



10 great nature books for kids

Pond life, tern migration, and the science of animal nests: Literacy experts share their favorite nonfiction children's books about nature.

by Sandy Roberts, on June 15, 2026



Summer is a great time for children to explore the outdoors, so we asked literacy experts [Melissa Stewart](#) and [Kathy Renfrew](#) to help us put together a list of books that are sure to inspire curiosity about the natural world.



Nonfiction science books, especially picture books, do more than inform: They serve as a bridge, connecting children with the world around them through storytelling and vibrant imagery. Exploring nature can improve focus and strengthen observational skills, which support scientific thinking. And pairing hands-on outdoor experiences with reading can boost language development and build a child's vocabulary. As an added benefit, time spent outdoors lowers stress and [gets kids off screens](#), fostering social-emotional development.

Both Melissa and Kathy recommended reading aloud with children. As Kathy explained, "Story picture books can be an engaging way to tell a true story or introduce a concept." Reading with children of all ages—at home, in the library, or at summer camp—introduces complex topics in an accessible way, while encouraging active listening and critical thinking. Plus, it's fun! "Some adults are hesitant to read nonfiction aloud, but it can be a truly joyful experience for everyone," Melissa said.

So as the days get longer, grab a good book, find a shady tree, and read with the kids in your life. Melissa and Kathy's top recommendations are below, and you can get a [printable version](#) of the complete list here.

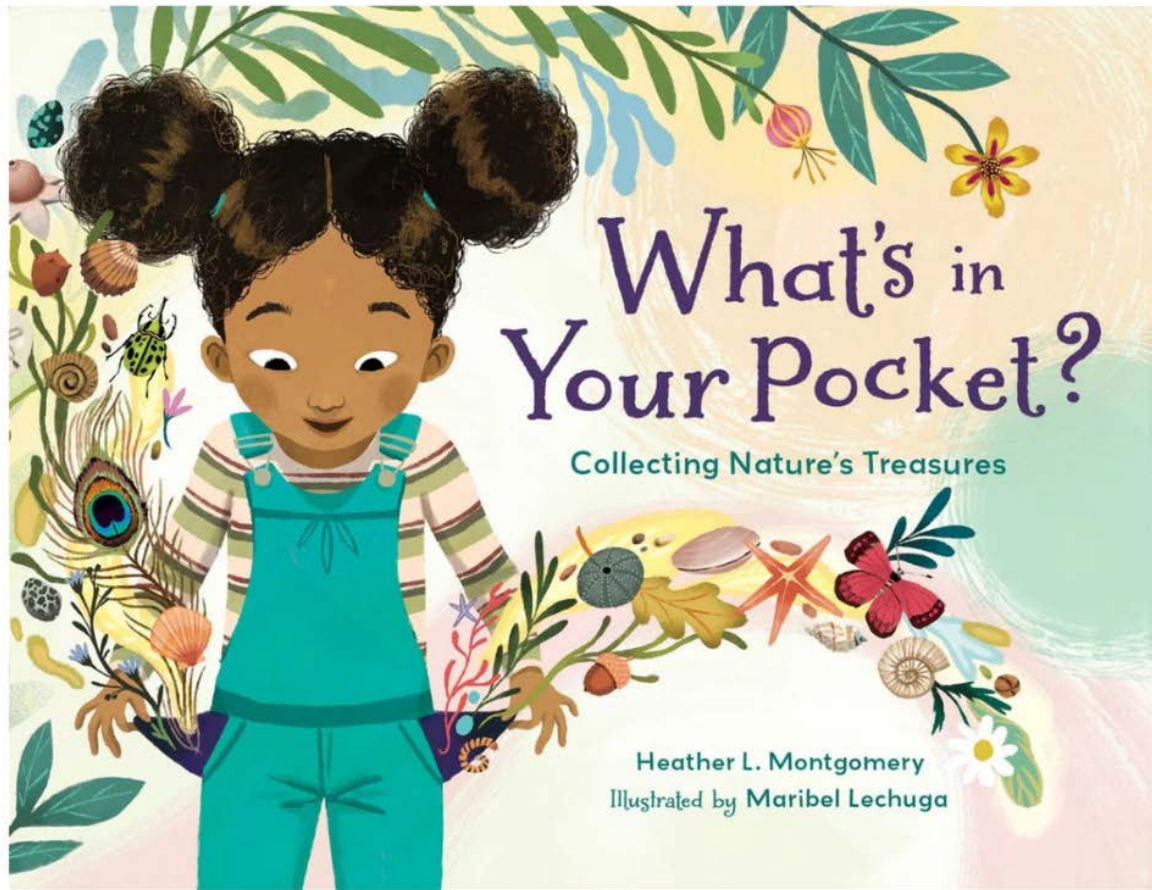
Sadly, Kathy Renfrew passed away on May 20, 2026, before this piece was finalized. We are grateful for her dedication to science education, her boundless creativity, and her willingness to mentor her fellow educators. She will be missed.

