

= Bart the Mother =

" Bart the Mother " is the third episode of The Simpsons ' tenth season . It originally aired on Fox in the United States on September 27 , 1998 . In the episode , Bart accidentally kills a mother bird with a BB gun , and decides to hatch and take care of the two eggs he found in the bird 's nest .

" Bart the Mother " was written by David X. Cohen and directed by Steven Dean Moore ; it was the last full @-@ length episode Cohen wrote for The Simpsons before leaving to work on Futurama . The original idea for the episode was intended to be a B story , but because it was too difficult to work into other episodes , it eventually became a primary plot . The episode features the final appearance of character Troy McClure and was dedicated to the character 's voice actor , Phil Hartman , who was murdered by his wife on May 28 , 1998 , four months before the episode aired .

In its original American broadcast , " Bart the Mother " finished 58th in ratings for the week of September 21 ? 27 , 1998 , with a Nielsen rating of 7 @.@ 4 , translating to 7 @,@ 355 @,@ 600 households . The episode received generally positive reviews from critics , who praised Bart 's moral dilemma and soul searching moments . Nancy Cartwright , the voice actress of Bart , described the episode as one of her favorites .

= = Plot = =

When Marge takes the family to the Family Fun Center , she notices Nelson acting like a bully , especially when he knocks Milhouse off the track and wins a BB gun from stolen prize tickets . Bart and Nelson attempt to be friends , but Marge forbids Bart to hang out with Nelson . Bart goes to Nelson 's house anyway and starts using Nelson 's new BB gun . When Nelson pressures Bart to shoot a bird in a nest , Bart accidentally kills the bird . Marge is furious that Bart killed an animal , but instead of punishing him , she refuses to have anything to do with his destructive ways .

After Marge leaves Bart with Nelson , Bart discovers two eggs in a bird 's nest . Since he does not want the babies to die like their mother , he decides to hatch the eggs , and secretly keeps the eggs warm in his treehouse . After Bart spends more time in his treehouse , Marge starts to suspect he is up to something . After Marge finds out what Bart has been doing , she tells him she is proud of him . With Marge 's help , the eggs eventually hatch , but the Simpson family is shocked when instead of birds , a pair of lizards emerge from the eggs , who Bart names Chirpy Boy and Bart Jr .

Bart and Marge take the lizards to the Springfield Birdwatching Society . Principal Skinner , a member of the society , explains that they are Bolivian tree lizards , a type of lizard that steals a bird 's eggs and leaves their own eggs to be watched after by the mother bird , which is then eaten by the offspring once they hatch . Skinner says the lizards must be killed by law , because they have killed many bird species . Bart escapes and runs away with the lizards , but before he can get away , Skinner catches up to him and they both struggle on top of the building . Suddenly , the lizards glide to the ground , where they start to eradicate pigeons in Springfield .

Since the town considered the pigeons to be a nuisance , they are delighted that the lizards have eaten all the pigeons . So , Bart is thanked and honored by Mayor Quimby with a loganberry scented candle . Lisa worries the town will now become infested by lizards rather than the pigeons , but Skinner assures her they will send in " wave after wave of " Chinese needle snakes , then snake @-@ eating gorillas , and then " when wintertime rolls around , the gorillas simply freeze to death . "

= = Production = =

" Bart the Mother " was the last full @-@ length episode David X. Cohen wrote for The Simpsons . Shortly after the episode aired , Cohen teamed up with The Simpsons ' creator Matt Groening to develop Futurama , where he served as executive producer and head writer for the series ' entire run . Cohen 's idea for the episode started out as a B story for Homer . In the original concept , pigeons nest outside Homer 's window at the Springfield Nuclear Power Plant . Mr. Burns exterminates the pigeons and Homer climbs out onto the ledge of the window , in the middle of a blizzard , to nest the eggs . Cohen said the idea " [did not] fit in anywhere " , so he decided to pitch

it as an A story instead , with Bart nesting the eggs instead of Homer . The Simpsons writer George Meyer thought the idea of Bart shooting the bird and simply nesting the eggs was too straightforward , and he did not think it had " enough of a twist " to be a good episode . Cohen and Meyer eventually decided the eggs should be lizard eggs . Cohen thought the twist was what ultimately made the episode both " touching " and " interesting " .

