Nature Detectives

"Who's been here?" "What were they doing and why were they doing it?" "When did it happen?" Nature Detectives try to answer questions like these by looking for clues and evidence of the activities of creatures in the outdoors.

   Have you ever wondered about teeth marks on the trunk of a tree, or strange footprints in the snow or mud? If you have, then you are already a nature detective.
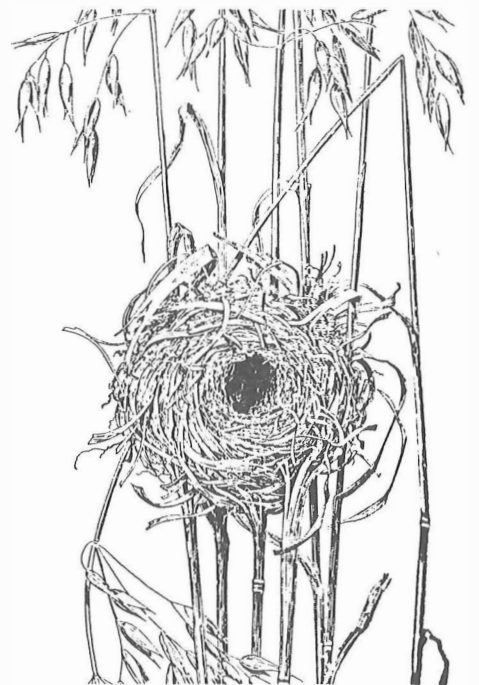
THEME: Animal Homes

Animal homes are <u>everywhere</u> around us. Look for holes and burrows in open meadows, under tree roots or in river and pond banks. Watch for heaps of earth that say "someone has been digging here", or see if you can spot cracks and crannies in rocks or holes underneath boulders that could be somebody's shelter.
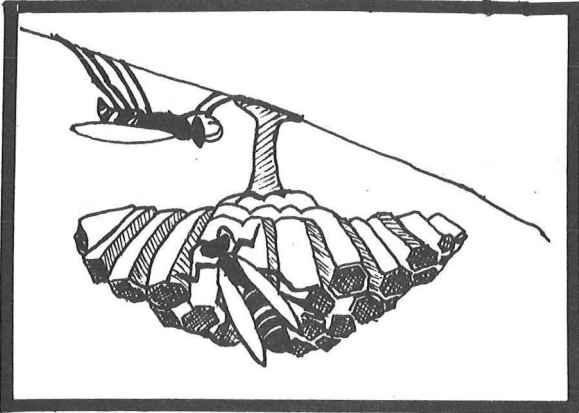And those big trees? Do they have nests in the angles of their branches or even suspended from frail looking twigs high up? Or are the trees hollow? Perhaps woodpeckers or chickadees live in small holes or even a family of raccoons if the hollow center of the tree is more spacious!
Flattened areas of long grass under shrubbery could be a deer's "yarding ground" (the place where the deer rests). Mounds of vegetation, cattails or large branches, out in the middle of the pond, are likely home to muskrats and beavers.
Whenever you see animal homes, keep an eye open for signs of recent animal activity - fresh tracks, droppings, remains of food, clipped grass or bushes, or runways. And if you are very lucky, quiet, and observant in those kinds of places, you have a good chance of seeing the private lives of many animals.

