
MOTHER KNOWS BEST:

Helping Wild Birds Protect Their Young

All migratory birds are protected by federal and state law and there are stiff penalties for violations. The list of protected species includes all songbirds, water birds, game birds and birds of prey found in the United States other than Rock Dove, European Starling and House Sparrow. It is illegal to shoot, trap or otherwise harm any migratory species. It is illegal to have possession of one of these birds, even if it is one that was injured or orphaned. It is even illegal to possess an egg or a feather from a migratory species without a special federal permit. These laws are intended to protect our valuable birds of prey, so they will continue to play their vital role in maintaining the health of Alabama's natural ecosystems.

Contrary to popular belief, adult birds will not reject their young if touched by human hands. Most birds have a very poor sense of smell and all birds have strong parental instincts. Many times, you can watch after a bird by simply monitoring it until it is able to fly on its own. Read these simple tips to find out when you should bring a bird in and when you should try to help it yourself.

Nestling birds are either naked or covered with a soft down, not feathers. If you find a nestling bird on the ground, contact the Alabama Wildlife Center's Wildlife Help & Info Telephone Line at **(205) 663-7930, Ext. 2** for assistance. If their nest has been destroyed, it is possible to make a substitute nest. However, nesting habits vary among species and if the substitute nest is not properly designed and positioned, the parents may not resume care of the babies. You should always contact the Alabama Wildlife Center for guidance in reuniting nestling songbirds.



American Robin nestlings



American Robin fledglings

Fledgling birds have their wing feathers, but they are still small and may have a few lingering tufts of down. During the first few days after they leave the nest, they are unable to fly and will hop around on the ground or in low bushes to gain strength and coordination. The mother and father birds hear them call and will bring food to them. If you find a fledgling on the ground, contact the Alabama Wildlife Center's Wildlife Help & Info Telephone Line at **(205) 663-7930, Ext. 2** for advice. A trained animal care specialist will help you determine if the young bird is in need of assistance. We recommend keeping cats indoors at all times and keeping dogs confined until the fledgling can fly.

Baby raptors (*hawks, owls, eagles, vultures*) need special diets and handling. Do not attempt to feed or raise a baby raptor. Limit contact with baby raptors if rescued, as they are easily imprinted on humans which can prevent their return to the wild. Contact the Alabama Wildlife Center's Wildlife Help & Info Telephone Line at **(205) 663-7930, Ext. 2** immediately.



Baby Barred Owls

When to Take Action

For the following situations, call the Alabama Wildlife Center's Wildlife Help & Info Telephone Line at **(205) 663-7930, Ext. 2** immediately for information on how to rescue a bird:

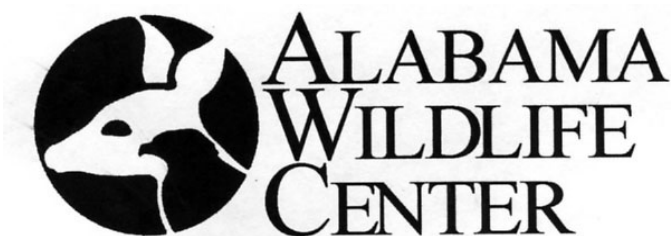
- If the baby bird's parents are known to be dead
- If the bird is visibly hurt (if it is bleeding or is struggling)
- If the bird is tangled in string or plastic
- If the bird is stunned from crashing into a window
- If there are flies, maggots or ants on the bird

In the meantime, it is best to wear gloves to catch the bird. You may have to approach it from behind and use a towel, sheet or blanket to throw over it. After lining a cardboard box with a soft, ravel-free material, place the bird in the cardboard box and close the lid to warm it. It is not necessary to poke holes in the box; the bird will get plenty of air, and a dark environment helps to keep it calm. If the bird is alert, you may offer water in a jar lid, but do *not* try to feed it.

The Alabama Wildlife Center does not have the personnel to send people out to rescue baby birds. The exception to this rule is baby raptors, who often require specialized training and equipment to capture. If an Alabama Wildlife Center volunteer is being sent to capture a bird, keep monitoring it until the volunteer arrives so that the bird's location is known.

Help Protect Baby Birds by Keeping Your Cat Indoors

One of the best things you can do to protect birds around your home is to keep your cat indoors. Millions of birds of different species are killed by domestic cats each year, according to scientific studies. Even birds that survive cat attacks often die from an infection brought on by the cat's claws or teeth. Keeping your cat indoors will help protect baby birds and it will also keep your cat safe from cars, attacks by other animals, diseases and parasites.



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