



Baltimore Oriole

A Baltimore Oriole nestling.

## Birds of Barrington: BALTIMORE ORIOLE

THE BALTIMORE ORIOLE (*Icterus galbula*) is one of our most brilliant summer residents, a gift from the tropics, where it winters, to northern latitudes where it migrates to raise a family and brighten the soundscape with its liquid notes. The male is the one with brilliant orange plumage; the female sports feathers that are more yellow. Orioles favor mature trees—cottonwoods, elms, maples—for their nests.

And what a miracle of avian architecture is the nest. It is a hanging pouch, woven of fine plant fibers, horsehair, and other long, pliable materials. I have seen an Oriole's nest in a city park that sported the green plastic "grass" used to line commercial Easter egg baskets. But a country Oriole's nest almost always features horsehair as a major component. In early May, female Orioles can be spotted hard at work, stripping the outer fibers from dried milkweed stalks, in the same way basket-makers collect their osiers for weaving. The Oriole's only tool is its long, sharp beak, typical of birds in the blackbird family, and it uses it to

fashion a soft woven sack that cradles and rocks the eggs and nestlings, often at the end of a high, drooping branch.

The Baltimore Oriole derives its name from the first Baron Baltimore, George Calvert, whose livery was black and yellow. Oriole comes from the Medieval Latin word *oriolus*, which means "golden bird".

The Baltimore Oriole is not the only member of the Oriole family that makes its summer home in and around Barrington. Its cousin, the Orchard Oriole—not as brilliantly colored, but no less interesting for its nest architecture and remarkable song—also raises broods in local natural areas. But that's a subject for another Birds of Barrington profile.

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*for Citizens for Conservation, and has led regular bird walks in Barrington and Chicago, as well as in New York City and Washington, D.C. She currently teaches the Birds in My Neighborhood,*

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**The Year of the Bird:** 2018 marks the centennial of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the most powerful and important bird-protection law ever passed. In honor of this milestone, National Geographic, the National Audubon Society, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and BirdLife International will join forces with more than 100 other organizations and millions of people around the world to celebrate 2018 as the "Year of the Bird". What bird populations do usefully indicate is the health of our ethical values. One reason that wild birds matter—ought to matter—is that they are our last, best connection to a natural world that is otherwise receding. They're the most vivid and widespread representatives of the Earth as it was before people arrived on it." (Nat Geo, Jan. 2018)