Animal Architects

Many insects, birds, and mammals construct elaborate shelters for them-
selves, using an amazing variety of materials and techniques. Are you
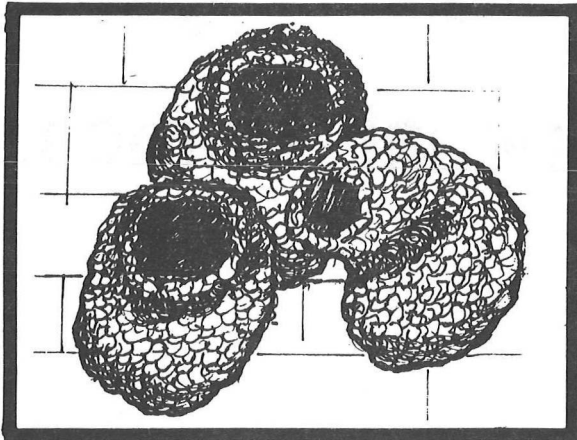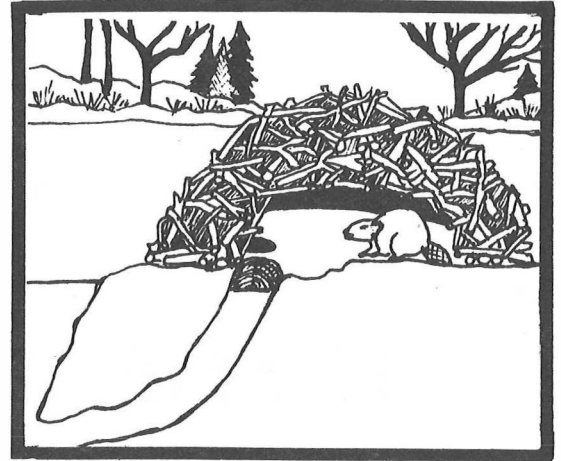familiar with some of the building materials shown below?

WASPS: PAPER CONDOMINIUMS

Paper wasps make nests for their larvae
out of weathered wood chewed to a pulp and
mixed with saliva to form a durable papier-
mache (PAY-per ma-SHAY).

BEAVERS: LOG CABINS

Sharp teeth for cutting branches and
agile "hands" for construction are the
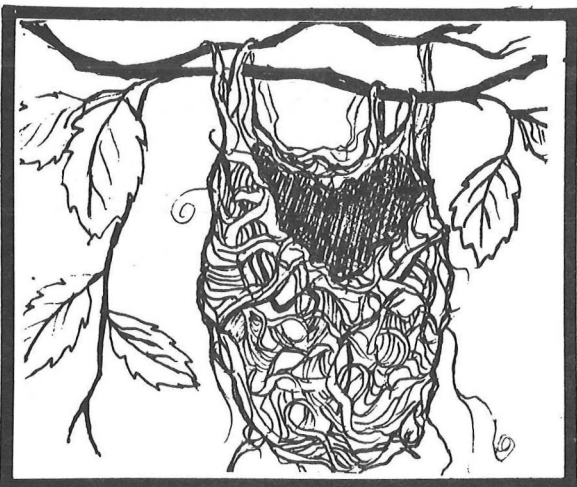only tools used by this mammal when
building its lodge.

SWALLOWS: MUD APARTMENTS

You've probably seen clusters of these
gourd-shaped nests plastered to the sides
of buildings, bridges, and cliffs. They're
made from mud pellets which are built up
in layers similar to the way a potter
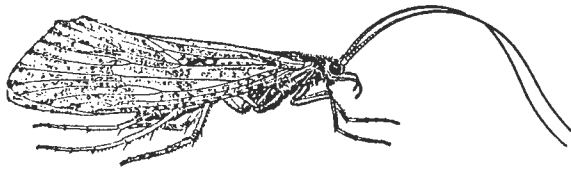makes a clay pot.

CATERPILLARS: SILK TENTS

These webs are created by tent caterpil-
lars in the branches of wild plum and
chokecherry trees; the tents are good
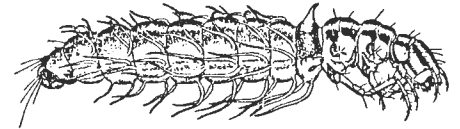protection from predators.

ORIOLES: GRASS BASKETS

These colorful birds also weave yarn,
fishline, feathers, and horsehair into
their sturdy nests, which hang from the
limbs of cottonwoods and other tall trees.
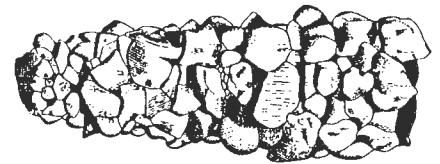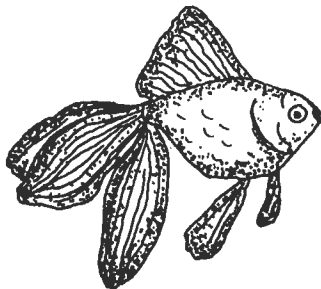
Mobile Homes

