

# When You Find a Baby Bird

By Yvonne Patterson, Wings of Love bird shows  
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Did you know that it is illegal to possess a feather of a native bird, let alone keep one in captivity? Even more so with a hawk, eagle or owl (people that legally have a bird of prey feather or actual birds have permits from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service). Because springtime is upon us, it is important that we enable ourselves to help children in making the correct choice of what to do with a helpless baby bird or other injured wildlife.

Of all our back yard birds, or birds that reside in the United States, we can legally keep three which are **introduced species** {species that have escaped in a shipment and compete with our native birds for nests/food sources}. Nature Centers will rehab these birds: 1) starlings; 2) common sparrows; and 3) pigeons. All other birds in the U.S. are illegal to keep - even their feathers!



A month-old great-horned owl can't fly with down feathers it needs its parents to survive

**What do you do if you find a baby bird?** NOTE: If a chick is **fully feathered** it has 'fledged' (left its nest) and is learning how to fly, hunt, perch and do all the things necessary to become an adult bird - **leave it alone!** *This is no different than a child playing in their own yard ~ the child's parents are nearby.* The fledged baby bird is learning how to hop, fly and watch its parents find food.

Many think that if you touch a baby bird their parents will not feed it if it has a human's scent on it.

**Birds have a poor sense of smell so this is not true.**

If you find an injured bird, mammal or reptile and you are able to capture it (NOTE: if you are unable to capture an injured animal he's probably better left alone), place a towel inside an appropriate sized box, carefully place the bird or animal inside, and cover the animal with another small towel, if possible. Place the lid on the box (no need to poke holes in it ~ they are not air tight) and if possible tape it shut. Do not look inside the box to 'check' on the animal as this will further stress it. Wild animals are not used to human contact; if you imagine yourself as this scared and hurt animal inside a box and a giant person opens the box to peek inside, think how scary that would be. It's less stressful on the animal to be left alone while transporting it to the rehab facility. Do not try to feed a bird or any other animal because you could get food in its trachea (place it breathes) which will cause it to suffer a long agonizing death.

**The BEST thing to do is to place the chick back in its nest if you know where it came from.** Be certain you have the right nest as you wouldn't want to put a mockingbird chick into a blue jay's nest because the jays would kill the mockingbird chick. It is difficult sometimes to tell what kind of baby bird it is since most of them don't have feathers yet and some further observation may be necessary.

Obviously if a baby bird is in the street after being hit and you are able to safely stop and get it, do so. This will require your taking it to the nearest rehabilitation center (contact the Dept. of Conservation in your city). **If you are near Kansas City we will provide you with the two largest rehab centers for native wildlife (DO NOT CROSS STATE LINES):**

**If found in K.C. Kansas (or suburb) take to:**  
OPERATION WILDLIFE  
23375 Guthrie Rd., Linwood, Ks. 66052  
785-542-3625 (or \*695 from cell phone)

**If found in K.C. Missouri (or suburb) take to:**  
LAKESIDE NATURE CENTER  
4701 E. Gregory Blvd., Kansas City, MO 64132  
816-513-8960

Some people go into the woods and take a baby hawk from the nest without a permit and this is very much against the law unless you are an Apprentice Falconer. Unfortunately some uninformed people feed a baby hawk dog food which is very low in calcium. What happens as the chick develops into a larger bird, the chick needs calcium to grow and its body will remove or absorb calcium from its bones which of course weakens the bird and leads to cracks and breaks in its bones. Some of these same people think that because they 'release' a wild bird that they've raised from a chick the bird will know how to hunt. After rehabbing a few years for our local wildlife rehabilitation center, I can tell you that most raptors that come to their center are starving to death because of this problem.

If you live in the country sometimes owls' wings get caught inbetween the barbed wires. If you see an owl caught on barbed wire obtain some large wire cutters and cut on each side of the owl. Do not put your hands on the owl's feet as their talons (claws) can go through your skin. Follow the same directions if possible by placing the bird and barbed wire inside a box over a towel (its wings will be open and out so this would require a long box if it's a large owl) and if possible place a towel over the bird, then close the lid. Do not attempt to remove the barbs from the birds' wings; this should only be attempted by a wildlife-approved licensed veterinarian or rehabilitation center. They will rehydrate, remove barbs and deal with a situation like this because of their familiarity with wildlife.

For information on our birds or see our rainforest slideshow, visit <http://www.wings-of-love.com>