

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND A BABY BIRD

How to tell a nestling from a fledgling, whether it's OK to handle a baby bird, how to move a hatchling to safety even if you can't reach its nest, and how to locate a wildlife rehabilitator. *Published: June 3, 2005*

If you don't have the proper state and federal licenses, don't even try to raise a wild native bird in captivity. It's illegal. Here's what you should do if you find a chick out of its nest:

If the bird has its feathers and is hopping around on the ground, it's a fledgling. Leave it alone.

It can't fly yet, so it's normal for it to hop as it gets used to life outside the nest. The parents are still feeding it and are probably close by. As long as cats or other predators pose no danger, it's best for you to watch from a distance. If a parent doesn't return after an hour or so, however, the fledgling might need assistance.

If the bird has either no feathers or feathers that are just starting to come in and it cannot hop around, you've found a nestling. Carefully return it to the nest.

Birds do not recognize their offspring by smell, so there is no truth to the notion that they will reject a chick that you have handled. If you can't reach the nest, make one. Poke drainage holes in the bottom of a clean Cool-Whip or margarine container or use a berry basket, and line the bowl with paper towels. Then tack the container as close to the original nest as possible, and place the bird into it. Then leave. The parents will usually feed the chick as if it were still in the original nest.

If the bird is injured, or if it's truly orphaned, contact the nearest wildlife rehabilitator.

To find a rehabilitator in your area, call the local humane society, an Audubon chapter, your local game warden or conservation department, or your veterinarian, or check these websites:

[Wildlife Rehabilitation Information Directory](#)

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