

HELP! I FOUND A BABY BIRD — NOW WHAT?

If the baby bird you found is too young to fly, you cannot return it to its nest or a substitute nest, and it appears to be abandoned,* **CONGRATULATIONS** on your new job, as an avian foster parent!

We offer the following information to help you raise a strong, healthy bird that can eventually be released back into the wild.

BABY BIRDS NEED TO BE KEPT WARM, WELL FED, AND CLEAN

Warmth. If the baby bird does not feel warm to the touch, warm it up immediately. Birds naturally have a higher body temperature than we do, but with no body fat, simply wrapping the baby in a towel will not be enough to keep it warm. Use a warm towel from the microwave or dryer, or hot water in a watertight jar, lidded coffee cup, or plastic bag. For longer-lasting heat, place the baby's container flat on a heating pad set to "low," or on a machine that produces steady, low heat, like a computer or a cable TV box. Warmth is the most important, life-saving care you can provide.

For safety and proper development, baby birds need to be kept in a nest-like container. Legs should be tucked underneath, not splayed out to its sides. Until the bird is older, well feathered and moving around, keep a heating pad under half the container, so the bird can move away if it gets too hot. Check the bird often to avoid overheating (the bird will pant, beak open, when it is too hot). Sick and injured birds of any age need to remain on heat until well.

Cleanliness. Line the container with paper towels or tissues, and change them often. Keep the bird clean; bacteria can develop quickly, and babies with immature immune systems are highly susceptible to illness. If food gets on the bird during feedings, clean gently with a tissue or cotton-tipped swab. Observe the droppings carefully; they are often the first clue to a sick bird. Babies' droppings should be well-formed and brownish in color. Rinse the feet and vent (under their tail) gently in warm water if messy. Be sure to warm and dry the baby afterwards.

Food. Baby birds can be fed bits of juicy fruit like papaya or mango at first. To rehydrate a sick bird offer it sugar water or place drops of sugar water on the tip/sides of its beak. As soon as you can, begin feeding the proper diet for the species. See our website at www.wildbirdrehabhaven.org for species-specific diets. Note: baby doves need grain and seeds, since doves in Hawaii don't eat fruit.

Most babies can be fed commercial baby bird formula, a special powder sold at pet stores. Mix it with water and feed with an eye dropper. Use one measure of food to two-to-three of hot tap water. To avoid burns, do not microwave; crop burns can be fatal. Add a little extra water the first few meals, so the bird does not develop digestive problems while adjusting to the formula. *Be extremely careful not to let the bird choke.* Feed small amounts at a time, giving the bird time to swallow between bites. Small birds need only a few drops at a time, while baby pigeons may eat 10-30 cc, depending on their size. At first you might need to gently tap or squeeze the beak open to put in a bite of food. Most babies will quickly learn to signal their hunger with chirps

and wide-open beaks. However, doves and pigeons do not open their mouths to be fed. You have to gently pry their beaks open and slip the eye dropper inside. Feed until the crop is nearly full; look for a bulge like a water balloon near the baby's neck (most birds) or chest (pigeons, doves, baby chickens).

Time between feedings varies according to species and age. Most babies eat every hour until they start developing feathers and growth slows down. Larger babies like pigeons can eat more at a time so can wait 2-3 hours between meals. Because birds hatch with only partially-developed systems, but become fully mature rapidly, it is critical that babies be fed frequently and sufficiently. If you must delay meals, feed later into the evening so that the total nutritional intake is still the same each day. Babies normally eat during 14 hours or so of daylight daily. At night, the babies should not be hungry; they need to be kept in a quiet, warm, dark place to get plenty of rest.

Clean feeding utensils thoroughly with soap and hot water. Babies from different nests should not share eye droppers, because new bacteria can spread quickly between birds. We humans are not normally at risk from disease or parasite from birds in Hawaii, but you should isolate wild birds from pet birds.

When the baby has weaned and eats only the proper food for adults of its species, it should have a chance to learn to fly, gain strength, and interact with other birds of its own age and species. We maintain aviaries around the island for that purpose. This helps the bird gain independence from humans, too. After graduating from the aviary, your bird can be released near where you found it, if safe, or with its new social group.

For more information about the care of your baby bird, to sign up for free classes, to make a donation for veterinary expenses, food, supplies, and our future Rehab Center, or to join us as a volunteer transporter, foster bird parent, or aviary manager please contact us at:

Wild Bird Rehab Haven -- 808-447-9274 (WBRH)
www.wildbirdrehabhaven.org

*Ground-nesting seabird parents leave before dawn and return after dusk. The baby may look abandoned, but as long as it is waiting for mom and dad in a safe place, it is probably fine. If it is in a dangerous spot and you cannot return it to its nest, confine it, keep it warm, be careful it doesn't bite you, and take it to Sea Life Park 808-259-2537. They have a drop off area that's accessible 24 hours a day. You may offer the bird a dish of water but never force food or water on seabirds.

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