

Wildlife Viewfinder Guide: In signature style

by Tim Herd

Plumed in flaming orange and black, the male Baltimore oriole bows low to an olive-brown female, his tail spread and wings slightly raised in a courtly curtsy. His whistling, flutelike voice serenades her in rich, melodic tones, and the flashy blackbirds pair to breed. Preferring a home with a view, they fashion a distinctive hanging nest, woven from plant fibers and suspended from the twig tips, high in a tree. Affixing just a single fiber at a time, the pendulous pouch may take up to two weeks to construct. Anchoring twigs are first tied together with long pieces, and the overall shape is industriously formed; feathers, string or lint gleaned from their surroundings add substance. Softer fibers of grass, plant down and hair line the interior, and in they move with a clutch of four to five pale-blue, black-spotted eggs. Despite its meticulous construction, cleaning and care (fecal sacs of the babies are removed and dropped some distance away), the basket is occupied for only about a month until the fledglings strike out on their own, although the signature work usually survives intact until winter.

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