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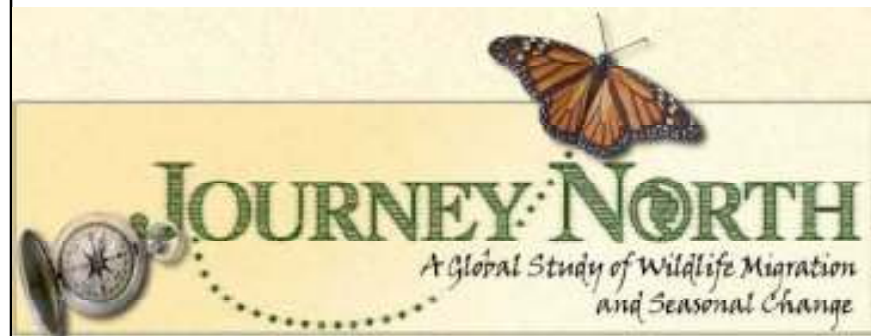


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## **Building a Hummingbird Nest: Strong, Soft, and Stretchy**

by Eve Pranis

Once female hummers arrive and mate in the spring, they have big plans. Their instinct "tells them" to build nests for raising young. These little homes must be strong, soft as a baby blanket; protected from cold, rain, and predators; and stretchy enough to hold fast-growing nestlings. That's no easy task!



A female hummer starts her nest by collecting plant **down** (fluff that carries seeds).

She brings it to a well-hidden branch and stamps it flat with her feet to make the bottom stiff and secure. Then she uses spider silk to weave together more downy fluff, tiny bits of leafy material, and **lichens**.



*Many hummer nests are cup-shaped, like this one.*

She might use a bit of sticky **resin** from a pine tree to hold nest materials together. She forms the lip of the nest by pressing the nest material between her bill, chin, and chest as she rotates her body.

**Lichens** make good nesting materials. They are tiny, strong for their weight, easy for a tiny hummingbird to work with, and waterproof.



Photo © Phil Brown

A **lichen** is a combination of a fungus and an algae.

Because they provide good camouflage in trees, lichens are used mostly on the outside of nests.

The finished nest isn't much bigger than a coin. But it's just the right size to hold two tiny eggs the size of jelly beans!



Photo © Verle Stuve

Fluffy down from dandelions and other plants is soft, waterproof, and easy for hummers to work with. It also keeps cold air out of the nest. A hummer can find dandelion down just about anywhere!



Photo © Suzanne DeJohn



Plant down is usually too white to use on the outside of the nest. Can you guess why? But it is perfect on the inside because it is soft next to the baby hummers' fragile bare skin.



Spider silk is a good nesting material because it is easy to find, strong as steel, sticky enough to hold plant materials together, and waterproof. A hummer can easily grasp it with its tiny beak. Best of all, it's the stretchiest material available. This allows the nest to grow with the babies!



*Spider silk is super stretchy and stronger than steel!*

It takes about five or six days for the female to finish her nest. What happens after that? In the next full update, we'll peek inside to explore the birth and daily lives of hummer hatchlings!