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Melissa Stewart's Picks

Children's nonfiction author of more than 200 science books





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

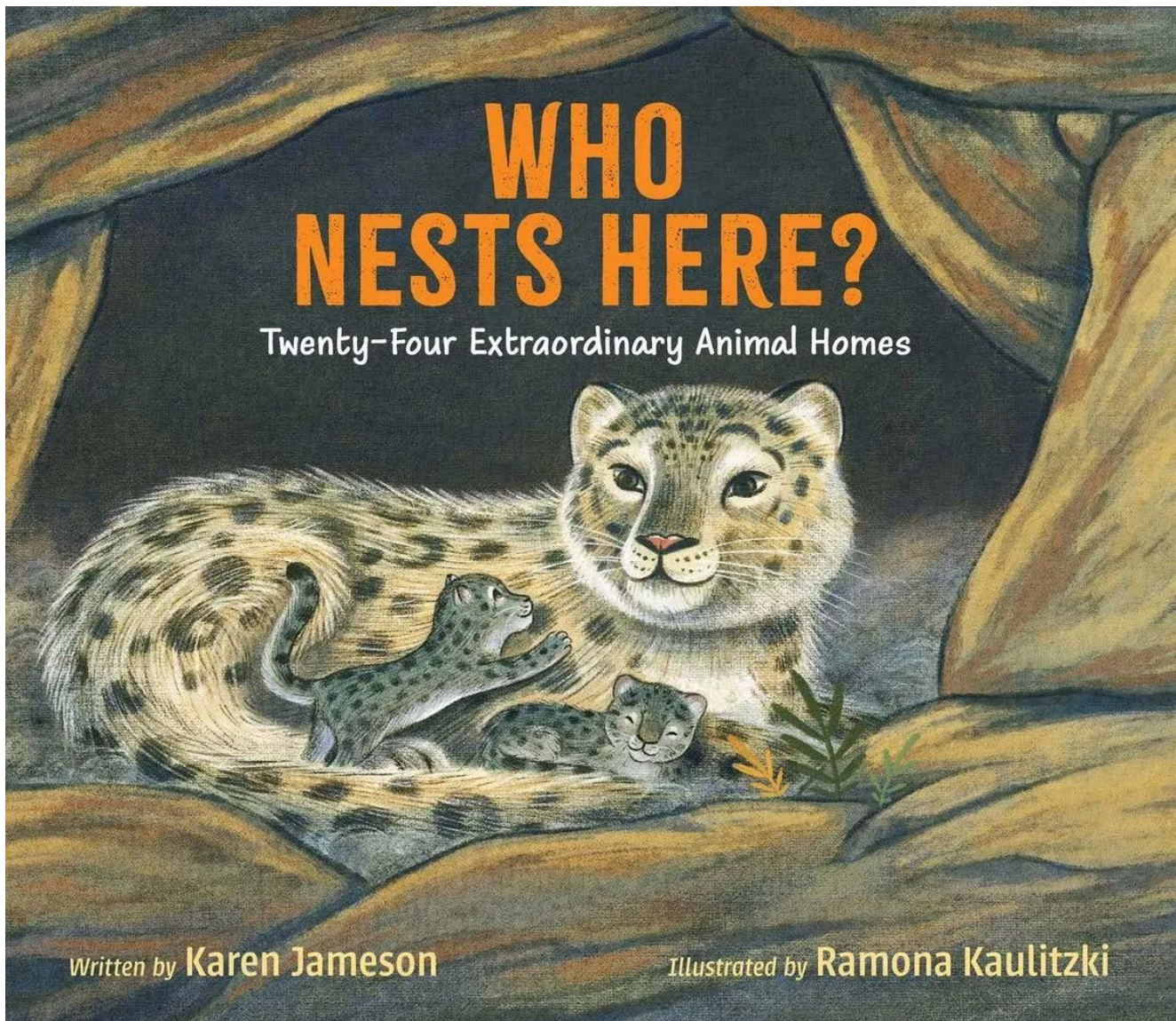
Heather Montgomery

