

How to Rescue Baby, Sick or Injured Birds

First, determine if the bird needs to be rescued:

A bird is hurt or sick and must be rescued if:

- it is unable to flutter its wings
- its wing or wings are drooping unevenly
- it is weak or shivering
- it has been attacked by another animal
- it has been in the mouth of a cat or dog



A bird is a hatchling or nestling and must be rescued

if it does not have feathers. Do not try to put it back in its nest.



A bird is a fledgling (still young, has recently acquired feathers, has a tail over 3" long [in most species] and is dependant on its parents for survival) **and must be rescued** if it is on the ground and:

- is in danger from people, animals and other birds
- its parents are not nearby or are not feeding it

A bird is a fledgling and does *not* need to be rescued if it is hopping on the ground, is safe from people, animals and other birds, and its parents are feeding it.



Follow these instructions to rescue a bird:

1. Prepare a carrier.

Place a clean cloth towel, baby blanket or t-shirt (with no strings or loops) on the bottom of a cardboard or shoe box or small pet carrier. The box must be big enough to allow the bird to stand up fully and turn around. If the bird has a fractured leg or wing, a cloth towel will help limit the bird's movement. For smaller birds, you may use a paper bag.

Make some air holes in the box or bag.

2. Protect yourself. Wear gloves, if possible. Some birds may stab with their beaks, slice with their claws and slap with their wings to protect themselves, even if sick. Birds also have parasites (fleas, lice, ticks) and carry diseases. (Although few of these affect humans.)

3. Cover the bird with a light sheet or towel.

4. Gently pick up the bird and put it in the prepared carrier.

5. Warm the animal if the environment or bird is cold, or if the bird is a nestling/hatchling.

Put one end of the bird's carrier on a heating pad set on low.

Or, put hot tap water in one of these to keep the bird warm while in transport:

- Hot water bottle
- Zip-lock plastic bag (double bagged)
- Plastic soft drink bottle with screw lid
- Rubber glove

Wrap the warm container with a string-free cloth or towel and put it next to the bird.

Make sure the container does not leak so the bird does not get wet and chilled.

Birds die from hypothermia. What seems warm to you may be cold to a bird. The bird should be as warm as the palm of your hand.

Keep nestlings/hatchlings from the same clutch together on toilet or facial tissue in a margarine dish or other size-appropriate container. They will help keep one another warm.



You can also warm a hatchling by holding it in your closed hand.

6. **Tape the box shut** or roll the top of the paper bag closed and keep closed with tape or a clip.
7. **Note exactly where you found the bird.** This will be very important for release.
8. **Keep the bird in a warm, dark, quiet place. Leave it alone.** Do not leave the bird in direct sunlight.

Don't give the bird food, water, milk, worms or cereal. Different species require different diets. Giving a bird the wrong food can kill it. Birds cannot digest milk. If you give it milk, it will die.

Baby, sick or injured birds are easily aspirated and die. **NEVER** feed a baby bird or give it water. If food or liquid is given to a cold bird, it will die.

Leave the bird alone; do not handle or bother it. Keep children and pets away.

9. **Wash your hands** after contact with the bird. Wash anything the bird touched to prevent the spread of disease and/or parasites to your or your pets.

10. **Get the bird to a wildlife rehabilitator** as soon as possible. Do not keep the bird at your home any longer than necessary.

Keep the bird in a closed carrier; don't let it loose in your house or car.

Do not hold the bird in your hands or on your lap. This causes additional stress to an already traumatized bird.

Do not transport the bird with a water dish in its carrier.

Additional Instructions for Rescuing a Baby Duck, Goose, Quail or Killdeer:

- If the mother is dead or the baby is injured, take the baby to a wildlife rehabilitator right away.
- If a baby is separated from the mother, and you know where she is, place baby near the mother so she can hear it. Watch from a distance. If the mother does not claim it within 15 minutes, transport it to a wildlife rehabilitator.
- *Do not try to introduce it to a different mother or her babies.* They will ignore or kill it.
- *Do not put it on a lake by itself.* It will die.
- *Do not feed it bread.* This will stunt its growth. When this happens, it cannot be released into the wild.
- *Do not put it in water.* It needs its mother or a heat source for warmth.
- *If transporting a mother with her babies, put the mother in one carrier and the babies in a separate carrier.* This will prevent the mother from stepping on the babies, injuring or even killing them.

