

Birds in Backyards: What to do if you find a sick, injured or baby bird

It can be very stressful when you find a sick, injured or baby bird – both for you and the bird! We have compiled some information about what to do in these situations.

According to all state and territory legislations, you must be a qualified and licenced wildlife carer in order to rehabilitate wildlife. This means, if you find a sick, injured or young bird (that is not able to be reunited with it's parents), you must hand it over to a licenced wildlife rescue group or take it to a vet.

What do I do if I find a sick or injured bird?

Birds are very good at hiding illness and so when we find a sick bird it usually means it is very sick. Sick birds often look; fluffy and hunched when it isn't cold, weeping, puffy eyes, or crusty eyes, dirty and matted or missing feathers, visible wounds or injuries.

A healthy bird will generally be behaving as others of the same species do, however birds that are behaving oddly might be unwell or injured. They may be unable or reluctant to fly, making shallow, rapid breaths, head tilting, limping, not moving when approached or sitting in unusual, open places. Often other birds will also attack an unwell bird.

If you do find a bird that is sick or injured:

1. Ensure the threat to the bird is removed and it isn't in immediate danger (and keep yourself safe too)
2. Handle the bird gently but firmly (and wear gloves where ever possible or use a towel). For small birds, use one hand and hold the bird so its head is between your index and middle fingers. The rest of your hand will wrap about the body. For medium sized birds you will need two hands – one over each wing. Large birds like raptors and owls have large beaks and claws so avoid handling birds of this size if at all possible (contact wildlife rescue immediately and have someone qualified capture it).
3. **Put the bird into a well-ventilated box and keep it dark and quiet** while you get treatment for it. This reduces the stress and shock for the bird and is the best treatment you can give it.
4. **Don't feed the bird or give it water.** This could cause the bird to aspirate or delay any treatment it might need.
5. Contact your local wildlife rescue group or vet. Depending on resources, they may be able to come and collect the bird themselves directly or will provide you with advice based on the situation you are describing. A vet will not charge you for bringing in wildlife.

My cat caught a bird. It is still alive, what do I do?

Even if there is no visible injury to the bird, it can die from infection after a cat attack. Bacteria found in the saliva and the mouth of a mammal can cause fatal septicemia (infection in the bloodstream) of a bird very quickly. Cat bites should be considered the most dangerous, as the *Pasteurella* bacteria commonly found in a cat's mouth, is extremely hazardous to birds. Even

a simple puncture by a tooth can result in a fatal infection. Scratches from claws are also extremely dangerous, as the risk of infection is very real.

If a cat brings you a bird, place it in a dark, well-ventilated box and contact either your local wildlife rescue or nearest vet that has wildlife/bird experience.

I found a baby bird on the ground, what can I do to help it?

Most of the time, baby birds don't actually need our help at all!

If the baby bird is fluffy and downy or has only a few feathers and it is unable to grip your finger then it is a *nestling* – so it isn't ready to leave the nest yet and wouldn't have travelled far. Search nearby trees and shrubs for the nest and pop them back in.

If the baby is largely feathered (but usually has a stumpy tail) and it can perch on your finger and hop around, it is a *fledgling* and it is actually ready to leave the nest – even though they might not look like it. Its parents are likely around nearby keeping an eye on it. If you put it in the nest, chances are it will jump back out again, so simply find a nice safe branch and pop it up there. Mum and dad will call to it and come and continue to feed it. Some fledglings like Tawny Frogmouths and Australian Magpies spend a lot of time on the ground. Unless there is an immediate threat to them they will not need any assistance.

In both cases watch from a distance (and hidden if possible) and the parents should come to attend to the young bird. If they do not come back within an hour, contact a wildlife rescue group for further advice. Seek wildlife rescue help if you suspect the young bird is sick or injured.

It is a myth that if touch a baby bird then the parents won't take it back. Birds recognise their offspring by call rather than smell, and in fact they have a pretty bad sense of smell. So if you find a nestling out of a nest simply pop it back in and mum and dad will do the rest.

What about if it is a sick, injured or baby introduced bird?

This is a tough one! Introduced birds are not allowed to legally be released back into the wild. They compete with our native birds for food and resources, and in some cases are aggressive as well. If you find an introduced bird that is sick or injured, or a baby bird, please take it to a vet. It will be euthanized humanely, a much better fate than suffering. If you are unsure about whether a bird is introduced or not, check with a local wildlife rescue group or post a photo on the Birds in Backyards facebook group for confirmation.