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

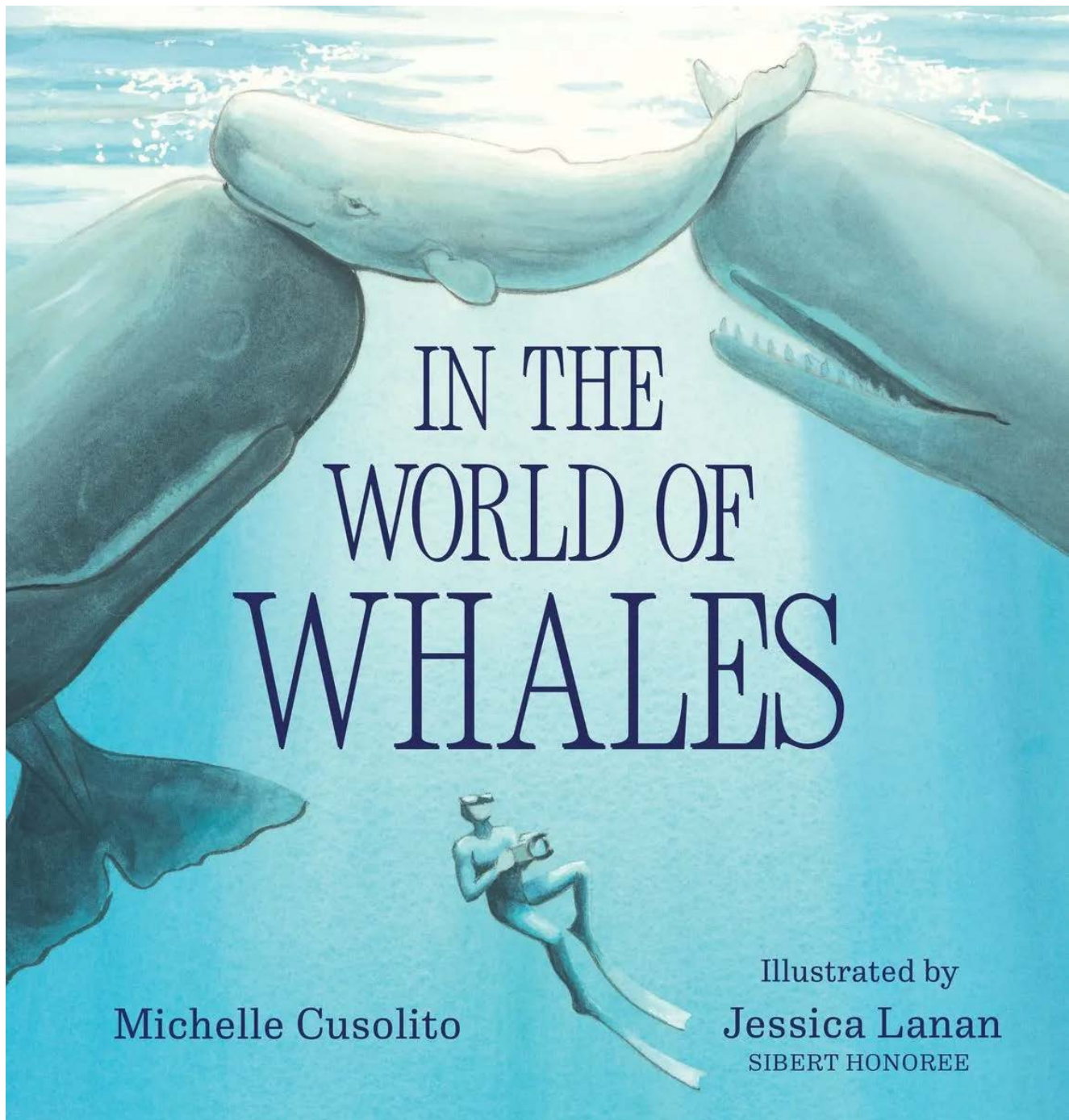
Karen Jameson

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

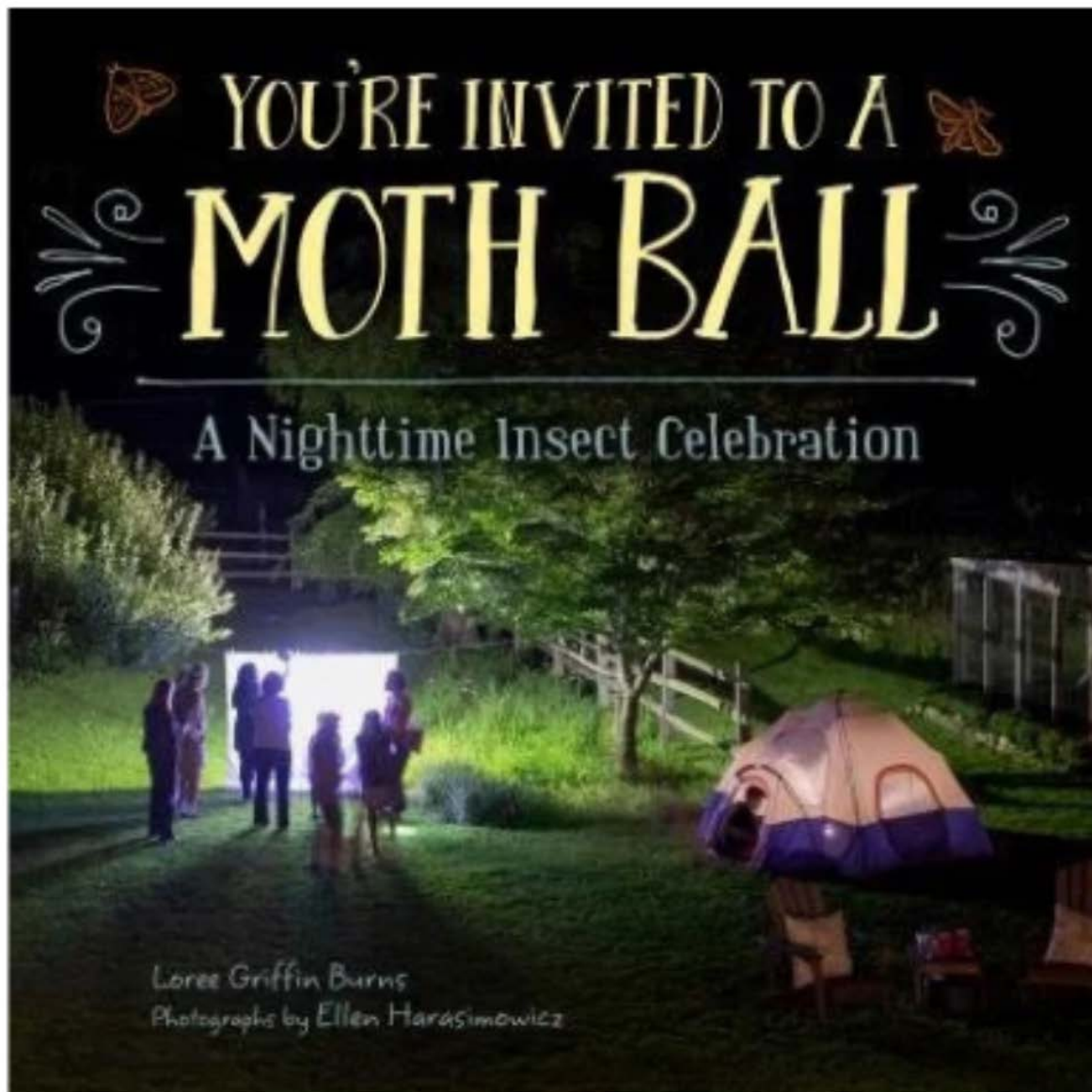
Michelle Cusolito

