

# What To Do When You Find a Baby Bird

by Peggi Rodgers, LWR, Oregon

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*So you've found a baby bird. Now, what do you do with it?*

Before I answer that question, let me dispel a few myths. Keep in mind, the first choice is ALWAYS to return the offspring to the parents if possible.

**Q. Won't the parent birds know I've touched the baby and reject it?**

The majority of birds do not have a highly developed sense of smell. They will not "smell" a human and reject the nestling if you replace it in the proper nest.

**Q. The baby has feathers but can't fly. It must be sick or fallen from the nest, right?**

This is not necessarily true. Several species of birds (i.e. jays, towhees, American Robins) continue to care for their young and, in fact, finish the fledgling's education at ground level.

**Q. I found a duckling swimming in the pond. I know they need water, so I filled a bathtub and put it in the water and gave it bread. Is this ok?**

Downy waterfowl are protected by oil from their mother's oil gland. They do not have the ability to generate this oil on their own. If they are placed in water they cannot get out of, they will eventually become waterlogged and die.

Bread is a common misconception. Adult birds have gravel in their crop that allows bread to be broken down for digestion. Young babies do not have the benefit of gravel and, as a result, the bread will become compacted in their crop. This can cause death.

**Q. I brought a baby bird into the house and turned on classical music to soothe it. Is this ok?**

Contrary to popular belief, music does not "soothe the savage beast". Baby birds are wild animals and as such have no experience with, nor need for music. This will, in fact, frighten them and add to their distress.



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**Now, back to the original question. What do I do with this cute, little baby bird?**

**1. Determine its age. Does it have feathers?**

• If not and you know where the nest is located, replace the hatchling in the nest. The parents will take it from there.

●If it is feathered and not obviously injured (broken wing, leg, etc.), clear all pets and children away from the fledgling and observe it for an hour. Chances are the parents will return for it. They may be waiting until all the hoopla has died down before approaching the youngster.

**2. I tried all that, I don't know where the nest is and/or the parents haven't returned. What do I do now?**

●Carefully pick up the baby and put it immediately in a small cardboard box or plastic food container large enough for the bird to stand up in or move around a bit. (Try to have the container ready before you pick up the bird; this will reduce stress on the animal.) Use facial tissue, toilet tissue or paper toweling for padding and cover the container LOOSELY with a towel leaving a small gap at the edge for good air circulation. Place the box in a warm, QUIET area of the house and call your local wildlife rehabilitation center (see below) for further instructions. Do not offer the bird food or water until you have spoken with them and avoid peeking at or disturbing the bird.

**3. Well, I think this baby I found is a duck. Do I do the same thing?**

●Absolutely. Always observe a young waterfowl before picking it up. These birds are doting parents and will respond to a lost offspring. They do know how many babies they have. Because of this, they'll backtrack until they find the errant youngster. If you listen, you'll hear the duckling/gosling calling for its parents.

●If you're sure the duckling/gosling is an orphan, follow the same steps as above. Place it in a padded box/container, covered with a towel, and put it in a warm, QUIET place. You'll want to use a deeper container for ducklings as they will jump. Immediately call your local rehabilitation center for further instructions.

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**Tips on Capturing Wildlife For Transfer to a Rehabilitator**

If you spot an animal, particularly a young or juvenile animal, that appears to be deserted or in difficulty, do not catch it right away. Take 20 minutes or so to observe it's behavior.

In the case of a young or juvenile animal, it may simply be waiting for a parent to return. Remember, adult animals will often leave their young to hunt for food and return within a short period of time to feed/care for the offspring.

If you believe the animal is injured, call a rehabilitation center near you BEFORE you pick up the animal. Injured wild animals can be dangerous and need special handling. Keep an eye on its whereabouts and describe its condition to the rehabilitator you reach on the phone. They will give you the proper course of action to take for that particular animal.

If, however, you are unable to reach a rehabilitation center for advice, a good rule of thumb is to wear appropriate clothing and safety equipment. Use common sense: if the animal has teeth (like raccoons, opossums), a sharp beak or talons (like hawks), wear gloves and eye protection. Place an injured animal in a covered box (with air holes punched in it), and keep it in a warm, QUIET place. Do not try to administer first aid, offer food or water to the animal, and avoid lifting the lid to check on its condition. The less it sees of you, the less stress it will experience, and the better its chances for recovery will be. Call a rescue/rehabilitation center or, if you're traveling, deliver it to the nearest rehabilitation center, Fish & Wildlife office, or police station. In most cases, these people will be able to direct the animal to an appropriate rehabilitator.



Remember, most species of birds are protected and therefore it is not legal to keep them unless you are licensed to do so. Beyond the legalities, these animals require specialized care and diets to grow up healthy and strong. It's important to turn them over to an experienced person as soon as possible.

In most areas, Wildlife Rehabilitation is governed by Fish & Wildlife or Wild Game agencies. Although some areas do not have established shelters for wild animals, there are rehabilitation individuals who provide home care. Again, Fish & Wildlife offices, humane societies, animal control agencies, and often state or local police will be able to provide you with phone numbers and/or addresses.



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