Further Reading

<https://wildcare.org.au/species-information/birds/>
<https://www.rspcavic.org/health-and-behaviour/native-and-introduced-animals/>
<https://www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/about-us/contact-us/wildcare-helpline?showall=&start=1>

Wildlife Rescue Contact List

State	Location	Organisation	Website	Phone	Email	Information
ACT	Canberra	ACT Wildlife	ACT Wildlife	0432 300 033	ACT Wildlife Email	Injured kangaroos call: 13 22 81
NSW	Statewide	WIRES	WIRES	1300 094 737	WIRES Email	
NSW	Mid North Coast	FAWNA NSW	FAWNA NSW	02 6581 4141		South from Bulahdelah to the northern part of the Kempsey Shire and west to Stroud and Gloucester
NSW	Mudgee	Wildlife Carers Network Central West	Wild Carers	0408 966 228		
NSW	Northern Tablelands	Northern Tablelands Wildlife Carers	Northern Tablelands Carers	1800 008 290		
NSW	NSW South Coast	Wildlife Rescue South Coast	Wildlife Rescue	0418 427 214 (N of Batemans Bay) 0417 238 921 (Batemans Bay to Vic Border)		
NSW	Hunter Valley	Hunter Wildlife Rescue	Hunter Wildlife Rescue	0418 628 483	Hunter Wildlife Email	Newcastle, Maitland, Cessnock and Lake Macquarie local government areas
NSW	Sydney	Sydney Wildlife Services	Sydney Wildlife Services	02 9413 4300	Sydney Wildlife Email	
NSW/ACT	Queanbeyan	Wildcare Queanbeyan Inc.	Wildcare Queanbeyan	02 6299 1966	Wildcare Queanbeyan Email	Areas surrounding the ACT
NT	Darwin	Darwin Wildlife Sanctuary	Darwin Wildlife Sanctuary	0473 992 581	Darwin Sanctuary Email	
NT	Darwin	Wildcare Inc	Wildcare Inc	0408 885 341		

NT	Katherine	Wildcare Inc	Wildcare Inc	0412 955 336		
NT	Alice Springs	Wildcare Alice Springs	Wildcare Alice Springs	0419 221 128		
QLD	SEQ	Wildcare Australia SEQ	Wildcare SEQ	07 5527 2444	Wildcare SEQ email	
QLD	Brisbane	Kerry's Wildlife Rescue and Care	Kerrys Rescue	0431 674 016		
QLD	SEQ	A.R.R.O.W Wildlife Rehabilitation	ARROW	0430 904 415		
QLD	Gold Coast	Currumbin Wildlife Hospital	Currumbin Sanctuary	07 5534 0813		
QLD	Sunshine Coast	Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital	Australia Zoo	1300 369 652		
QLD	Wacol	RSPCA Wildlife Hospital	Qld RSPCA	07 3426 9910		
QLD	North Qld	North Queensland WildLife Care	NQld Wildlife Care	0414 717 374		
QLD	Far North Qld	Far North Queensland WildLife	FNQld Wildlife	07 4053 4467		
SA	Adelaide	Fauna Rescue of SA Inc	Fauna Rescue SA	08 8289 0896	Fauna Rescue SA	KOALA HOTLINE: 1300 562 527, Bats incl. Microbats & Flying Foxes Rescue hotline (24 hours) 0475 132 093
SA	Statewide	Wildlife SA	Wildlife SA	0402734555 or 0403269953		
SA	Statewide	RSPCA South Australia	SA RSPCA	1300 4 777 22		
VIC	Melbourne	Wildlife Victoria	Wildlife Victoria	03 8400 7300		Covers all of Victoria
VIC	Dorreen	Help for Wildlife	Help for Wildlife	0477 555 611	Help for Wildlife Email	

VIC	Bendigo	Wildlife Rescue and Emergency Service	Wildlife Rescue	0427 301 401		
VIC	Melbourne	Wildlife Rescuers Inc	Wildlife Rescuers	0417 506 941		Based at LaTrobe University
WA	Perth	FAWNA WA	FAWNA WA	0438 526 660	FAWNA WA Email	This number is recommended by several smaller wildcare groups in WA alternative number: DBCA Wildcare (08) 9474 9055 Their website recommends numerous vets in different suburbs
WA	Karratha (N. WA)	Pilbara Wildlife Carers Association	Pilbara Carers	0438 924 842	Pilbara Carers Email	
WA	Perth	Native Animal Rescue	Native Animal Rescue Perth	08 9249 3434		
WA	Perth	Kanyana Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre	Kanyana Wildlife	08 9291 3900		
WA	Broome	Native Animal Rescue	Native Animal Rescue Broome	0407 773 258		