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





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

Loree Griffin Burns

Illustrated by Ellen Harasimowicz

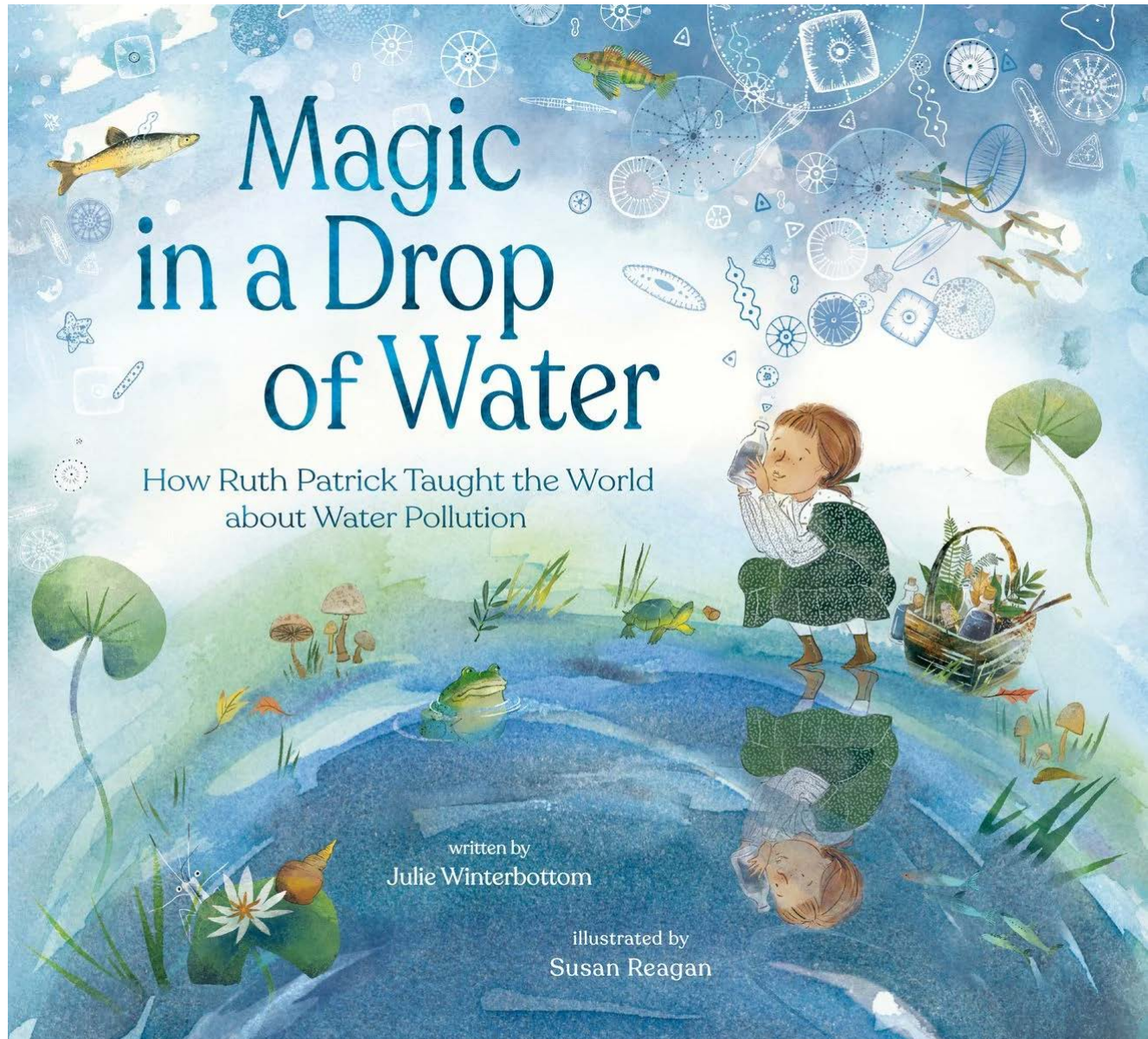
Ages 6 and up

"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.”

