

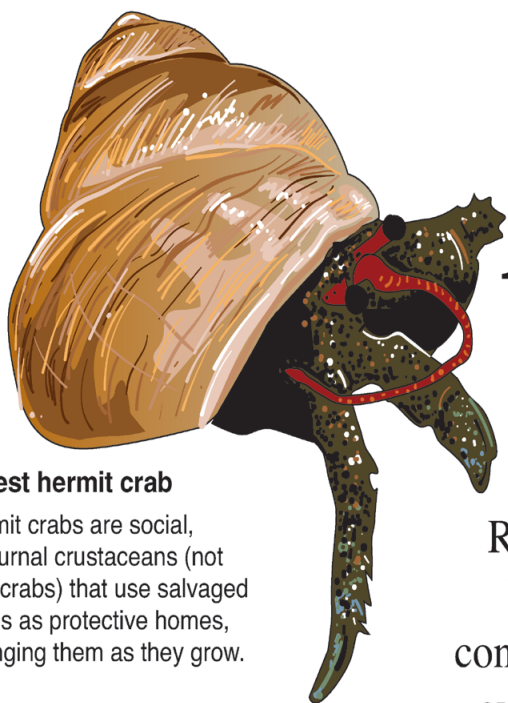
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ANIMAL HOMES



Forest hermit crab
Hermit crabs are social, nocturnal crustaceans (not true crabs) that use salvaged shells as protective homes, changing them as they grow.

Home vs. habitat

A **habitat**, also known as a **biome**, is the environment plants or animals live in. Animal habitats (forests, oceans, deserts, grasslands) provide essential food, water and shelter. A habitat is determined by the plants that grow there, the climate and the geography.

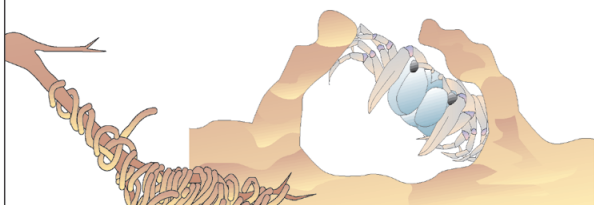
Some animals build homes, such as **nests** (birds), **burrows** (rabbits), **dens** (bears), **webs** (spiders) or **hives** (bees), for protection from predators and weather. These homes vary from complex structures to natural shelters, adapted to their specific environment.

Living in trees

Everybody knows that many birds build nests in trees. But did you know some also burrow into them? The elf owl carves its nest into cacti, and many woodpeckers make their homes inside tree trunks. The tropical hornbill literally walls herself into a tree trunk home while incubating her eggs. And not all bird nests are made of grasses. Some birds, like the ovenbird of Central and South America, build clay nests.

Birds are not the only animals that live in trees. Insects and many other animals take advantage of the shelter trees provide.

Real estate agents often quote the mantra “location, location, location” as the most important thing to consider when choosing a home. The saying holds true, even in the animal world. Where an animal lives can be important to survival, and, like people, they need homes that protect them from the elements and predators. Many animals are talented architects and build their homes; others borrow or share dwellings. Some find homes in the natural habitat around them.



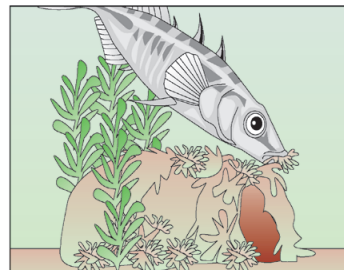
Soldier crabs are named for their habit of moving in large groups at one time. They live in mangroves, beaches and estuaries. Soldier crabs build sand houses with air bubbles that allow them to breathe when the tide comes in.

There are more than 125 species of **weaverbirds**. Most live in the grasslands and marshes of Africa.

The **elf owl** lives in desert lowlands and canyons. This nocturnal bird nests in woodpecker holes in the saguaro cactus as well as the cavities of oak and pine trees.

American robin nests are built using mud, grass, twigs and moss.

The **stickleback** is a freshwater fish that constructs a nest that looks a lot like a bird's nest. The male secretes a glue-like substance that is used to cement leaves and roots into a nest.



Groundhogs are also known as **woodchucks**. Unlike their cousin the prairie dog, groundhogs prefer to live alone.

Groundhogs live two to four feet underground in **dens** or **burrows** that consist of several tunnels and rooms. You can spot a groundhog den by looking for the pile of dirt that often marks the main entrance.

Under ground

Animals that dig (burrow) holes to make a home are called **burrowers**. Some, like prairie dogs and ants, dig in the earth, making elaborate tunnels and rooms. Others, like the woodpecker, burrow into trees. Ocean creatures like the sea urchin dig out homes in the sand.

Under water

Many animals that live in the water also build homes there. The tropical “well-digger” jawfish digs a tunnel in the ocean floor and lines it with stones and pebbles. Many other fish build underwater nests, and some air-breathing creatures like the water spider and the beaver prefer water homes.

Water spiders make silk nests underwater that they fill with air bubbles. The air-filled bell is anchored underwater by spider threads.

Sculptors

Wasps have a talent for sculpting their houses. Many make paper nests from chewed-up wood. Others build nests from mud or live in burrows.

Mud daubers are a type of wasp that builds long tube-shaped nests out of clay or mud. The female wasp collects the mud and carries it to her building site.

Paper make paper pulp by chewing wood and mixing it with saliva. The female wasp then builds a paper nest of tiny cells.

Beavers will often work together as a family to build the perfect home. They like to build in deep water. If the water is not deep enough, they will construct a dam to raise the water level of their neighborhood before beginning work on the lodge. Beaver dams are made of reeds and saplings held together with mud and rocks.

Fox den

Many mammals use decaying trees for homes. Foxes, wolves, coyotes, raccoons and bears will make dens in uprooted and dead trees.



A **squirrel drey** is a football-sized nest built high in tree fork. Using twigs, leaves, bark and moss, the drey serves as a sturdy, insulated shelter.

SOURCES: World Book Encyclopedia, World Book Inc.; <https://en.wikipedia.org>; <https://www.britannica.com>; <https://www.pbs.org>; <https://www.discoverwildlife.com>

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