

# Snag It!

Who Needs a Dead Tree?



by Mary Holland

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Explore the crucial role of dead or dying trees, known as snags, in forest ecosystems. Through engaging narrative and vivid photography, the book explains how snags provide essential habitats for a variety of animals, including birds, mammals, reptiles, and insects. It highlights the diverse ways animals use snags for nesting, shelter, food, and perching. Ideal for environmental education and aligned with NGSS standards, this book promotes wildlife conservation and ecological awareness to young readers.

Arbordale Publishing offers so much more than a picture book. We open the door for children to explore the facts behind a story they love.

Animals featured in this book using snags include bald eagle, bat, flying squirrel, gartersnake, great blue heron (cover), green heron, porcupine, raccoon, red squirrel (title page), red-breasted nuthatch, salamander, screech owl, turkey vulture, and woodpecker.

The *For Creative Minds* includes

- Pileated Woodpecker Food and Nest Holes
- Which Animals Use Snags?
- How Might These Animals Use Snags?
- Nests in Snags
- True or False?

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**Mary Holland** is a naturalist, nature photographer, columnist, and award-winning author with a life-long passion for natural history. After graduating from the University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources, Mary worked as a naturalist at the Museum of the Hudson Highlands in New York state, directed the state-wide Environmental Learning for the Future program for the Vermont Institute of Natural Science, worked as a resource naturalist for the Massachusetts Audubon Society, and designed and presented her own "Knee-High Nature Programs" for libraries and elementary schools throughout Vermont and New Hampshire.

Her other children's books with Arbordale include *What's Inside?*, *Animal Myths*, *Animal Homes*, *Animal Tracks and Traces*, *Otis the Owl*, *Ferdinand Fox's First Summer* (NSTA / CBC Most Outstanding Science Trade Book and Moonbeam Children's Book Award), *The Beavers' Busy Year*, *Yodel the Yearling*, *Animal Ears*, *Animal Skins*, *Animal Noses*, *Animal Tails*, *Animal Eyes*, *Animal Legs*, and *Animal Mouths* (NSTA / CBC Most Outstanding Science Trade Book). Mary's book *Naturally Curious: a Photographic Field Guide and Month-by-Month Journey Through the Fields, Woods and Marshes of New England* won the 2011 National Outdoor Book Award for the Nature Guidebook category. *Naturally Curious Day by Day* was published in 2016. Mary lives in Vermont. Visit Mary's blog at [naturallycuriouswithmaryholland.wordpress.com](http://naturallycuriouswithmaryholland.wordpress.com).



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Have you ever heard of a snag?

A standing tree that is dead or dying is called a snag. It can be standing in water or on land.

When a tree dies, its leaves and bark fall off.

A snag is a very important part of the forest on which many animals depend.



All kinds of animals use snags. They build nests and raise young in them. They rest (perch) in them. Animals store food in snags. They shelter from snow, wind, and rain inside snags. Some animals even use snags to hide from animals that might eat them (predators).

This green heron perches on a snag looking for a fish or a frog to eat.

Hawks, herons, eagles, ospreys, and owls use tall snags as hunting perches. They can spot mice, voles, fish, and other prey from high above the ground.

Bald eagles have excellent eyesight and can see prey well over a mile away.



Insects, mosses, lichens, and fungi can be found in and on snags. They provide a wide variety of food for animals.

Many insects lay their eggs in dead trees. When the insect eggs hatch, the young insects (larvae) live inside the tree until they grow wings and fly away.

Insect-eating birds, like this red-breasted nuthatch, drill into snags with their strong, pointed bills to eat the larvae.



# For Creative Minds

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## Pileated Woodpecker Food and Nest Holes



Pileated woodpeckers drill holes in snags to find ants, beetles, and other insects to eat. These holes are usually longer than they are wide.

They also drill holes to make nest cavities. These holes are usually round.

Can you find one of each kind of hole in the snag on the left?

### Birds & Snags: Did You Know?

Birds that eat insects, like woodpeckers and nuthatches, depend heavily on snags as a source of food. These birds help to control unwanted insect pests.

Over 85 species of North American birds use cavities in dead or deteriorating trees.

All woodpeckers lay white eggs. Because they are hidden inside the tree, the eggs don't have to be camouflaged.

