

Baby birds – When to intervene

By WRAS Centre Manager Lindsay Redfern Bsc Hons.

Orphaned birds are a common occurrence in rescue centres throughout spring and summer. It is not unusual for many birds to leave their babies for short or even extended periods of time, so how do you know when a bird has been orphaned or abandoned?



Young birds go through three stages of development, hatchling, nestling and fledgling.

Hatchlings are bald and usually come in to care after being pushed out of the nest or having been taken by a predator, nestlings are partially feathered (usually bald under the wings) and are more vocal so are commonly victims of predator attacks. Both hatchlings and nestlings should remain in the nest so if you ever find one on the ground, contact your local rescue centre for advice.



Fledglings, unlike hatchlings and nestlings are usually seen on the ground, this is completely normal and these birds should not be removed or taken in to care. Fledglings are fully feathered and more mobile as they are able to hop and flutter but cannot yet fly. Fledging is an important stage of development during which young birds will remain on the ground from 1 – 7 days (depending on the species) as they build up the strength in their muscles to fly. If you are worried about the safety of a fledgling then you can move the young bird in to an area of cover close by - for better protection from predators - but they should never be removed from that area as their parents will still be caring for and feeding them, although less often at this stage.



If a young bird is showing signs of illness or injury then contact your local rescue centre as they may need medication. Victims of cat attacks will need immediate treatment as a cat's mouth holds so much bacteria, even the smallest wound can prove fatal without antibiotics.

If you find a bird which needs rescuing, place it in to a box with a towel or blanket in a warm, quiet room. DO NOT try to force feed any bird as if done incorrectly it can be fatal, keeping the bird warm will be enough until you can get the bird to a rescue centre.

WRAS needs your help:

If you would like to make a donation to help fund WRAS's work please call 01825-873003 to make a donation or post a donation to: East Sussex WRAS. PO Box 2148, Seaford, East Sussex, BN25 9DE.

WRAS's Rescue Line: 07815-078234.

Reg Charity 1108880.