[GET THE BOOK](#)



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

by Julie Winterbottom

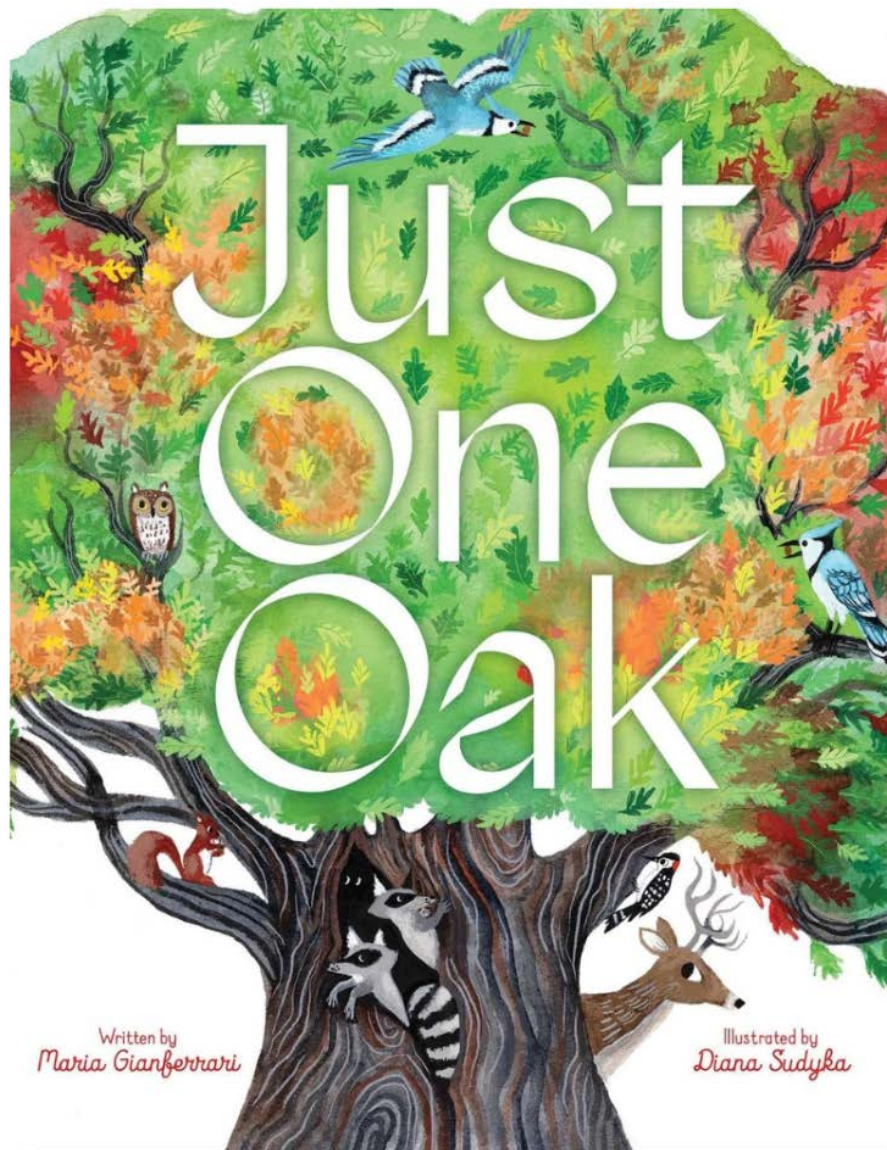
Illustrated by Susan Reagan

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.”

[GET THE BOOK](#)



