

Precocial Birds

(Ducks, geese, quail, rails and shorebirds, etc.)

Precocial Birds are "self-sufficient" because most of these babies can find and eat food on their own often within minutes or hours of hatching. Ducklings are an example. However, these babies are defenseless and cannot regulate their own temperatures. Therefore, they require protection and warmth from their parents.

Precocial babies also rely on their parents to supply the oil they need to waterproof their feathers and keep them dry. A precocial baby on its own is an easy meal for a predator.

Colorado's wild birds are protected under the Migratory Bird Act. Therefore, birds (dead or alive) may not be kept or housed by individuals without a wildlife rehabilitator's license.



Is the Baby Truly Orphaned?

A baby animal's best chance of survival is to be raised by its natural parents. **It is imperative that you make every effort to reunite the parents with their children before considering removing an orphan from the wild.**

It is important to take some time to determine if the baby, or babies, is truly orphaned or is just temporarily separated from its parent. Look and listen to try and detect if the baby's parents are in the area. If the baby appears to be separated from a possible parent, place the baby close by the parent so the parent can hear it. Watch from a distance to see if the adult returns to claim the baby.


Remember to watch from a distance when deciding if a baby bird needs to be reunited with its parents. Precocial shorebirds, like Killdeer, will fly in the opposite direction of their babies and perform a broken wing display to lure you toward them, and hence, away from the babies. So the mere sight of a human will cause the parent to flee away from the babies. As soon as the human is out of sight, the parent will return to the sound of the baby calling. So, when hiking through open space, if you come across a baby bird, don't pick it up if it has no signs of illness. Keep walking and get a good distance away to observe it.

Baby birds have the best chance for success in the wild when they are raised by a parent. When you find a precocial baby bird, please take the time to stop, look, and listen...you just might reunite a family!

If the Parents Do Not Return, or the Bird Needs Help

If a precocial baby's parent does not claim the baby within **three hours**, or if the baby's parent is known to be dead, call **Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center** at **(303) 823-8455** to discuss what you observe and decide with a licensed wildlife rehabilitator if the animal you see needs help.

If you determine that a bird needs to be brought to Greenwood Wildlife, follow these instructions:

- 1) **Contain the bird in a box. Poke air holes in the box.** Use a net or a sheet to throw over the bird. Be sure to cover the head to reduce stress. Use gardening-type gloves to pick up the animal in the linens. Try not to touch the feathers or down with your bare hands. The oil from your hands can affect the bird's waterproofing ability.
-  **IMPORTANT:** If the bird is bigger than a pigeon **wear safety goggles or sunglasses** to protect your eyes and **wear gloves** to protect your hands. Some birds have very sharp beaks that can injure your eyes or cut your hands. Place the bird in a box that has been lined with a t-shirt or sheet. Secure the lid to the box.
- 2) **Give the baby a source of heat.** Even on warm days, babies can quickly become hypothermic. A rice sock, plastic water bottle filled with hot tap water, or chemical hand warmers, such as Hot Paws, can be used. Place the heat source under the linens in the box.
- 3) **Place the covered box on the seat or floor of your car.**
- 4) **Keep the car warm and quiet.** No radio and keep talking to a minimum while you travel.
- 5) **Do not feed or water the bird.**
- 6) **Do not let anyone, especially children, hold the animal on his/her lap during the trip.**

I Found an Injured Bird (Adult or Baby)

Sick or injured birds in need of help can display the following symptoms:

- 1) Bleeding or visible wounds
- 2) Lack of balance, leaning or falling to one side, or turning in circles
- 3) Inability to fly (adult) or flutter its wings
- 4) Weak or shivering behavior
- 5) "Fluffed out" feathers
- 6) Lack of response to danger, except for altricial fledglings which are usually very easy to pick up even when they are completely healthy.
- 7) Drooping wings, especially if wings droop unevenly
- 8) Evidence of a cat or dog attack
- 9) Lying on the ground
- 10) Sticky feathers or feathers coated with a substance, such as oil
- 11) Appears frequently sleepy or is unresponsive
- 12) Has a patch of feathers that are broken or missing
- 13) Has string, fishing line, or other materials protruding from its mouth or wrapped around any body part
- 14) Discharge from eyes, nose, or mouth

- 15) Has swelling or lesions on its body
- 16) Gaspings, wheezing, or sneezing
- 17) Has any worms or bugs on its body or swarming around its body
- 18) Cannot stand up
- 19) Shows signs of dehydration (i.e., eyes appear dry and sunken, emaciated appearance)

Call **Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center** at **(303) 823-8455** if you find an injured bird and a licensed wildlife rehabilitator can help you assess the situation.

