

Wildlife Rehab: what do you do?

What to do if you find an injured baby bird:

Step one is to *take a step back*. *Watch the bird from a distance for a few hours*. Most times, a baby bird hasn't actually been abandoned, and its parents are just out running errands and getting food to feed them with! They can be gone for up to four hours at once. The best thing to do is watch from a safe distance. Too close and you might keep the parents away because they feel endangered! If after a few hours there's still no sign of mom, then don't worry **touching a baby bird to put it back in its nest will not make their parents abandon them**. Depending on the bird's circumstances, you'll need to handle the situation differently:

- If you find a fallen baby bird, your goal should be to *return it to its nest*. If you can't find the nest or you know that the nest has been damaged/destroyed, the best thing to do is *DIY your own* in a small box. Some dry straw sprinkled on a soft t-shirt usually do the trick. Then, *place the nest back in the tree* as close to the original location as you can get it. If that's not a possibility, *just be sure that the nest is protected from direct sunlight, pets, and children*. Before you put the hatchling back in the nest, *make sure they're warm* or use a heating pad under a shirt to get them warm enough to go back! Keep an eye out for the parents' return, and if they don't return within two hours *call a wildlife rehabilitator*.
- If you spot a bird hopping around on the ground, seemingly away from any tree, *don't assume helplessness!* Fledglings are baby birds who are in the process of learning to fly, and they actually learn from the ground and not from a tree! Usually, you can leave them be to keep practicing, but if they are in any danger, say by a high-traffic area, *place them in a nearby bush* away from any danger and keep an eye on them for an hour or two and if their parents have not returned by then, *get in touch with a wildlife rehabilitator*.

Always bring an injured bird to a wildlife rehabilitation clinic. If you know their parents are dead, if you can tell they're infested with fleas, maggots or other bugs, or if they have been attacked by a dog or cat they **need** special medical attention. Remember, it is always in the bird's best interest to let a professional handle their care so that they can receive the most humane, effective, and promising treatment from those who devote their lives to helping birds just like them!

Using gloves and a towel, carefully lift the bird into a small, warm box and keep it in a dark and quiet place to help keep the bird calm. Don't give the bird food or water.

Remember, always try to call a rehabilitation center first. They can give you super helpful advice, and let you know what the steps are for bringing an animal into their care. Don't try to rehabilitate any animal you find by yourself, it's always most humane to bring them to professionals.

Helping Injured Wildlife, from Turtles to Hares:

If you find an injured wild animal, your first inclination is to help them. This should help you deliver the most humane course of action to an animal that needs your help. Remember, the rule of thumb with wildlife is to **be careful!** Adult animals will see you as a threat, regardless of your good intentions, so you

should always call a wildlife rehabilitator before approaching the animal or attempting to care for it. **Avoid picking up raccoons, skunks, groundhogs, bats, or foxes as they are all potential carriers of rabies. If you must, be sure to avoid touching the animal with your bare hands by using thick gloves and a towel.**

The protocol for different animals and different ages varies, below we have outlined the basics for deciding if you need to step in and what to do if you do for a number of species.

Rabbit: if you see baby rabbits alone in their nest, it's not an immediate cause for concern. Mother rabbits return at dawn and dusk to care for her babies. The best thing you can do for a nest is *to make sure it's protected* from pets (placing a basket over it usually works, but make sure you uncover the nest before mom returns) and then *keep a safe distance* so as not to scare off the mom. If the nest is damaged, you can rebuild it in the original location. A rabbit with its ears up and eyes open, that's at least four inches long can actually survive on its own, so there's no need to step in and help!

Squirrel: if possible, baby squirrels should always be *returned to their nest*. Make sure they are warm before you return them. If the nest has been destroyed, *DIY a replacement* with a small box and a clean and soft t-shirt. *Place the nest as close to the original location as possible*. If the entire tree has been compromised (i.e. cut down), move the nest to a nearby tree. Squirrel moms usually have a backup nest ready to go in a nearby tree. *Check back in about three hours* to make sure the baby has been picked up and brought home by its mom. If they're still in there, *contact wildlife rehabilitators*.

Opossum: Once an opossum is about six inches long, they are okay to be living on their own. There's no need to step in to the rescue for this animal! However, if you discover a dead momma opossum, check her pouch for a baby. *If you find one, it will need to be taken to the wildlife rehabilitation center*.

Turtle: if you spot a turtle crossing the road, you can help it get to the other side faster by *picking it up and moving it*. Never place them back on the side of the road they were coming from because they have a strong sense of direction and will likely just start crossing the road all over again. Move them across the road in the direction they were going. If you have to move a snapping turtle, **be very careful**, they pack a mean bite. Lift them by dragging them by their tail onto a shovel or a big piece of cardboard and then carrying them to the other side. If you lift by their shell, they could whip around and snap at you.

Usually, the best thing to do is let wildlife be, **but if you see staggering, convulsing, crusted over eyes, bleeding, or broken limbs... contact a rehabilitator. If an animal has been trapped or just attacked, they will also need a wildlife rehabilitator's attention and should be brought in for help immediately.**

Always call the rehabilitation center first as they can offer indispensable advice on how to transport the animal to them, and they can make sure you take proper care of the animal during their commute to help! It's also important to verify that the rehabilitators have the capacity to care for this animal before you show up at the doorstep!

Sources:

<https://wildlife-rescue.org/>

<http://www.schuykillcenter.org/>

www.phillywildlife.org/