Caddis Adult

Caddis Larva

Turtles and snails are never without a hiding
place when danger strikes - for they can tuck
themselves into their own "mobile homes".
But these shells are not really homes. They are
not built, but grow as part of the animal's body.
A turtle can't came out of his shell all the way;
the shell is part of the turtle.
Other creatures really do have mobile homes.....
In ponds and streams you can find larvae of caddis
flies. These 'larvae' (a caterpillar is the larva
a butterfly) live and grow in the water protected
by "mobile homes" that they build out of whatever
is handy - glued together with silk threads and
spit. If the river has tiny pebbles or mica, the
caddis larva will make his home of pebbles and
mica. If the pond has little bits of twigs or
stems of plants, that's what will be made into the
caddis-house. The caddis mobile home is protec-
tion for the growing larva until it hatches out
into a moth-like fly, the tiny brown kind you can
often find fluttering about in the long grass of
a pond or river bank.
Can YOU think of other animals that live in mobile
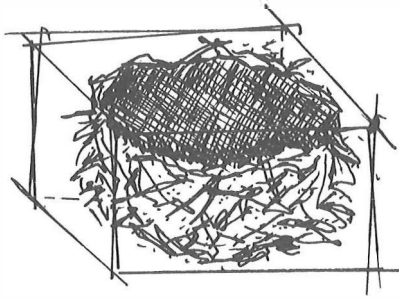homes?

Caddis Larval
Houses

Who Lives with You?

Perhaps you live with a parent or two? Sisters? Brothers? Maybe even some
pets - dog? cat? lizard or goldfish?
Do you know that you also share your home with quite a few other animals?
Inside you may spot a spider or two scurrying away into a dark corner or
lurking in the tub, or see moths fluttering at a window or a light. Out-
side you can look for spiders' webs across the corners of window frames,
ready to catch unwary flies or ants. You may find ant lions - or at
least their traps - in warm sandy places and rolly-polly bugs under loose
boards or logs.
Got a minute with nothing to do? Then go and explore your home inside
and out and keep a notebook of all the animals who live with you.
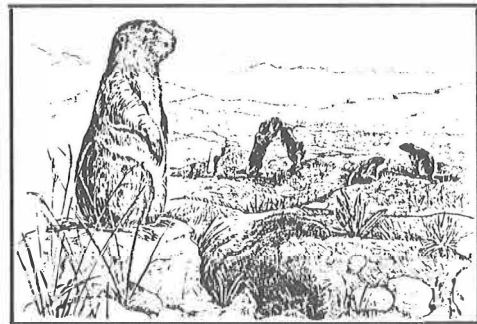
Collecting Nests

Fall and winter are good times to find birdnests of the past summer. Nests found now may be removed and displayed in your home or school. Before collecting the nest, you may wish to record observations in your field notebook--location, size, shape, height from the ground, and materials used for construction. Can you tell what kind of bird built the nest?

Home Sweet Home

Match the animals with their homes.
Answers are below.

1	Beaver	--	a nest
2	Prairie dog	--	b drey
3	Fox	--	c town
4	Badger	--	d hill
5	Eagle	--	e hive
6	Robin	--	f lodge
7	Jack rabbit	--	g tent
8	Caterpillar	--	h eyrie
9	Squirrel	--	i sett
10	Bee	--	j rookery
11	Heron	--	k form
12	Ant	--	l earth or den

**We have a new address! 5201 St. Vrain Rd., Longmont, CO 80503.
You can still find events in the Images calendar!**

Mailbox

What animal homes do you find? Please send drawings, copies of field notes, or any other nature news to: NATURE DETECTIVES, Boulder County Parks and Open Space, P.O. Box 471, Boulder, CO 80306.

**** NATURE DETECTIVES' SPECIAL PROGRAM ****
"Animal Homes Hike"--Winter is a good time to look for nests and other animal homes that were so hard to find when the trees were leafy and the grass was tall! Come to Walden Ponds to look for hundreds of homes. Details in the Images calendar.

ANSWERS: 1f. 2c. 3i. 4l. 5h. 6a. 7k. 8g. 9b. 10e. 11j. 12d.