



Baby Birds

Why Are There So Many “Orphan” Birds?

Every year, hundreds – or perhaps thousands – of healthy fledglings are mistakenly brought into the veterinary surgery as “orphans” or “injured” birds.

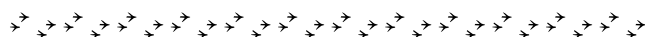
Would you know the difference between a baby bird that really does need human assistance to survive and one that is best left exactly where it is? If not, read on...

- Fledglings of many garden nesting species spend some time being cared for on the ground after leaving the nest. The vast majority of immature birds that may not yet be able to fly properly, or else are not sufficiently cautious to keep out of your way, are still being fed and cared for by their parents (you are unlikely to see them, of course).
- Their small size, and extremely high metabolic and growth rates, mean that hand-rearing garden birds is almost prohibitively difficult and certainly extremely time consuming. The best success rate is a 50% fly-away rate by an experienced rearer, whose minimum routine is to feed fledglings in an ex-hospital incubator, **every ten minutes from 5am to 10pm!** The nutritional demands of growing garden birds are very complex. If you want to try, suggested foods are tinned cat food (including the jelly), proprietary diets for soft bills and whatever you can supply of the bird’s natural diet. White bread, dairy products and salted meats should be avoided.
- However many cats are in the neighbourhood and however bad the weather is, a fledgling bird’s best chance for survival is with its parents.

What to do if you find a Baby Bird ...

It is very easy to mistake the short tail and flight feathers of garden fledglings for real damage. If you find a bird and think it is uninjured and immature, then:

- Place it in a sheltered position, e.g. under a bush as close as possible to where you found it.
- If possible, wear gloves to minimise your (human) scent.
- Do this as quickly as possible to prevent distress to the terrified chick and its parents.
- Cats, dogs and any other possible predators should be kept indoors for at least half a day.
- Leave the site alone.



And Remember ...

Injured, immature small garden birds are even more difficult to rear and euthanasia may be the best option, unless there is access to particularly willing and experienced rearers. Many of these will be licensed for various species by the Department of the Environment under the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

Finally, unless the cripple is a LesserSpottedSomethingQuiteUnusual, no-one is likely to offer it a permanent home and this should be considered at the time of the first examination.

