



Downy Woodpeckers
Downies drill into soft, dead wood in a tree making a circular hole and egg chamber. The male does much of the excavation.

Sewickley Heights Borough Park

Male Downy making an unsuccessful test hole in the side of an old wooden structure at Frick Park.

Frick Park



Pileated Woodpecker

A Pileated Woodpecker nestling peers out of its nest hole waiting for a parent to return. As with all woodpeckers, both parents feed their young.

Buttermilk Hill Nature Sanctuary



Red-headed Woodpecker

One of a pair found nesting in North Park in 2012.

North Park



Northern Flicker

Flickers will choose dead, rotting trees for their nests, since their beaks are not that strong for excavating.

Frick Park



A male flicker ejects wood chips from a nest hole he is working on.

Magee Marsh, Ohio



Red-shafted female Northern Flicker has three young mouths to feed.

Foy's Lake, Montana

Red-bellied Woodpecker
As with most woodpeckers, the male Red-belly begins excavations with several test holes before finding the right location.

Sewickley Heights
Borough Park





Red-naped Sapsucker

A male sapsucker waits for his mate to relieve him of incubation duty. Both parents take turns on the nest inside this aspen tree. When she returns to the nest hole, the exchange is rather quick if not elegant.

Glacier National Park,
Montana



Gila Woodpeckers

Gila Woodpeckers drill into Saguaro cacti to form nest holes. At first the chamber has wet walls in the cactus pulp. After several months of drying, the cactus forms a dry lining around the chamber, and it is ready for nesting.

Sweetwater Wetlands and Pima Community College in Tucson, Arizona



Resplendent Quetzal

This Costa Rican bird carries a drupe of the lauraceous plant in its short beak. He (and she) can only bite or gouge into dead, rotting wood to form a nest hole.

Paraiso Quetzal, Costa Rica



The male shares incubation duties with his mate, but his long tail feathers usually end up outside the nest hole on his watch.

Savegre Mountain Lodge, Costa Rica



Belted Kingfisher

The male uses his long, sharp beak to begin a nest hole in a bank above water.

Duck Hollow

Turquoise-browed Motmot

This Central American bird digs a nest hole in soil like the kingfisher.

Rio Tarcoles, Costa Rica





Bank Swallows

The smallest species of swallow burrows into a bank. They often live in crowded colonies as these past-season holes attest. The birds may return to use these holes again next year.

Kalispell, Montana

Cliff Swallows

Cliff Swallows build their mud cavities under the eaves of buildings or under bridges – rarely on cliffs now-a-days. Like Bank Swallows, they live in colonies and reuse nests annually.

Fish Hatchery, Pymatuning



The Cliff Swallow nests in the upper right contain grass nests built by House Sparrows, which can drive out swallows or simply occupy empty nests. Note enlarged entrance hole.

Fish Hatchery, Pymatuning



Chimney Swifts

These birds now build their nests inside chimneys or other hollow structures, adapting to the presence of humans. Swifts drop into their roost chimney at dusk (above).

Hancock, Maryland and Squirrel Hill, Pittsburgh



Atlantic Puffin

This puffin is bringing nesting material for its underground burrow.

Machias Seal Island, Maine



Wedge-tailed Shearwater

The tail feathers of a shearwater protrude from its underground nest.

Kilauea Point, Kaua'i, Hawaii



Wedge-tailed Shearwater

A mated pair of shearwaters sits at the entrance to their cavity, a common practice.

Kilauea Point, Kaua'i, Hawaii



Burrowing Owl

Standing at the entrance to its burrow.

Mountain View, California



Mountain Chickadee

A secondary cavity nester, the chickadee may use an old woodpecker hole or a natural cavity in a tree like this for its nest.

Glacier National Park, Montana



Eastern Bluebird

Also secondary cavity nesters, these bluebirds are exploring a woodpecker hole to use for their nest.

Moraine State Park



White-breasted Nuthatch

A well-worn female nuthatch takes a seed at our feeder. Slipping in and out of her nest hole has greatly frayed her feathers.



Wood Ducks

Hen and drake Wood Ducks on a tree limb looking for an appropriate nest hole in which to lay their eggs. He guards as she searches.

Green Cove, IBA-80



Pygmy Nuthatch

This small nuthatch leaves its cavity after delivering food to its nestlings.

Foy's Lake, Montana



Tree Swallow

Claiming this old woodpecker hole as its own, a Tree Swallow looks at home.

Magee Marsh, Ohio



Northern Rough-winged Swallow
This swallow may live in colonies or by itself.
Metzger Marsh, Ohio

Many of the weep holes in this retaining wall above Duck Hollow are used as nest holes by rough-winged swallows.
Browns Hill Road, Pittsburgh



One Northern Rough-winged Swallow family used this standpipe on an apartment as their nest hole.
Chapel Harbor, O'Hara Twp.
The Peregrine Vol. 17, No. 2 March/April 2018

Elf Owl
A female Elf Owl fills her nest cavity entrance as her mate calls from a nearby tree.
Madera Canyon, Arizona
All photos © by the author.



Great Horned Owllet

An owlet peeps out of its nest in a broken tree.

Darby Marsh near Magee Marsh



Eastern Bluebirds

Bluebirds benefit from boxes set up for them.

Erie National Wildlife Refuge



Purple Martins

A very large martin house is well occupied by this largest swallow species.

Magee Marsh



Barn Owllet

An owlet peeps out of its distinctive nest box.

Barr Lake State Park, Colorado