Producer Ron Hauge came up with the idea of someone shooting a bird and feeling guilty about it . Hauge told the staff a few weeks before Cohen started writing the episode that when he was 13 or 14 years old , he accidentally killed a bird after he got a Wrist Rocket slingshot , and took a shot at a bird that he thought was " far , far away " . Hauge said his friends were excited about it , but he was " dying inside " . For the scene in which the bird is killed , Cohen received further inspiration from an episode of The Andy Griffith Show entitled " Opie the Birdman " . The writers were trying to figure out a way to have Bart kill the bird without actually wanting to kill it , and decided to give the gun a crooked sight that Bart would be unaware of , so when Bart intentionally takes a shot at the right of the bird to avoid it , the bullet still hits the bird . After Bart kills the mother bird , he imagines himself before a bird court with a vulture , an eagle , and a toucan as judges . This sequence was added to " liven up the visuals " , because the writers thought the episode tended too heavily towards extreme realism and because most of the scenes in the episode were taking place in and around the Simpsons ' house . Then @-@ show runner Mike Scully had done the same thing with an episode he wrote for season seven called " Marge Be Not Proud " . In that episode , Bart gets caught shoplifting , and writer Bill Oakley suggested the addition of a fantasy sequence to get away from the realism in the episode .

The Family Fun Center the Simpsons visit is based on a real family fun center in Falmouth , Massachusetts that Cohen went to as a child to play video games . The Bolivian Tree Lizard is a fake species , but Cohen based it on real animals , including the dinosaur species Oviraptor , which was originally thought to eat eggs . The species is also based on the cowbird and the cuckoo , which lay their eggs in other birds ' nests , and Draco , a genus of gliding lizards . Cohen also received inspiration from the Cane Toad that started " taking over " Australia in 1935 .

" Bart the Mother " marked the last guest appearance of Phil Hartman on The Simpsons as Troy McClure . On May 28 , 1998 , four months before the episode aired , he was shot and killed by his wife Brynn . " Bart the Mother " was dedicated in his memory in response to this . Rather than replace Hartman with a new voice actor , the production staff retired McClure from the show , along with Hartman 's other recurring character , Lionel Hutz .

= = Reception = =

In its original American broadcast , " Bart the Mother " finished 58th in the ratings for the week of September 21 ? 27 , 1998 , with a Nielsen rating of 7 @. @ 4 , translating to 7 @, @ 355 @, @ 600 households . Nancy Cartwright , the voice of Bart Simpson , called it one of her favorite The Simpsons episodes , along with " Bart Sells His Soul " and " Lisa 's Substitute " . The Toronto Sun 's Bruce Kirkland wrote that " Bart the Mother " was one of the " classic episodes " of the series ' tenth season . The authors of the book I Can 't Believe It 's a Bigger and Better Updated Unofficial Simpsons Guide , Warren Martyn and Adrian Wood wrote , " We particularly like the moral dilemma at the end , as underlined by Lisa , regarding the eventual culling of the lizards that will need to take place . A good romp , this one , with some nice laughs at Homer 's expense . " Colin Jacobson of DVD Movie Guide said , " The show generates decent heart as it shows Bart ? s attempts to make up for his misbehavior . The show becomes reasonably enjoyable if not especially memorable . " Jesse Hassenger of PopMatters named the tenth season of The Simpsons the series ' " first significant dip in quality , a step away from its golden era [...] with broader gags and more outlandish plots " . However , Hassenger enjoyed " Bart the Mother " , and wrote , " [The episode] explores the show ? s sweet and dark sides simultaneously as Bart , remorseful after killing a bird , tries to care for orphaned eggs that turn out to hold ravenous lizards . " DVD Town 's James Plath described " Bart the Mother " as an episode that viewers would either love or hate , because of Bart 's rare moments of soul searching , and he found the episode to be a memorable one .

