

# There's No Place Like Home

Animals require homes for a variety of reasons: somewhere to sleep, a place to shelter from the weather, or a safe place to raise their young.

A good home might also allow an animal to find food nearby, or offer protection from predators. Because different animals have different needs, their homes aren't always alike — they come in a multitude of shapes and sizes.

## Burrows

- Burrows are small holes or tunnels, which are identified by holes in the ground or sometimes in riverbanks. Burrows are usually small, but they can be extensive tunnel systems housing many animals. Most people associate them with rabbits, but plenty of other animals also inhabit burrows.

One such animal is the water vole, which digs its burrows into riverbanks, near the water's edge. These burrows allow voles, which are excellent swimmers, to escape from predators more easily. Voles construct tunnels composed of multiple levels and lots of entrances, some of which might be underwater.



There's even a species of owl which lives in a burrow! The appropriately named burrowing owl is unable to hollow out its own burrow. Instead, it finds a burrow which has been abandoned by another animal, builds a nest for its eggs inside and then moves in to raise its young. Burrowing



owls often deposit mammal dung at the burrow's entrance. Originally thought to be a means of hiding the scent of baby owls from predators, recent studies have shown that this process is actually intended to attract beetles, which are a source of food for the owls.

# Nests

Typically made from twigs, grass and leaves bound together by mud and saliva, nests are mainly used for sleeping and protecting eggs. They can be built amongst tree branches, on the ground or they can be attached to the interior or exterior walls of buildings. Many species of birds live in nests, but they are also home to more unexpected residents.



Australian saltwater crocodiles build nests on riverbanks using bits of plants and mud, ensuring that they choose a location that's unlikely to suffer from flooding. Then the female crocodile lays up to 60 eggs inside the nest. When the baby crocodiles hatch, the mother uses her jaws to extract them from the nest and deposits them at the water's edge, where she looks after them until they are old enough to survive alone.



African mountain gorillas primarily use nests for sleeping, and they have to build one from scratch every evening. They construct their beds by stacking layers of branches on top of each other, sometimes adding leaves. With the exception of baby gorillas (which sleep with their mothers) each gorilla has its own nest. The larger male gorillas only build nests on the ground, but females and young males prefer to take to the trees, bending and weaving branches together. It's a race against time to make sure that the nest is finished and fit for purpose before night falls: it has to be robust enough to support the gorilla's weight throughout the night.



# Caves

The area just inside a cave near the entrance can act as a temporary resting spot for many animals, such as foxes, wolves and bears. However, caves can also serve as permanent homes for some creatures.

Bats are probably the most well known cave dwellers. They hunt for food at night, which means they need a safe place to sleep during the day. Bats can use caves to remain out of reach of most predators, since many caves have high ceilings from which these creatures can hang upside down. Sleeping in this position also makes it easier for bats to become airborne: they have a lot of trouble taking to the skies from the ground, so they climb to a high location and fall into flight.



Rather more unusual are Ridley's racer snakes, which spend their lives in the limestone caves of southern Thailand, Malaysia or Borneo and rarely venture outside. Like many other cave-dwelling animals, they are pale in colour, with yellow or beige skin and thick blue-black stripes around their eyes. Ridley's racer snakes share their caves with rodents, bats and insects and, unluckily for the bats, these snakes are exceptional climbers. They tend to hang down from ledges or holes in the ceiling and pluck their flying neighbours from mid-air as they swoop back into the cave.

Burrows, nests and caves protect animals from the weather and are safe havens for animals to gather food and to rear offspring. All kinds of creatures live in these remarkable homes — even some unexpected ones!