Baby Birds

Mission Viejo Animal Services
Serving the cities of
Mission Viejo, Laguna Niguel, Aliso Viejo,
Laguna Hills and Rancho Santa Margarita

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Most baby birds are of two main groups:

Altricial Birds

One main type is called "ALTRICIAL". These birds are born showing skin without feathers, their eyes are closed, and they rely totally on their parents for warmth and food. Baby birds must be fed every 15-20 minutes from sunrise to sunset. Some examples of Altricial Birds are Robins, Blue Jays, and Cardinals.

Precocial Birds

The other main type of baby bird is called "PRECOCOIAL". Precocial birds are hatched as soft downy chicks. These babies can follow their parents around shortly after hatching and do not have to be fed by a parent at all. These babies can peck at the ground for food while following its mother and stay with her for warmth and protection. Ducks, Geese and Killdeer are Precocial birds. These babies usually require help when they are separated from their parents

How to Return Babies to the Nest

Young "Altricial" birds are sometimes knocked or blown out of the nest, or are pushed out by a sibling. They may have downy feathers (like peach fuzz), or some feathers on their bodies. These babies can be picked up and cupped in your hands until they feel warm. Once they are warm, they should be placed back into their nest. It is **NOT** true that the parents will abandon their babies if they smell human scent. Most birds do not have a strong sense of smell and have their own territories. Even if the nest & babies are gone, the parents remain in their territory, waiting to welcome their babies home.

Fledglings

Baby birds that are found on the ground, are already feathered, and are able to hop, but are not yet ready to fly, are called "fledglings". These young birds are often mistaken for a bird with a broken wing. A bird with a broken wing will hold the injured wing lower than the good wing. Most broken wings will droop very low. Fledglings are able to hop, but not fly yet. These birds should **NOT** be put back into the nest. They should be put back where they were found or close to it so their parents can continue to feed them. This is a very important time for the young birds to learn by observing their parents. They will learn about finding food, avoiding predators, and how to fly. Many people who mean well, take these young birds in by mistake. If you want to help, leave them right where they are and keep people and pets out of the area. It will take about 5-15 days before the baby can actually fly.

Birds need to be rescued only if:

There is a visible injury, cat caught it, is icy cold, or you can verify that it is orphaned by **both** parents.

How to verify if a baby bird has truly been abandoned:

Watch for the parents. Observe the baby continuously for 60-90 minutes from a distance of about 50 feet. Watch very carefully, the parents fly in quickly.

Baby Birds

Symptoms of Illness or Injury:

- Falling over on side
- Unable to flutter wings
- Has been attacked by a cat or dog
- Bleeding
- Wing is pointed upward
- Feathers fluffed
- Wings drooping
- Weak or shivering

If you have the bird in a box, check the feces:

- Clear with white feces (or green bile) indicates a baby bird is not being fed, and is likely abandoned.
- Color in the feces indicated that the parents are feeding the baby, and should be put back where they were found.

Safe return of the fledgling:

- Keep pets & children indoors so that the parents will return to the baby.
- If you found him in a high traffic area, move him to a safe area under the cover of bushes.
- Parents communicate with their young by a series of voice calls. This allows them to locate their babies and move them where they wish.

Temporary Care Instructions for ALL birds

1. **NO** food or water
2. Keep the bird warm. (You can keep it warm by placing it in a tissue filled shoebox or other small box with holes in lid. Place on a heating pad on **"LOW"**)
3. Keep bird in a dark, quiet place.
4. Leave it alone, don't handle or bother it.
5. Keep pets and children away.
6. Call a wildlife rehabilitator.

Keeping a native wild bird in the State of California is against the law if you don't have a permit, even if you plan to release it.

In areas serviced by the Mission Viejo Animal Services Center, we will respond to and remove any bird that is injured, sick or deceased. .