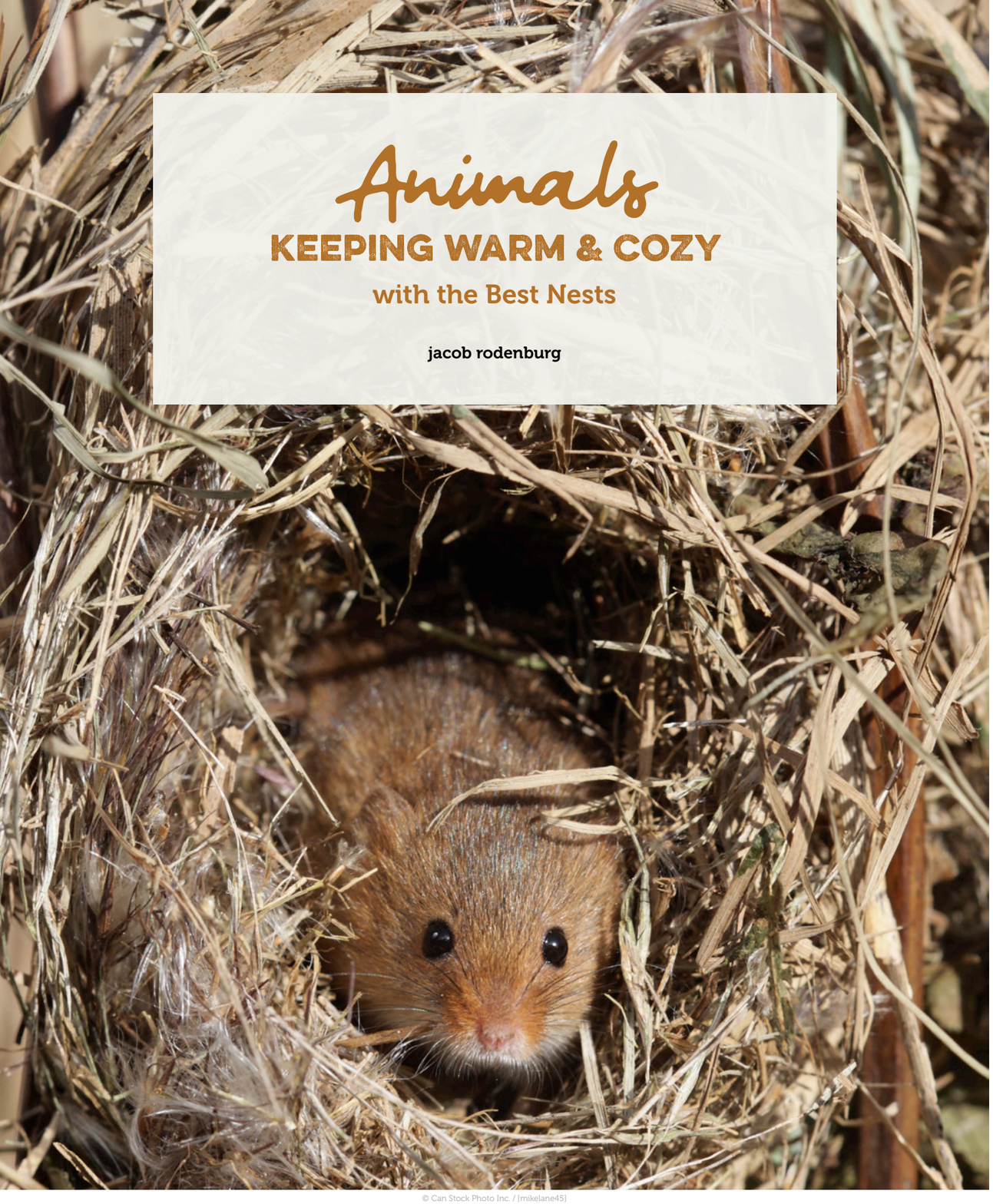

Animals

KEEPING WARM & COZY

with the Best Nests

jacob rodenburg

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Fall is a time for new beginnings and sad endings as we say goodbye to the warmth and freedom of summer. On or around September 21, the sun marches across the equator on its annual southward course, marking the official beginning of the season. As trees shed their cloak of leaves and birds wing their way southward, many mammals, insects, amphibians, and reptiles are getting ready to face the coming cold and shortage of food.

BUILDING A DRAY

By mid-winter, the temperature can drop below -40° C, yet many animals survive. If you are a Grey Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*), you make a cozy squirrel's nest, called a dray. In early fall you begin by gathering twigs with leaves still attached. Using your paws and teeth, you weave a rough platform that you jam into the crook of a tree. Then you stuff softer material such as moss, grass, shredded bark, or single leaves on top of it. Next you dome the platform with a skeleton of twigs, ramming more leaves in every nook and cranny until you have an insulated, snug winter home. You make two entrances, one at the bottom angled toward the trunk to keep rain and snow out, and another as an emergency exit off to the side.

Other animals, such as field mice, weave dried grass into a tight, fluffy ball. Chickadees might find a hole or a cavity in a tree and line this with feathers and moss. Foxes make a den on a hillside or inside a hollow log. Snakes find crevices called hibernaculum, and wind themselves together into what looks like a snake ball to retain heat.

Ensuring their shelter is protected from the wind, rain, and snow, and located in a safe place is critical for animals to survive.

MAKE YOUR OWN WINTER NEST

For this experiment, you'll need a thermometer, a small container with a tight-fitting lid, hot water, and access to dried leaves, grass, twigs, and moss.

Fill the small container with hot water. Let's imagine the container is your "critter." Measure the temperature of the water and record it, then snap the lid shut. Now create a nest that you think will keep your critter as warm as possible using only natural materials. Like a squirrel, you might create a frame of sticks and stuff leaves inside it. Or, inspired by mouse nests, you might decide to create a ball of dried grass. Perhaps you'll find a hole in a tree or log and stuff it with moss or leaves.

When the nest is complete, place your critter (your container of hot water) into the nest and wait about two hours. Now, retrieve your container and quickly measure the water's temperature. How did you do? Did your critter lose much heat? What might make a better nest next time? Remember the importance of insulation—lots of dried material helps to retain heat, just like the insulation in people's homes.•

KIDS ACTIVITY

Shelter Rap

Works best when the leader says a line and the children repeat. Alternatively, clap your hands and thump your thighs to create a rhythm.

A hole in a tree ain't no empty space,

To a chickadee or a squirrel, it's a dandy place,

You line with some feathers or some tufts of fur,

It will keep out the chatters and the shivers and burrrrs.

Refrain:

Cause it's windproof, waterproof, warm and safe.

Yea it's windproof, waterproof, warm and safe.

Gather some leaves or whatever might be dry.

Stuff them in branches in a place that is high,

Jam this nest into the crook of a tree,

Now that is a cozy and safe place to be!

Refrain:

Cause it's windproof, waterproof, warm and safe.

Yea it's windproof, waterproof, warm and safe.

By: Jacob Rodenburg