Altricial Birds

(Finches, sparrows, robins, jays and flickers, etc.)

Many of our backyard songbirds, such as finches, sparrows, robins, jays, and flickers, are altricial birds. Altricial birds hatch naked and helpless with their eyes closed. These birds live in a nest or cavity. Over time they develop down, open their eyes, grow feathers, and learn to fly.



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There are **three stages of development:** hatchling, nestling, fledgling.

Hatchlings: They are naked or have minimal feather/down development. They are usually less than a week old and have eyes closed. Hatchlings require warmth and frequent feedings.

Nestlings: They can have just a covering of down, or be nearly feathered. They may have patches of exposed skin or tufts of down poking out of their feathers. Their eyes are open. They can move around somewhat, but they tend to stay in one spot and remain in the nest. Nestlings require warmth and food.

Fledglings: They are fully feathered birds, often with very short tails. They are active and mobile; they walk and jump, and are learning to fly. Fledglings range in flying ability from very poor to some ability to fly. These birds are too old to be returned to a nest because they will not stay put.



It is important to note that most songbirds leave the nest **BEFORE** they are able to fly. The exceptions to this are swallows and swifts. These birds are fully feathered **and** flight capable when they are ready to leave the nest on their own. So, fledgling swallows and swifts that cannot fly and are on the ground must be rescued. This is also true for other cavity nest species.

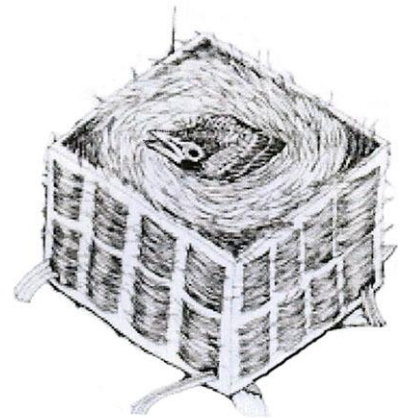
If you are unsure of the species of bird call **Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center** at **(303) 823-8455**, and we can help you to identify the bird. If you should need further assistance with identification in order to determine if the bird needs rescuing, Greenwood Wildlife may ask you to take a picture of the bird with your cell phone and send it to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator. A phone number will be given to you at the time of the call.

I Found a Baby Bird. Can I Put It Back in Its Nest?

Baby birds leave the nest for a variety of reasons. Sometimes they are pushed out by the other nestlings. Sometimes one of the parents will push a baby out, or the baby bird may be ready to leave the nest. A baby bird that is featherless or that still has tiny, fluffy, downy feathers on it belongs in the nest. Carefully pick the bird up and place it back in the nest. Don't worry about your scent on the bird. It should not affect the reunite of the baby. The parent's instinct is to raise its young. **If the bird continually pushes the same baby bird from the nest, please bring the baby in.** It may be sick, or it may be a bird that isn't one of theirs, such as a cowbird. Call **Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center** at **(303) 823-8455** for help.

What If the Entire Nest has Fallen Down?

