



You Found A Baby Bird On The Ground... Now What?

Is the Bird You Just Found an Infant or a Preschooler?

Young birds usually fall into one of two categories:

1. **Nestlings** are baby birds that are featherless, with pink skin. They can't move around much or fly and they still need to be in the nest.
2. **Fledglings** are juvenile birds that are actually old enough to be out of the nest, but still too young to be competent fliers.

What to Do If You Find a Nestling

Nestlings (the featherless baby birds) are sometimes blown out of their nest on a windy day or during a storm. And sometimes, the whole nest comes down.

If you find a nestling, take the following steps:

1. Look around first to see if it fell from a nest that is still intact and in place. If the nest is still there, simply put the baby bird right back in it.
2. If the nest has been blown down or has fallen to the ground, you'll want to collect as much of the nest material from the ground as possible.
3. Next, get a plastic container the approximate size of the original nest or you can cut one to size. Put the nest material into the container and poke a few small holes in the bottom for drainage.
4. If there's no nest material left, you can substitute either an old wash cloth or other type of clean, dry cloth, or some clean paper towels.
5. Nail your nest container high up in the tree closest to where you found the nestling, and gently place the baby bird back into the nest.
6. From a distance, watch your homemade nest very closely and wait for the mother bird's return.

Please understand it is a myth that mother birds abandon baby birds touched by human hands.

Birds (excluding vultures) have a very poor sense of smell, so mama bird isn't likely to pick up your scent on her nestling! Rest assured the mother bird has invested time and energy into raising her baby, and nature will prompt her to continue until the baby bird can survive on its own.

"caring for the pets of ipswich since 1967"

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You should feel very comfortable gently picking the nestling up and placing it back in the makeshift nest you've secured high up in the tree.

The Fledgling Stage

Instead of a little pink, featherless baby bird, you might run across one a bit older, a fledgling.

These are young birds that have outgrown the nest. Flying from the nest to the ground is instinctual in fledglings, but their landing and ground take off skills are still developing.

Fledglings spend several days to several weeks hopping around on the ground, learning hunting and foraging skills from their parents.

During this period in the fledgling's development, the mother bird is usually within calling distance of her youngster. She will return intermittently to feed the fledgling while it learns how to find its own food on the ground and continues to mature.

What NOT to Do If You Encounter a Fledgling

Fledglings are more often "kidnapped" than nestlings because people who find them hopping around on the ground alone assume they've been orphaned rather than blown out of their nest.

If you see a fledgling, you might be tempted to capture it to get it out of harm's way.

You might look around for the young bird's parents, not finding them, you assume the baby is an orphan and you approach it.

It's rare, but there is a slight chance you could be dive bombed by a mother or father bird as you get close to their baby. If that should happen, it's your cue to leave the fledgling alone.

In most cases, however, you won't see or hear the parents. If you capture the baby to remove it to what you believe is a safer location, what you're unintentionally doing is kidnapping the fledgling from its mother and interrupting its natural development.

What you want to do instead is simply keep pets and children away from the area where the fledgling is hopping about.

The mother and father will continue to support their young bird from a distance and within a relatively short time the fledgling will develop the breast musculature and feathers it needs to fly away to its life as an adult bird.

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How to React in an Emergency

There are a few situations which are genuine emergencies and you'll need to intervene to save the life of the nestling or fledgling you've found.

Symptoms of an Injury or Illness:

- *Falling over on side*
- *Wing tweaked upward*
- *Wings drooping*
- *Unable to flutter wings*
- *Weak or shivering*
- *Feathers fluffed*
- *Attacked by a cat or dog*
- *Bleeding*

If you find a nestling, have followed the steps I outlined above, and the mother bird hasn't returned to the nest within a day or so, do the following:

- Prepare a shoebox with some soft nesting material (clean, dry cloths or paper towels).
- Retrieve the baby bird from the makeshift nest and gently place it in the shoebox. You may also be able to remove the homemade nest from the tree and place it with the bird into the shoebox.
- Don't attempt to feed the baby bird.
- Contact your veterinarian or RSPCA.
- If you find an injured baby bird or one that appears cold, weak, unable to move well or is otherwise debilitated, very carefully move it to a shoebox prepared as described above. Again, don't try to feed it, and contact a licensed wildlife rehabilitator immediately for further guidance.

Should You Keep It?

Many people who rescue a wild baby bird are tempted to keep it and raise it themselves. There are a few problems with that approach.

- First you need to be aware that not all birds are alike.
- Nutritional requirements depend on what species the bird is. For example, some species of baby birds eat worms and bugs.
- But if the baby bird in your care is a seed-eater, worms can be toxic.

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- It's crucial that you know not only the species of bird, but also its metabolic requirements and what it can safely eat.
- And did you know it's against the law to raise wildlife without a license?

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