

# Nest Structures for Mourning Doves

AGE LEVEL  
9-12



**Life Skill:** Critical thinking  
**Project Skills:** Enhancing nesting habitat for mourning doves  
**Objective:** Supplement basic needs of wildlife  
**Success Indicator:** Participants build, place, and monitor a suitable nesting structure for mourning doves

## Provisions Needed

- 1/4- or 1/2-inch hardware cloth (screen wire)
- Ruler or tape measure
- Scissors or wire cutters
- Twist ties, electric wire, or tape
- Roofing nails, staples, or wire
- Ladder
- Bicycle mirror
- Pole for mounting the mirror
- Camera
- Notebook and pencil



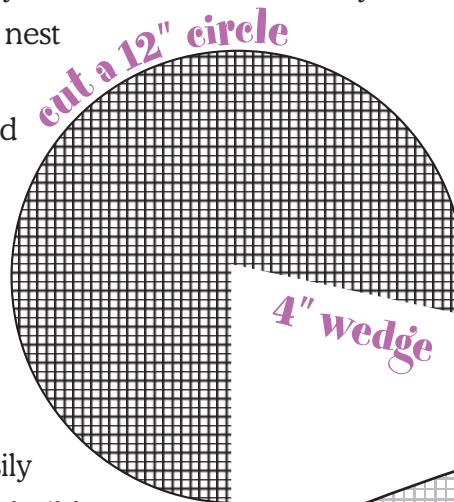
## Trailhead

Can you think of a bird you see nearly every day? Chances are, the mourning dove is one of them. Among the most abundant birds in North America, mourning doves number around 450 million in the United States. Birdwatchers enjoy observing them. They also are the most abundant species of game bird in the Southeast. You have probably seen this member of the pigeon family foraging on the ground and heard the whistle of its feathers as it takes to the air. The mournful hoo-hoo call is an equally familiar sound. But have you ever seen a mourning dove nest? These birds don't nest in tree cavities or boxes, but can be drawn to use a simple, shallow cone of wire mesh placed in a tree or shrub.

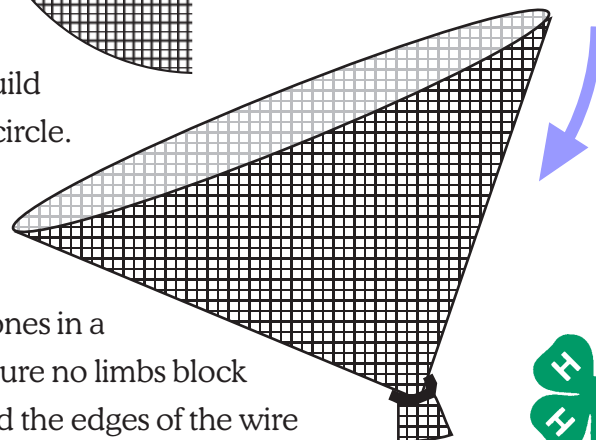


## Trailblazing

Build a nesting structure for mourning doves and place it in a suitable location where it will be easy to observe. Using a mounted mirror, you can easily monitor the nest for eggs and other activity. To build the nest, carefully cut screen wire into a 12-inch circle. From the circle, cut a pie-shaped piece about 4 inches wide. Close the cut by overlapping the wire. Fasten the circle into a cone shape using bread bag ties, electric wire, or tape. Place the cones in a shady area 6 to 16 feet above the ground. Make sure no limbs block the opening. Fasten the cone in the tree and bend the edges of the wire down around the nest so no sharp edges protrude. Place the cones early in the