Just One Oak: What a Single Tree Can Re



Maria Gianferrari

Illustrated by Diana Sudyka

Ages 6 and up

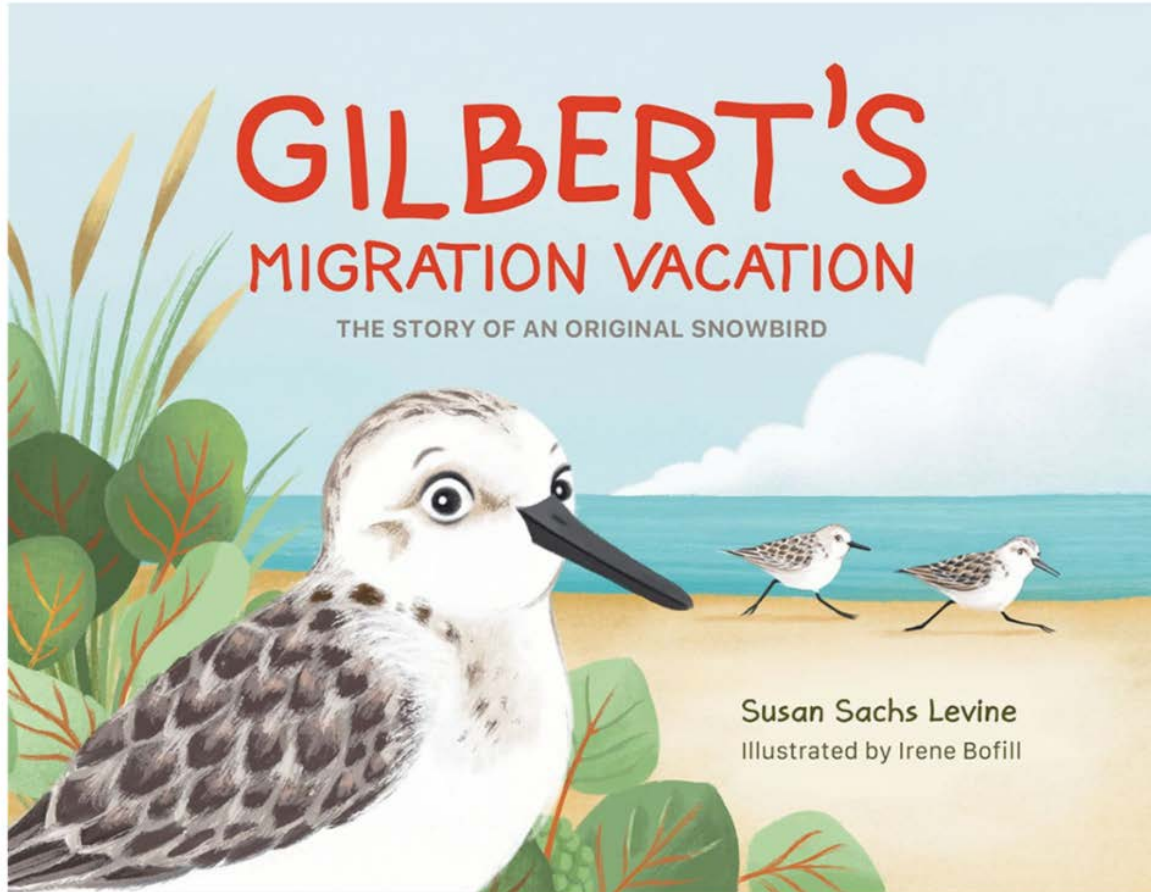
“Explore a mighty oak tree, from its leafy crown to its branching roots, and discover how it supports dozens of creatures of all sizes and shapes. Poetic main text bursts with delightful language, while well-placed labels and informative captions provide a treasure trove of captivating details. Lush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

[GET THE BOOK](#)