Birds that nest in cavities tend to nest earlier in the spring than other birds. Their eggs are well protected from the cold, snow and rain.

There are two kinds of cavity-nesting birds, primary and secondary. Primary cavity nesters, including all woodpeckers, excavate their own cavities. Secondary cavity nesters do not excavate their own cavities—they use those made by primary cavity nesters.

## Which Animals Use Snags?

Dead trees provide habitat for more than 1,000 species of wildlife in the United States. Which of these animals find food, shelter, or a resting place in snags?



beetle larva



long-tailed weasel



salamander



red-tailed hawk



honeybees



spider



black bears



barred owls



wood ducks

Answers: all

## How Might These Animals Use Snags?

Animals may use snags for several reasons. How do you think these animals use snags?

nest

roost (sleep)

perch (rest)

hibernate

hide

find food



screech owl



bald-faced hornet



double-crested cormorant



eastern chipmunk



mourning cloak butterfly



spider

Possible Answers: Screech owl-roost, nest, perch; Bald-faced hornet-hibernate; Double-crested cormorant-perch, roost; Eastern chipmunk-hide, find food; Mourning cloak butterfly-hibernate; Spider-hibernate, find food

## Nests in Snags



Many birds nest in snags, including swallows, herons, owls, and even ducks!

Deep inside this snag a female wood duck has laid her eggs. She sits on them to keep them warm until they hatch.

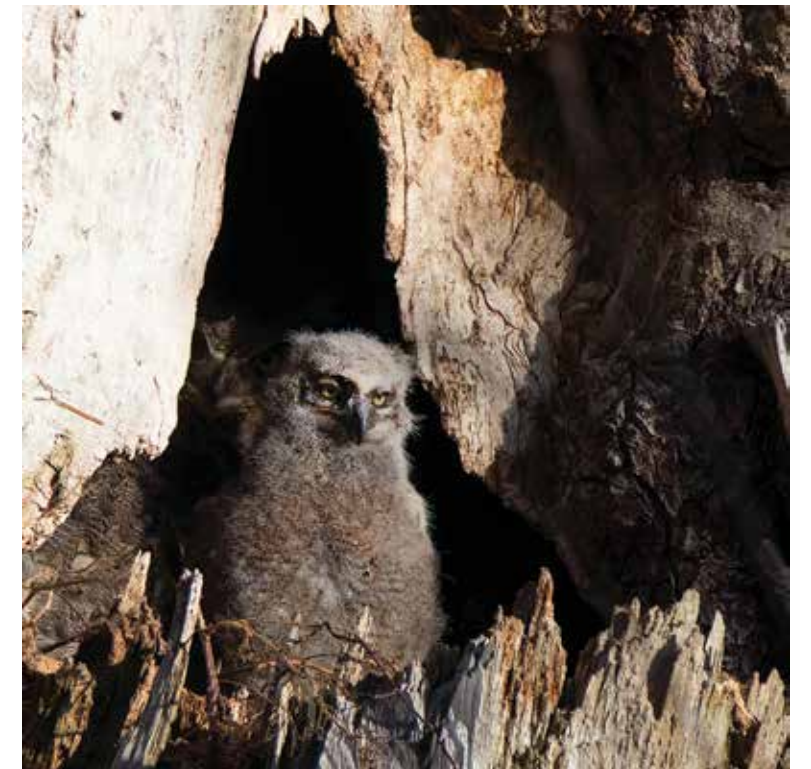
The young ducklings must jump out of the snag (fledge) when they are old enough to join their mother.

If the snag is standing in water the ducklings land in the water when they jump.

If the snag is in the woods the ducklings bounce like tennis balls on the forest floor when they land and then follow their mother for up to a mile to find water.

## True or False?

1. Trees can provide more habitats for wildlife dead than when they are alive.
2. In total, more than 100 species of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians need snags for nesting, roosting, shelter, denning, and feeding.
3. Hollow snags are very valuable in winter as they are used by many species like squirrels, raccoons, owls, and bears for denning and roosting.
4. Many snags are formed when trees break during strong windstorms.



Answers: all are true

To all the landowners who strive to enhance wildlife habitat by preserving snags on their property.— MH

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