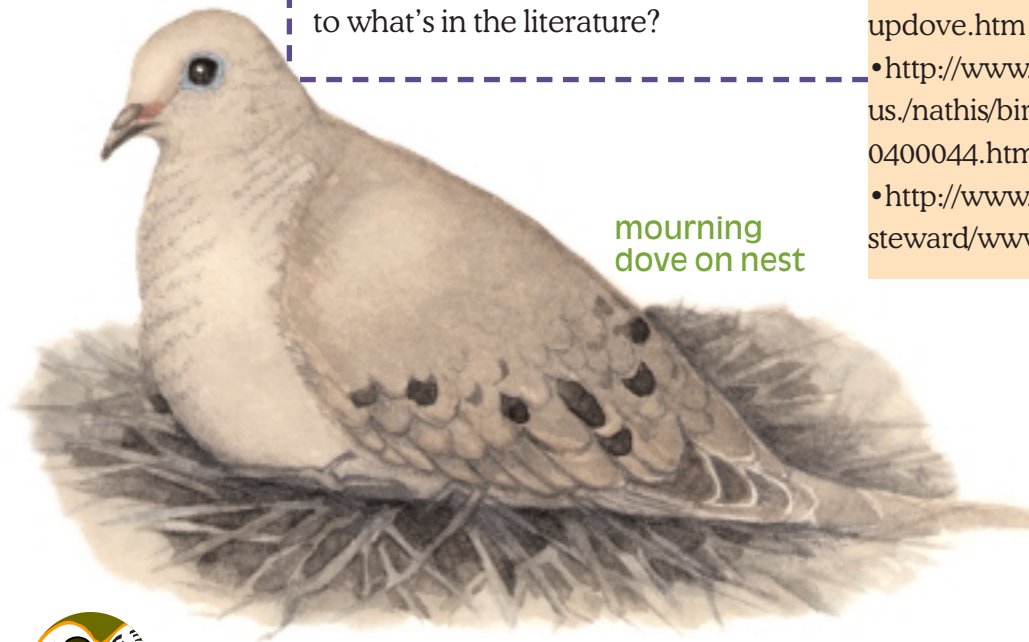
fasten the circle into a cone



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# Nest Structures for Mourning Doves

hoo-hoo



mourning dove on nest



## Field Guide

Though animals don't have the same lifestyle as people, they have the exact same **requirements** to live and reproduce. These are food, water, cover, and space. Each component must be available in proper proportion, within a certain distance, and within a reasonable amount of time. The place where an animal finds all these things is called its habitat. Mourning doves are able to adapt to a wide variety of habitats—including coniferous forests (mainly pine), farmland, and residential areas. A limiting factor is when one of the basic needs is not being met.

Mourning doves may have **two to six broods** in a season. Each nest or clutch usually contains two eggs.

Both the male and female dove **incubate** the eggs. The eggs hatch in about 14 days.

The birds may build a simple nest of twigs **6 to 30 feet up** in the crotch of a tree or shrub limbs, although doves may nest on the ground in treeless areas.

Doves eat primarily **weed seeds** and grains.

spring, if possible. Check them periodically. Are they in use? By what species? How many eggs are there? When were they laid? When did they hatch? How many survived? Keep a record book of the information along with photographs. Gather information about survival rates of mourning doves. How do your nesting statistics compare to what's in the literature?

## Internet Resources

- <http://www.state.ia.us/government/dnr/organiza/fwb/wildlife/pages/updove.htm>
- <http://www.conservation.state.mo.us/nathis/birds/birdatlas/maintext/0400044.htm>
- <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/nreos/foreststeward/www12.html>

## Suggested Reading

- Taylor, Mark. *Bird Houses and Feeders: How to Build and Enjoy Them*. Raleigh, N.C.: North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, Division of Conservation Education.
- Henderson, Carol L. *Woodworking for Wildlife: Homes for Birds and Mammals*. St. Paul, Minn.: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Non-game Wildlife Program. 1984.

# Nest Structures for Mourning Doves

## The Extra Mile

How can animals that once were plentiful rapidly become extinct? When Europeans first arrived in America, there were billions of passenger pigeons, a now extinct relative of the mourning dove. By about 1900, the bird was extinct in the wild—the victim of overhunting and habitat destruction. Compare the mourning dove—or some other species—with an extinct relative. Why are mourning doves so abundant and adaptable compared to the passenger pigeon? What are the differences in their biology and habitat needs? How do we manage wildlife now compared to a century ago? Why do some creatures become extinct while others thrive? Develop a table or other graphic representation of the similarities and differences you discover. How do you think your conclusions should affect management of the species?



## Field Notes

### SHARE

- How often did you monitor your nest? How easy or difficult was it to observe the nest and fledgling activity?
- What are some examples of limiting factors you observed in your area?
- What did you observe before and after improving your habitat?
- What kinds of challenges did you encounter during the project?

### PROCESS

- How did you ensure that any potential nesting birds would have everything they needed to survive?
- How did you find additional information about mourning doves?

### GENERALIZE

- Have you ever had to live a couple of days without shelter, electricity, or water? How did you adapt?
- In what other situations have you had to assess a situation and draw conclusions?

### APPLY

- How can you apply what you learned about record-keeping and data analysis to other pursuits in school, such as a research project?