- 1) You can try and put the nest back. If you are having trouble doing so, take a shallow plastic container, like a deli container, and punch holes in the bottom of it for drainage. Or, you can use a berry basket.
- 2) Pack nesting material into the container or use remnants of the original nest, which would be ideal. You can use dry grass packed tightly into the container. Push the nesting material down in the middle and up around the sides to form a cup just large enough to contain the babies snugly.
- 3) Thread several pieces of wire into the holes on the bottom of the container. These will become fasteners that can be used to wire the new nest in the original nest location.
- 4) Attach the new nest to the location of the original nest, if you can safely access it, or as near it as possible in a sheltered area away from direct sunlight or rain. It is important that the nest be as close as possible to the original sight since parent birds identify their babies by location. If you are not sure of the location, look for signs (such as remnants of nesting material or accumulation of feces) to make your best guess.
- 5) Once the nest is securely in place, tuck the baby or babies firmly into it. Make sure the babies are sitting upright with their legs tucked underneath them, and that the sides of the nest support the babies in this position.
- 6) Leave the area and monitor the nest from a distance for one to two hours to see if the parents return to care for the babies. If there is no sign of any adults coming to the nest within that time period, call Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center at (303) 823-8455.



For replacing nests built in crevices, commonly used for house sparrows and starlings:

- 1) Obtain a large plastic jug, windshield-wiper fluid bottle, gallon-sized milk jug, or two-liter soda bottle (though soda bottles may be too small for a full nest of starlings). Make sure the container is thoroughly rinsed and dried.
- 2) Poke holes in the bottom to allow for moisture drainage.
- 3) Cut a square into the side of the container that is two to three inches from the bottom. Only cut three sides of the square – the bottom and two sides. Leave the top of the square attached so that the flap can be pulled up from the bottle to form an awning. The square should be about two inches on all sides to allow the parent birds to perch on the edge and feed their young.
- 4) Pack nesting material into the container. Remnants of the original nest would be ideal. If that's not available, use dry grass packed tightly to better support the babies. Push the nesting material down in the middle and up around the sides to form a cup shape just large enough to contain the babies snugly. The bottom of the cup should be about one inch below the bottom of the square hole.
- 5) Secure a piece of wire around the top of the container. If the jug has a handle, wrap the wire around the handle. If not, poke two holes on the opposite sides of the top of the jug and thread a piece of wire through them. This wire will become a fastener that can be used to tie the new nest in the original location.
- 6) Attach the new nest as close as you can to the entry point of the original nest, if you can safely access it. It is important that the new nest be as close as possible to the original nest since parent birds identify their babies by location. If you are not sure of the original location, look for signs (such as remnants of the nesting material or accumulation of feces) to make your best guess.
- 7) Once the nest is securely in place, tuck the baby or babies firmly into it. Make sure that the babies are sitting upright with their legs tucked underneath them. The babies should be sitting high enough that you can see their heads through the hole you have cut. Monitor from a distance for one to two hours to see if the parents return to care for the babies. If there is no sign of any adults coming to the nest within that time period, call **Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center** at **(303) 823-8455**.




What If the Parent Continually Pushes the Baby Out of the Nest?

If this happens, most likely there is something wrong with that baby bird, and the parents have chosen not to care for it. You can bring the bird to Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center. We will have one of our licensed wildlife rehabilitators examine the bird to determine what kind of care needs to be given.

I Think I Found a Fledgling. Does It Need My Help?

A fledgling bird will leave the nest before it can fly. We know it is stressful to watch a baby bird running around on the ground. If you think about the size of the nest, and then the size of the fledgling, you will realize that the bird just doesn't have enough room to develop its flight feathers while staying in the nest. **It is typical for fledglings to hop around the yard for five to seven days prior to flying.** Parents should be close by, teaching them to hunt for food. If the fledgling is on the ground and there are humans or domestic pets nearby, or if the bird is in the road, pick the bird up and place it in a leafy bush or on the branch of a tree. **Keep pets and children out of the area for at least two hours. Leave fledgling birds alone. They are healthy and doing quite well on their own.**

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Identifying the Difference between a Baby Bird and an Adult

Small adult birds that cannot fly because of illness or injury are frequently mistaken for baby birds. Baby birds typically have at least one of these traits:

- 1) Fleshy yellow or white skin at the corners of the bird's beak
- 2) Covered in down or have tufts of down sticking through the feathers
- 3) Visible pin feathers that look like the baby has quills instead of feathers
- 4) Naked skin visible on the body, or naked patches under the wing
- 5) Frequent peeping or chirping
- 6) Short tail