



## Baby Birds

Thousands of baby birds become orphans during spring as a result of well-intentioned human "rescuers." Wildlife rehabilitators are put under unnecessary strain as a result of the circumstance.

People want to do the right thing when they come upon a baby out of its nest but in many cases these baby birds aren't being rescued – they are being bird-napped.

Most of the young birds brought into the Mission Viejo Animal Services Center (MAS) each year are completely healthy and not in any apparent need of rescuing. Caring for baby birds is time-consuming for staff and volunteers. If fewer unnecessary orphaned baby birds were brought in, rehabilitators could devote more time and resources to other truly injured and needy baby birds.

### **I found a baby bird out of its nest, what do I do?**

First, you need to determine if the bird is an infant or a "pre-schooler". If it's featherless with pink skin, it's likely a nestling that has fallen out of its nest. With limited mobility, these babies need get back to their nest. Birds will not abandon their young if handled by humans. In most cases the parents are close by and will respond and help when they hear their baby calling.

Young fledgling birds leave the nest before they can fly and spend a period of time on the ground, flightless, as they develop their muscles and plumage. Fledglings are like toddlers: they can hop and fly a little bit, but need a few days to develop their skills. As they are often found low to the ground and alone, fledglings are the most common animals to be unnecessarily rescued. These young birds are often mistaken for a bird with a broken wing. The best way to help these birds is to keep cats and dogs away from them. They should not be put back in the nest.

If a young bird is fully feathered, alert, able to walk or hop, and can perch on low branches, please leave it alone. It is normal for parents to leave their young alone for periods of time as they search for food and care for other fledglings.

Baby birds have the best possible chance of survival with their parents. Please ensure you have done everything possible to reunite them before removing them from their environment.

If you find a bird that has been attacked by an animal, or it appears injured, contact MAS at (949)470-3045.

### **How to Return Babies to the Nest**

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. Even if the nest & babies are gone, the parents remain in their territory.

### **Fledglings**

Fledglings are baby birds that are found on the ground, are already feathered, and are able to hop, but are not yet ready to fly. They 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. They should be left 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. 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 90-120 minutes from a distance of about 50 feet. Watch very carefully, the parents fly in quickly.

### **Symptoms of Illness or Injury:**

- Falling over on side
- Unable to flutter wings
- Has been attacked by cat
- 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 indicates the baby is being fed by the parents and should be placed back where 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.

**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.**



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