city, there will be birds nearby. All birds have feathers, but not all birds can fly. A few kinds of birds only swim or walk but never fly. Many birds that fly can also walk on land. Some kinds of birds can fly, swim and walk!

If you live in the north of the United States, you will see some different birds this summer than if you live in the south. That is because many birds migrate or travel from winter to summer homes. Many kinds of birds travel long distances to get from one home to another. Some of the birds in your neighborhood live there all year round. But birds that migrate are present either during the summer or winter. If you look closely, you may be surprised at how many different kinds of birds live near you.

**Birds**

## Bird Feet



Birds' feet are not all the same. Birds' feet depend on how and where they spend their time. Birds that swim a lot, like ducks, have skin that stretches between the toes. These are called webbed feet and they help ducks to be good swimmers. But webbed feet make it hard for ducks to move on land. Ducks do not use their feet directly in getting food. Can you imagine trying to pick up or tear food with webbed feet?

Other birds like hawks and owls use their feet directly in getting food. Instead of webs, these birds have strong sharp claws called talons. Talons help these birds grab, hold, and kill smaller animals for food. Talons help these birds get food but they are not useful for swimming.

Another type of birds sits or perches on branches of trees. Blackbirds and robins are birds of this type. These birds even sleep while perching. What keeps these birds from falling off their perches while they are sleeping? Perching birds have four flexible toes. Three of the toes point forward and one toe points backward. These flexible toes make it possible for birds to grab and hang onto a perch. When a perching bird sits, a tendon on the back of its leg locks the toes around the branch. With its toes locked, a sleeping bird does not fall from its perch. When the bird stands up, its toes let go. Then it can fly away.

**Birds**

## Bird Nests



When bird chicks hatch from eggs, they are small and cannot stay alive on their own. The chicks need a place to stay warm and safe from animals that might harm them. Adult birds make a warm safe place by building a nest. This nest is where parent birds keep the eggs warm. Once the eggs hatch, the nest is the place where the chicks live until they can fly and find their own food.

Birds use different materials to make nests. Often, the outside of the nest is made of small sticks and grass. To make the inside soft and warm, birds use their own feathers or other soft materials. Some birds make nests high in a tree to protect the eggs and chicks. Other birds build nests on the ground but hide them so that other animals cannot find the eggs or chicks.

Building nests can take time. Birds of prey, like hawks, may take a few weeks to build their nests. Small birds, like hummingbirds, may take only a few days. Wherever the nests are built, adult birds work hard to protect the eggs and the chicks.

By summer, most chicks have left the nest. But the nests may still be there for you to see. You might see nests in trees close to your house. Sometimes, there are nests in spaces close to the roofs of houses and apartment buildings. Look around you this summer for nests that birds have used.

**Birds**

## Words for Groups of Birds



Often a special word is used to describe a group of the same kind of animals. A group of lions is called a pride. A group of cows is called a herd. The common word for a group of birds is a flock. But some kinds of birds have special group names. For example, a group of geese is called a gaggle. It is not clear why people began using gaggle to describe geese. Perhaps it is because gaggle is similar to the sound that geese

make. Whatever the reason, the phrase “gaggle of geese” has been used in English for several hundred years.

A group of doves is sometimes called a cote of doves. Doves were once raised for food. They were kept in places called cotes. That’s why people sometimes call a group of doves a cote.

Perhaps the most unusual name for a group of birds is that used for crows. The name for a group of crows is “a murder of crows.” It is not exactly clear why this name was given to a group of crows. But a murder of crows has been used to describe a group of crows for a long time.

As you watch birds this summer, think about what names you might give a group of the same kind of birds. What about a name for a group of people doing the same thing like eating pizza or listening to the same kind of music?

**Birds****Rate your thinking and reading**

- ✓ Put a check each time you read one of the chapters of the book.
- ★ Give yourself a star for Sharing if you told someone about something you learned from reading the chapter.
- ✚ Give yourself a + if you can tell that your reading is getting smoother.

	1st Read	2nd Read	3rd Read	Sharing	Smoother
Introduction					
Bird Feet					
Bird Nests					
Words for Groups of Birds					

**Comprehension questions****Bird Feet**

1. Webbed feet help ducks \_\_\_\_\_.
- fly in the sky
  - eat their food
  - swim in the water
  - walk on land

2. How do perching birds stay on a perch?
- .....
- .....
- .....

**Bird Nests**

3. Why do bird chicks need a nest?
- Because the bird chicks can't fly
  - Because the bird chicks need a place to stay warm
  - Because other animals want to hurt the bird chicks
  - All of the above
4. What are some materials that birds use to make nests?

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**Words for Groups of Birds**

5. Which of the following names is not a name for a group of birds?
- Cote
  - Gaggle
  - Bed
  - Murder

6. Why is a group of doves called a cote?
- .....
- .....
- .....