

# AV Reviews

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Department Editor

**An inkling of beetles.** 1985. Cabisco Video, Carolina Biological Supply Co., Burlington, NC. Color/video. 12 min. Purchase \$119.95.

This excellent introduction to entomology utilizes the life cycle of the tiger beetle and a few other more familiar coleoptera to introduce insects. Various sequences include the usual things such as anatomy, defense mechanisms, feeding behavior, habitats, locomotion and reproduction. From the very beginning, good music and background sequences maintain attention-getting sounds. Several slow motion sequences such as "wing beats" and "toad tongue attacks" on insects add to the drama. With only a few examples, the producers masterfully display some of the great diversities that exist among the members of this order.

As an introduction to a unit on insects, I strongly recommend this video for use with upper elementary-middle school students.

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**The many worlds of nature (series). The bird's year: variety and change.** 1984. MTI Teleprograms Inc., Northbrook, IL. Video or 16 mm. 12 min. each. Purchase \$205 each video or 16 mm. Rental \$50 each.

The program illustrates the activities common to most bird species during the year: migration; setting up territories; nesting; raising young; and flocking. It begins with changes that occur in American Robins as spring approaches and continues with examples of Red-winged Blackbirds, Song Sparrows and Common Flickers. The film contrasts the colonial nesting habits of Grackles with the more solitary nesting of Robins, Chickadees, Wrens and Flickers, showing the relative roles of males and females in nest building, incubating and feeding of the young. Other habits such as the late nesting season of the American Goldfinch, production of multiple broods in the Mockingbird and occurrence of mixed-species flocks in winter are shown.

The film has broad appeal. Any audience from grade school through adult will appreciate the live-action shots of the dozen or so common birds familiar to most of us in the eastern states. The commentary is aimed at the grade school to junior high school level.

The first-rate camera work reveals a host of bird activities at close range, most of which are not specifically explained by the narration. The combination of the almost continuous action of the visual medium with the simultaneous but often nonspecific commentary would make the film a difficult one for note taking. The colors may appear washed out on a large monitor, and we recommend a small or high quality screen for better viewing of the colorful plumages. In spite of this criticism, the tape is excellent and highly recommended for anyone interested in birds. The strategy we recommend for a more mature audience is to turn the sound down and narrate it yourself.

The high quality visual presentation is maintained in this second tape, although in this one the narration is at times misleading or even incorrect. The development of an understanding of nesting habits of birds follows an evolutionary pathway, at least that is the stated (and commendable) intent. It begins with a shot of a snake in a bird's nest to reflect the reptilian heritage of birds and their egg-laying ancestry, and shows examples of, first, ground nesters like Ruffed Grouse, Song Sparrows, and Ovenbirds, said to be more primitive. Secondly, we see cavity nesters such as Belted Kingfishers, Bank Swallows and Sparrow Hawks (American Kestrel would be the correct name) and are told that these are "a step up in evolution of nest building." As the film develops we see "more advanced birds" such as bluebirds that add material to the cavity nest, then chickadees, and ultimately Ospreys that build nests in branches to "make them safer from predators." The main problem with this scenario is that birds nesting on the ground are not always more primitive (e.g. Song Sparrows and Ovenbirds) than tree-nesters (Ospreys). This confusion between primitive vs. advanced nesting habits and primitive vs. advanced lineages of birds is rampant throughout the film.

There are also minor objectionable comments such as the introductory reference regarding the "long-standing misunderstanding about the bird's nest being their home" which we doubt that any naturalist or obser-

vant young child has seriously believed since Aristotle's time. Fortunately, no one will be able to listen too closely to the narrative, with all the excellent visual stimulation. Just be certain to follow up with more detailed clarification of evolutionary processes. And, as you plan the follow-up comments avoid using the film's discussion guide for suggested post-screening activities, which includes having students place the birds they have seen in evolutionary order based on their nesting habits and the order in which the species appear in the film. This is, unless you wish the students to believe erroneously that Ospreys evolved from Ovenbirds.

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**Brave new babies?** 1982. BBC-Pennsylvania State University, Audio-Visual Services, University Park, PA. 48 min video, rental \$21.50. Purchase \$298 for ¾", \$198 for ½".

Genetic engineering has taken giant steps. New methods of gene mapping, a wide variety of cloning techniques and novel embryo manipulations, ranging from human *in vitro* fertilization to the production of chimeras by blastomere fusion, are at hand. Biology teachers who wish to have their students give serious attention to the moral and societal implications of these developments and those about to come upon the scene would probably welcome a good audio-visual presentation linking these implications to the actual biology. Unfortunately, this program does not do this effectively.

Although there are some moments where interesting photography shows

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