

Before containing any wildlife please observe and consult your local rehabilitation agency. All wildlife has specific social and dietary needs that cannot be addressed by a non-professional. Getting wildlife to professional care is always in the best interest of the bird or animal.

*If you are unsure whom to call, please use [Animal Help Now](#) to find your local rehabilitation agency.

I have found a baby bird. What do I do?

Do not attempt to keep and raise a baby bird. All native birds are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and keeping them for any period of time without a permit is illegal. Keeping a baby bird can and will result in imprinting, malnutrition, starvation, illness and/or death.

Imprinting is an irreversible social psychological disorder in animals that occurs when humans try to raise them. When a baby bird is taken care of by a human when it is 4-6 weeks old or younger, the bird will no longer associate or recognize its own species. **Imprinting is not equal to domestication.** If you find yourself caring for a baby wild bird, you may think the bird is thriving because it's alert, eating and seems to be "fine," but it may have some serious health problems, and imprinting may have already occurred.

When imprinting occurs, the bird will never be able to feed itself, mate or reproduce in the wild and therefore would never survive in the wild if released. By keeping a wild bird and unintentionally or intentionally imprinting it, you sentence it to a life in captivity or worse. Imprinting is one the most common "injuries" but it is also one of the most preventable. Giving every bird the best chance at survival in the wild means having to put our natural instinct to nurture it aside and do the right thing by getting it to professional care.

Fledgling on the ground

ALWAYS observe before interfering with any wildlife. This is especially important for baby birds. When birds are fledging (leaving the nest and learning to fly), they are often on the ground from anywhere from 1 to 5 days (typically), so it's actually perfectly normal for them to be on the ground, often looking very vulnerable. Bird parents are usually very consistent and have strong instincts to continue to care for their young even after they have flapped out of the nest. So before you scoop up a bird, observe from afar and look for a parent. Is there a parent coming down to it? During their time on the ground baby birds may be walking, hopping and flapping. They're also learning other things like foraging for food, and how to identify and avoid predators. Most fledglings have feathers, their eyes are open, and they will usually try to flap away from you! The best thing to do is leave it alone!

Hazards

There will always be hazards for baby birds (cats, dogs, kids, cars etc.), regardless of what type of environment they live in. If there is not an immediate hazard present, the best thing to do is leave the bird alone. The most you would want to do is to move the bird to perch on a nearby tree or shrub. If you have a dog, cat, or kids you should keep them inside for a few days if at all possible. Also avoid mowing the lawn or doing other yard work.

If you believe the bird is a nestling that was displaced from its nest (not yet ready to fledge), first try to find the nest. If you can see the nest and can put the nestling back in it, this is the best option. Despite the popular myth, most birds do not have a developed sense of smell and cannot smell a “human scent.” Bird parents will not abandon young if placed back in the nest. If you can’t reach the nest, the next best thing is to try placing the nestling in a small container (with tissue, straw, leaves, grass or a small towel) and attaching it as best you can to the closest sturdy thing you can. (Corvids (Crows, Ravens and Jays) are an exception to this rule, because they recognize man-made objects and will avoid them. They should be re-nested, or moved to a safer place nearby if necessary.) Below is a small breakdown the difference between fledglings and nestlings:

Hatchling

- Wisps of natal down on body, eyes closed

Nestling

- Eyes open.
- Primary feathers (also called pin feathers) pierce skin, they look like blue tubes sticking out of the skin.
- Bird is alert, stretches wings and legs.

Below are all examples of nestlings. not ready to fledge/should not be on the ground...



Fledgling

-Can flutter and hop from branch to branch, fully feathered, but has short tail and wings, leaves the nest.

-May leave nest and not return, are still fed by the adults in nearby trees or on the ground if the young have not yet mastered flying.

Below are example of fledglings. They will resemble their parents, but feathers will be slightly different.



How do I know if it's injured? The majority of fledglings on the ground are uninjured. Again, observe before taking action. If it's flapping its wings, is only one extending? Is it walking? Is there blood? Not flying does not necessarily mean injury. ***If you know a bird has been caught by a cat, get it to a wildlife rehabilitator immediately- cats have a bacteria in their saliva and claws that is deadly to birds if not treated immediately.**

To sum it up- it's always best for a baby bird to stay in the wild with its parents. If your situation doesn't quite fit this description you can always call ORC or your local wildlife organization.

Article from



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