Kathy Renfrew's Picks

Award-winning elementary science education specialist





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

Susan Levine

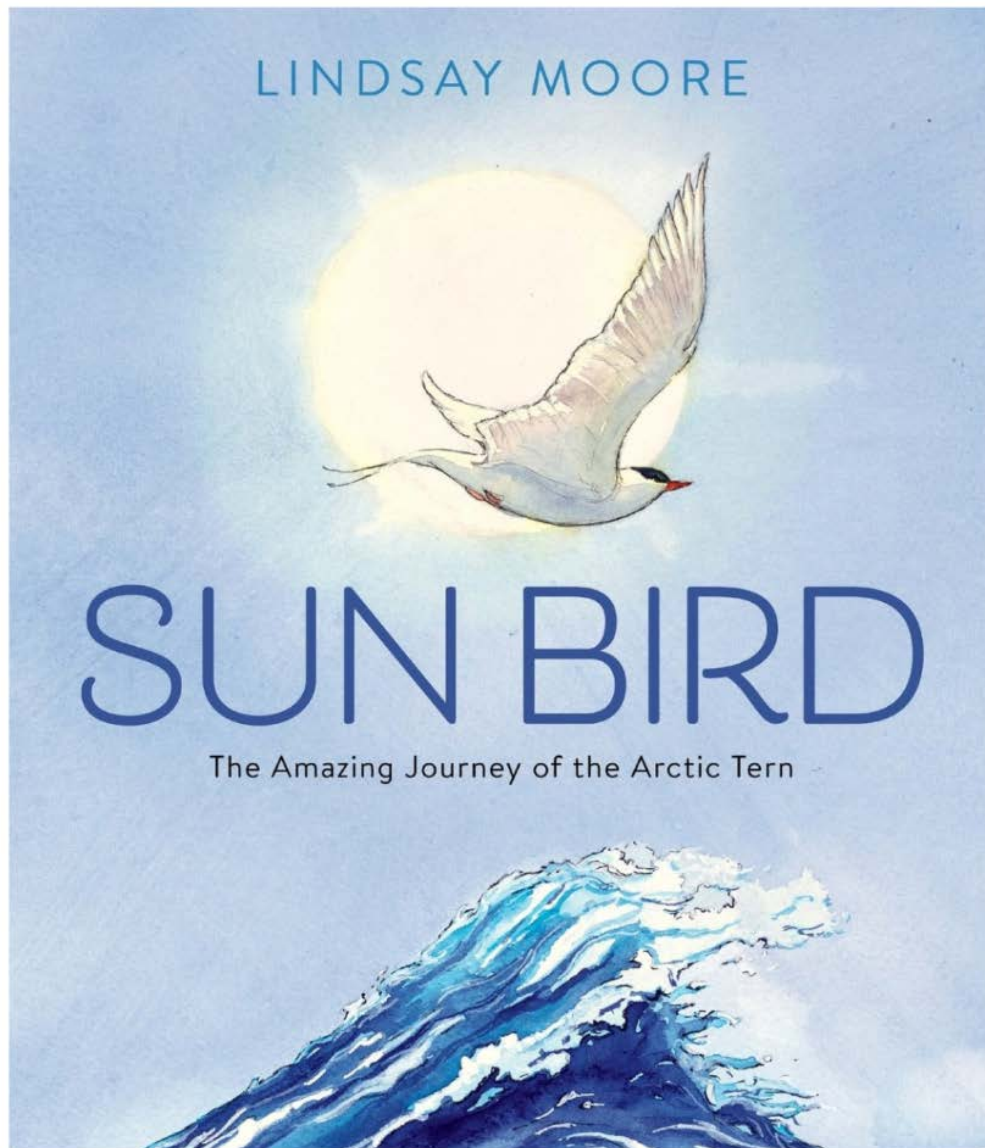
Illustrated by Irene Bofill

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."



GET THE BOOK



Sun Bird: The Amazing Journey of the Arctic Tern

Written and illustrated by Lindsay Moore

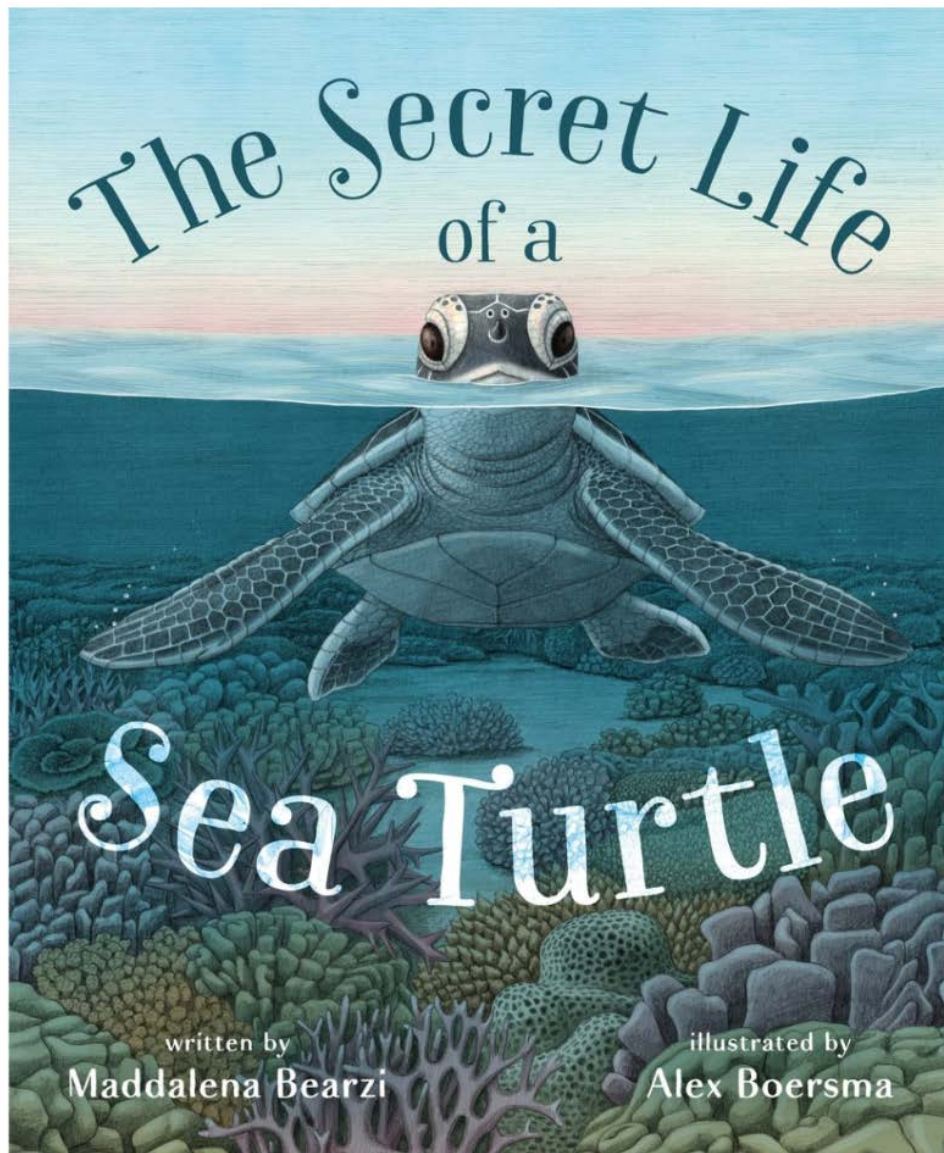
Ages 4 and up

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.”

