

## **I Found a Baby Bird!**

*Look, Mom, I found a baby bird! Now what? Can I keep him? What do I feed him? Where are his parents? Don't they care? Is he cold? Is he sick? Is he hungry? What can I do to help him?*

Often, all these questions come in a hurry when a baby bird is found. To really help a bird, children and their parents must remember to stop and think before taking action. As a former intern at the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center of Minnesota's bird nursery, I'll tell you some tips for caring for the chicks and help dispel some myths along the way.

### **How old is he?**

Babies with little-to-no feathers are considered infants and probably need your help. This leads to the number-one myth about young birds -- Can I put him back in his nest? YES! Putting a chick back in his nest is usually the best option. Many people think that a mother bird won't care for her baby if it smells like people. This is untrue. Most birds do not have a highly developed sense of smell and will continue caring for a chick you returned to the nest. Infants left on the ground can die of cold or predation.

Birds that have some feathers but cannot fly yet are considered fledglings. Some birds, like robins and towhees, continue to teach and feed chicks when they are out of the nest. Seeing a small robin that can't fly might make you want to take care of him, but he's really only waiting for his mother to come back and feed him.

### **Does the bird look injured or sick?**

A lot of babies that look lost or abandoned are actually just fine. Mom or Dad may simply be out looking for food and will be back in a little while. It's a good idea to watch the chick from a distance for fifteen or twenty minutes to see if a parent comes to check on it. Healthy chicks may open their mouths and beg for food, look alert, and make noises. Even healthy birds need your help if they can't get back to a nest. Injured or sick birds will move slowly, or not at all. They may hang their head and close their eyes, lie on their side, or refuse to stand. These birds need your help.

### **Now what?**

You've determined the baby bird you found is either sick, injured, or unable to go back to his nest, now what? Always remember is to try your best not to scare the bird. Chicks are very small and can be hurt easily, even if you're trying to handle them gently.

- First, get a container, like a shoebox or small Tupperware container with a lid. Make sure the container is large enough for the bird to stand up and move around in.
- Second, line the container with something soft, like toilet paper. Bring the container over to the bird; this reduces the time you will actually have to hold him. Remember, chicks are not like puppies or kittens. They may not be comfortable

around people and even a small child holding them can be very, very scary. Carefully place the baby in the container and close the lid. Make sure there are holes for air to circulate, but not big enough for the bird to escape.

- Next, be very quiet. The chick is probably scared by all the new things going on, and even though you may be excited, talking loudly may actually harm him. Keep the bird in a warm place away from pets, other children, and loud noises.
- Don't worry about feeding the chick or giving it something to drink. Most birds cannot drink water like people do, and trying to force water can scare the chick or possibly drown it if water gets into its lungs. The most important thing right away is that the baby stays warm. If a baby is cold, he cannot properly digest food and water anyway. Contrary to popular belief, most young birds cannot digest bread; feeding it bread may clog his crop and kill him. Some people want to soak bread in milk and feed it to chicks. This is also a bad idea because birds are allergic to milk! The best idea is to wait for instructions from your rehabilitation center.
- Last, but not least, call your local wildlife rehabilitator right away. A rehabilitation center's contact information can be found in the Yellow Pages or with online search engines. If you can't find one listed anywhere, call your local Department of Natural Resources, Forest Service, or Fish and Wildlife Service and they can refer you to someone who will help.

Good job! If you've followed these instructions you have done the best you can to help a baby bird. Maybe the bird you see at your birdfeeder next year is the very same one you helped to survive. Hopefully, he or she will grow to have a happy life, and more baby birds!

Sidebar:



***This bird is an infant.***

He has almost no feathers and is completely cared for by his parents. If you find a bird like this, place him back in his nest if possible.



***This bird is a fledgling.***

He may have fallen from his nest, or be waiting for his parents. Wait at a distance to make sure his parents are not caring for him before taking any action.