

10 great nature books for kids

Melissa Stewart's Picks

Melissa Stewart is a leading voice in children's nonfiction, with more than 200 science books to her name. Her work has been translated into more than a dozen languages and garnered multiple awards, including the Sibert Honor. She co-wrote "5 Kinds of Nonfiction: Enriching Reading and Writing Instruction with Children's Books" and edited the anthology "Nonfiction Writers Dig Deep: 50 Award-winning Authors Share the Secret of Engaging Writing."

What's in Your Pocket? Collecting Nature's Treasures

Heather Montgomery

Illustrated by Maribel LeChuga

Ages 5 and up

"Meet a diverse array of scientists with one thing in common—as kids, they loved to explore their surroundings and collect enticing natural objects. Their stories will inspire curious kids to hunt for treasures of their own, observe them closely, and perhaps even develop a lifelong love of science and nature. Engaging text and bright, friendly illustrations vividly capture the wonder of childhood explorations and the beauty of the natural world."

Who Nests Here? Twenty-four Extraordinary Animal Homes

Karen Jameson

Illustrated by Ramona Kaulitzki

Ages 5 and up

"Think birds are the only animals that live in nests? No way! Using a fun, game-like structure, this engaging book introduces readers to 24 extraordinary creatures that build nests made of mud, sand, water, plants, dirt, rocks, and snow—and none of them are birds. Captivating text and colorful, realistic illustrations make 'Who Nests Here?' a perfect choice for science lessons as well as bedtime reading."

In the World of Whales

Michelle Cusolito

Illustrated by Jessica Lanan

Ages 5 and up

"Witness Belgian freediver Fred Buyle's astonishing encounter with a newborn sperm whale and its pod. Rich, precise, lyrical language and luminous watercolor-and-ink illustrations immerse readers in the gentle giant's watery world, allowing them to share the magical moments when a whale pup takes its first breath and meets its family."

You're Invited to a Moth Ball: A Nighttime Insect Celebration

Loree Griffin Burns

Illustrated by Ellen Harasimowicz

Ages 6 and up

“Large, appealing photos and conversational text invite readers to plan and host a moth ball—a fun nighttime activity for attracting and studying moths. In addition to experiencing a moth ball vicariously, readers learn about the moth life cycle, the anatomy of moths, and how moths differ from butterflies. This appealing hands-on science book is sure to inspire budding scientists.”

Magic in a Drop of Water: How Ruth Patrick Taught the World about Water Pollution

Julie Winterbottom

Illustrated by Susan Reagan

Ages 6 and up

“Join pioneering scientist and environmental hero Ruth Patrick as she discovers the critical role microlife plays in maintaining the health of ponds, streams, and other aquatic ecosystems. This beautifully written, gorgeously illustrated book will inspire young nature lovers to follow their passion and curiosity.”

Just One Oak: What a Single Tree Can Be

Maria Gianferrari

Illustrated by Diana Sudyka

Ages 6 and up

“Explore a mighty oak tree, from its leafy crown to its branching roots, and discover how it supports dozens of creatures of all sizes and shapes. Poetic main text bursts with delightful language, while well-placed labels and informative captions provide a treasure trove of captivating details. Lush watercolors that alternate between panoramic scenes and zoomed-in views enrich this joyous tribute to a keystone species.”

The Book of Turtles

Sy Montgomery

Illustrated by Matt Patterson

Ages 5 and up

“Engaging language, superb use of page turns, and masterful transitions create a seamless flow as the book covers everything from unusual turtle traits and behaviors to the surprising ways turtles sense the world and communicate with one another. Stunning, realistic art and the author’s irrepressible admiration for her topic make this book a pleasure to read.”

Goldfinches

Mary Oliver

Illustrated by Melissa Sweet

Ages 5 and up

“In an exquisite union of verse and visual art, a Caldecott-winning illustrator brings new life to the work of a deeply beloved poet. Rich, joyful text and enchanting, mixed-media art celebrate the

natural world, illuminate the interrelationships of living things, and inspire readers to explore natural areas near their home.”

Vulture View

April Pulley Sayre

Illustrated by Steve Jenkins

Ages 4 and up

“Simple, lyrical language and gorgeous cut-paper art invite young readers to accompany a vulture on its daily journey. Watch it soar through the sky and use its senses to explore the landscape in search of food.”

Monarch and Mourning Cloak

Melissa Stewart

Illustrated by Sarah S. Brannen

“In 2008, I began writing a book called ‘Two Butterflies, Two Lives’ because I wanted to open readers’ minds to all the different ways butterflies live in and experience the world. Many children raise monarchs in school or at home, so I knew right away that they would be featured. I decided to compare this popular and familiar butterfly to mourning cloaks because they’re different in so many ways. And yet, each butterfly’s unique behaviors help it survive in its habitat.”

Kathy Renfrew’s Picks

Kathy was a retired elementary educator who received the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching. She was the Elementary Science Assessment Coordinator for the Vermont Agency of Education, an education specialist for the Wade Institute for Science Education, and a curriculum specialist for DiscoveryEd. Kathy was an active member of NSELA, NSTA, NCTE, and ASCD and served as a board member of the Massachusetts Science Education Leaders Association.

Gilbert’s Migration Vacation: The Story of an Original Snowbird

Susan Levine

Illustrated by Irene Bofill

Ages 4 and up

“I inadvertently found and immediately fell in love with this story about sanderlings—birds which often stop near my home in Massachusetts—on their annual fall journey south.” The story begins in the Arctic tundra with hatchling Gilbert joining other birds on their 4,000-mile migration. The birds experience hurricanes, hungry falcons, confusing city lights, and other obstacles along the way. “Gilbert sets an example to help all of us face our daily challenges.”

Sun Bird: The Amazing Journey of the Arctic Tern

Written and illustrated by Lindsay Moore

Ages 4 and up

This story about the yearlong migration of Arctic terns from pole to pole “will pull at the heartstrings of any bird-watcher.” The book combines natural science information with lyrical prose and “gorgeous watercolor paintings.” Through their travels, the terns interact with a wide variety of animals, habitats, and ecosystems, creating a rich and immersive landscape for young readers to explore. “Sun Bird’ can be used as an interactive read-aloud with any size group.”

The Secret Life of a Sea Turtle

Maddalena Bearzi

Illustrated by Alex Boersma

Ages 4 and up

Birds aren’t the only animals that migrate! Sea turtles can also travel long distances, returning to lay their eggs on the same sandy beaches where they hatched. This beautifully illustrated nonfiction story of a female green sea turtle shares more than accurate science; it creates a compelling and powerful adventure. “I really connected with ‘The Secret Life of a Sea Turtle,’ and wondered where their journey would take them.”

Salamander Rescue

Pamela McDowell

Illustrated by Kasia Charko

Ages 6 and up

“Another favorite is an oldie but goodie about the migration of long-toed salamanders making their way from a pond to the mountains.” This chapter book tells the story of Cricket and her friends who help a researcher, Dr. Kate, investigate the decline in the salamander population. After they discover how dangerous it is for the salamanders to cross a busy road, they use their engineering and design skills to build a ramp to assist them. It’s a “very unique migration journey.”

Lion Lights: My Invention That Made Peace with Lions

Richard Turere and Shelly Pollock

Illustrated by Sonia Maria Luce Possentini

“Lion Lights’ is my favorite book about inventions. It is the true story about keeping cows safe and saving the lions at the same time. The book highlights the big ideas of innovation and persistence. When I engaged with this book I challenged my students to design blinking lights that would replicate what Richard did to solve a problem that was important to his family but also to the other farmers in the village.”