

I Found a Baby Bird, Now What?

By Susan Heath

Well we made it through the freeze and the trees, shrubs, and flowers are coming back to life! The birds are getting busy building nests and laying eggs, so we need to be prepared to help them if help is needed.

Let's say you, your child, your neighbor, or someone else finds a baby bird and they want to help but they don't know what to do. At the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, we get a lot of calls about baby birds in the spring but the fact is that most baby birds are still being cared for by a parent even if they are on the ground. Young birds often leave the nest once they are mobile but before they can fly because it's safer for them on the ground where they can run and hide from predators.

Any baby bird that is feathered all over is called a fledgling and chances are it left its nest on purpose. If you observe from a distance or, better yet, from inside your house, you are likely to see a parent bird coming to feed the fledgling. If this is the case, leave the bird alone. Make sure you keep your dog and cat inside because they can injure or kill a baby bird in a matter of seconds.

Even well-fed cats will go after a young bird because this is their instinct. I know you don't want to think this of your sweet kitty, but unfortunately, it's true. A fully feathered nestling only needs our help if it is in danger from a predator (dogs and cats), appears sick or injured, or is wet and cold.

On the other hand, a baby bird that is not feathered is called a nestling. If you find one of these on the ground, it needs some help. If you can see where the nest is and can safely reach it, try putting the baby back in the nest. It is not true that parent birds will reject a baby if a human has touched it.

In most cases, the parent is somewhere nearby watching and will see that the baby is back in the nest. They will return to feed it right on schedule. If you can't reach the nest or if the bird has been injured or is wet and cold, then it needs to be rescued. In addition, any bird (adult, fledgling or nestling) that has been attacked by a cat needs to be rescued whether there is visible injury or not.

In cases where a baby bird needs help, put it in a small box lined with paper towels. Put the box somewhere safe from children and pets and call a rehabilitator immediately. Do not give the bird any water or food unless instructed to by a rehabilitator.

In the Lake Jackson area, Gulf Coast Wildlife Rescue handles all injured and orphaned birds (and other wildlife too). You can reach them at 979-849-0184. This hotline is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and they will return your call within an hour. You can find a rehabilitator in your area on the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's website at <https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/rehab/list/>. If you want to help in other

ways, wildlife rehabilitators are always looking for volunteers and of course any donations are always appreciated!

Photo by Susan Heath- Barn Swallow chicks in the nest.