[GET THE BOOK](#)



The Secret Life of a Sea Turtle

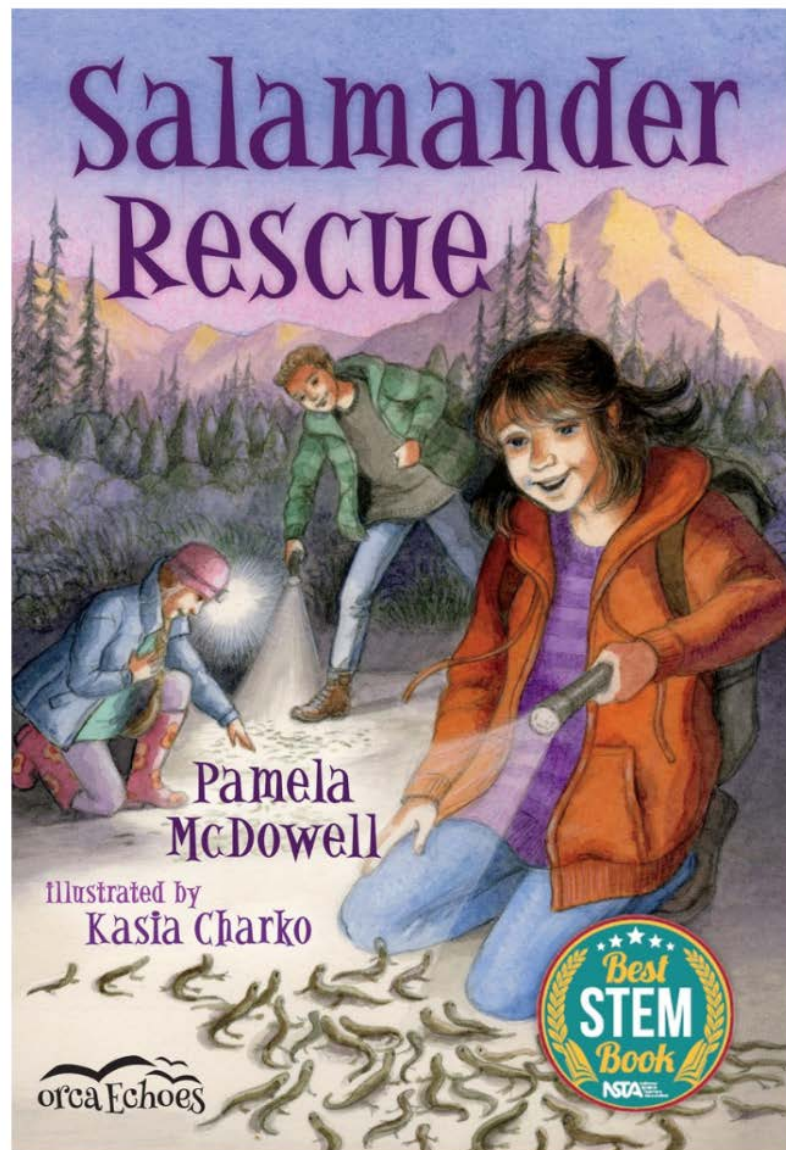
Maddalena Bearzi

Illustrated by Alex Boersma



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 the Sea Turtles,' and wondered where their journey would take them."

[GET THE BOOK](#)



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.”

[GET THE BOOK](#)

More recommendations for nature reads

The trade journal Kirkus has some great ideas on its [Best Picture Books of 2025 About Nature](#) list. Plus, each year, the American Library Association’s Sustainability Round Table publishes its top ten [Sustainably Themed Children’s Books](#). The School Library Journal also publishes an annual [Science and Nature Books for Kids](#) list, with great suggestions. And don’t miss Science Friday’s “Best Science Books for Kids” lists from [2022](#), [2023](#), [2024](#), and [2025](#).

Are you an avid science reader, too? Join the [SciFri Book Club](#) where we discuss books that spark curiosity—nonfiction, sci-fi, and more. Enjoy live-streamed events, friendly discussions, and a healthy dose of nerdy joy. Plus, it’s FREE!

Related Resources

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- [Make ancient ink with the help of oak tree parasites](#)
- [Go mothing! Easy outdoor science fun](#)
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MEET THE WRITER



About Sandy Roberts

Sandy Roberts is Science Friday's Education Program Manager, where she creates learning resources and experiences to advance STEM equity in all learning environments. Lately, she's been playing with origami circuits and trying to perfect a gluten-free sourdough recipe.

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