

## Nesting Birds and The Law

*Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981* is one of the most important pieces of Wildlife legislation in this country. It states it is an offence to

*Intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird*

*Intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any bird while that nest is in use or being built*

*Intentionally take or destroy an egg of any wild bird*

Nesting season is generally considered to be from early March to late August. Even then there will still be many birds tending to chicks in nests well in to September. However, birds can and do nest earlier and later than this. They don't do dates!

Hedge pruning and clearing of dense vegetation in a woodland should be restricted during these times as it is nigh on impossible to ensure that there are no nesting birds.



## HART WILDLIFE RESCUE

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Want to Help.....

## Baby Birds



If you come across a young bird that you think needs help, please think before taking any action. Unless it has obvious injuries or is in immediate danger, it may not need "rescuing" at all. Whilst we offer the very best standard of care, it will never be as good as "mum". Baby birds can be:-

### PRECOCIAL

Hatch with downy feathers, able to stand and follow the adult bird almost immediately. Precocial birds feed themselves from the moment they hatch e.g. ducklings, pheasants, moorhens

### ALTRICIAL

Hatch featherless, blind and totally dependent on their parents for food and warmth e.g. sparrow, blue tit, blackbird, robin, greenfinch and baby birds of prey e.g. tawny owl, kestrel. They can also be classified as either Nestling or Fledgling

### Nestlings

These are young, recently hatched birds that have not yet grown any flight feathers and are unable to fly. They may lack feathers entirely or could be covered with a light down, depending on the species. Nestling birds are entirely dependent on their parents for food and protection, though the length of that dependency varies for each bird species from just a few days to several weeks. One or both parents may feed the young birds and stay with them to help regulate their body temperature until they acquire thicker plumage.

### Fledglings

As birds mature and begin to grow their adult flight feathers, they are no longer called nestlings and instead are referred to as fledglings.

Many of the birds brought in to us are fledgling birds that have been picked up because they are thought to be "orphaned". This is not always the case. Many birds leave the nest before they are fully grown and spend a few days on the ground exercising their wings before they can fly. A common example of this is young blackbirds. During their time on the ground they are still fed and protected by their parents, but if anyone is



### Pigeons and Doves:

Adults - any type of wild bird seed, corn. Babies - bring them to the HART as soon as possible as they need special tube feeding which you can not do yourself at home.



**Ducks:** whole corn, lettuce, chick crumbs (with water added for ducklings). Do not place ducklings in water as they chill easily and die quickly.

### How do you transport a bird?

To carry and house the bird during the trip to HART, use a cardboard box lined with a soft towel (as described earlier). Cardboard causes less feather damage than a wire cage when transporting an excited bird that might be jumping around inside the container. Do not use shredded paper or cotton to line the box, as these can easily get caught in the bird's toes or get wrapped around its neck. As well do not use green grass cuttings, as the dampness could give the bird a chill. Finally, do not use old bird's nest. These may harbour mites and vermin harmful to the bird. For younger or injured birds, a towel or facial tissue can be bunched around the bird to provide support and prevent it from resting in an uncomfortable, splayed position. Once the bird is tucked safely in its box, a lid with holes punched in it or a paper towel can be placed over the box to prevent the bird from jumping out and to also give it some privacy. Frightened birds find darkness calming.

bird.

**DO NOT GIVE MILK OR BREAD to birds.** They are not mammals and therefore milk is not part of their natural diet. Milk may also cause diarrhoea leading to dehydration and bread does not provide the protein and vitamins needed by small babies.

The following is a guide of substitute foods for both babies and adults.

Babies have to be hand-fed. If the baby is opening its mouth then just place a small amount inside. If the baby isn't gaping then try wiping the food gently along the beak to encourage it to eat. Do not put water bowls in for baby birds as they may either get wet and cold or even drown. Small dishes of food and water can be put in the box for adult birds who eat on their own.



**Baby garden birds e.g Blackbirds, Robins, Sparrows etc:**

- Tinned cat or dog food, (non-fishy) preferably beef. This can be mashed-up into a paste with water and then offered on the end of a brush or tweezers.
- Small pieces of raw lean beef mince.
- Dried or live meal worms chopped up; if using dried they will need to be soaked in water to soften them.
- Scrambled egg.

Adult garden birds can be offered the same food from a dish; additionally seed eaters, such as sparrows, can be offered wild bird seed.

around the parent bird is likely to stay away so they don't draw attention to the youngster.

If you see a young bird like this, please keep a discrete distance to watch for whether the adult bird is around, and if so, the young bird should be left, unless it is in any immediate danger e.g. from a cat or appears to be injured

**Tawny Owl Chicks**

Last year HART admitted 10 tawny owl chicks that had been picked up by concerned members of the public. Tawny chicks are often found at the base of trees when they have come out of their nest; they are actually very good climbers and can clamber back up the tree using their beaks and talons to grip. Additionally adult tawny owls will feed their young on the ground. If you find a young tawny at the base of a tree please phone for advice before removing it as it may not need to be taken into captivity.



**Pigeons and Doves**

The behaviour of parent pigeons and doves is slightly different from other altricial birds. The parents feed their young by regurgitating 'crop-milk' into their throats by placing the beak inside the youngsters mouth. The youngsters are also fed less frequently, so it is important to observe the chicks for a longer period of time in order to check whether they have been abandoned. If taken in for rehabilitation baby pigeons and doves are tube fed directly into their crops which requires specialist training and should not be attempted at home.



## Help is Needed if.....

- Bird is lying on its side and floppy – needs attention immediately
- Unresponsive/unconscious – needs attention immediately
- Dangerous location – e.g. cat nearby or being attacked by corvids (crows, magpies etc).
- Obvious injuries
- Brought in by cat even if no injuries are obvious; will need antibiotics to protect against septicaemia
- **Definitely on its own: watch from a discrete distance for 1/2 an hour; garden bird fledglings will be fed by a parent during this time if they are attending the youngster**

## Do not attempt to help.....

- Unless the baby bird is injured, in a dangerous situation or definitely alone follow the advice above i.e. watch and wait to see if a parent is attending
- If you are not equipped (seek advice)
- If you or others would be put in too much danger (seek advice)

## How do you rescue/capture an injured bird?

First prepare a suitably sized container i.e. not too big so that the bird does not move around during transport. A cardboard box with a soft towel in the bottom and a lid is ideal. Most casualty birds will benefit from you providing a heat source; this is especially important for baby birds that have little or no feathers as they will soon become cold; they should feel warm to your touch. Use a hot water bottle to provide heat or, if you don't have one available use a plastic drinks bottle filled with warm water as a substitute. Never put the bird directly onto the heat source as this risks it getting burnt—place the bottle under the towel lining the box. Using two bottles, one on either side of the body, will provide even more warmth

## How to pick a bird up

- Injured birds are often incapable of moving and may be too weak or shocked to put up any sort of resistance to handling. In this instance pick the bird up by grasping it gently around the shoulders so that the wings are held against the body and cannot flap.

- Place the bird into the prepared box and cover on the top.

If you are having trouble catching the bird, or you are afraid to touch it, a towel can be used. Simply drop the towel lightly over the bird. The darkness will calm and immobilize the bird so that it is easier to pick up.

**N.B** do not place the bird in the sun to warm it. Although birds need to be kept warm, the hot, direct sun could quickly overheat it, especially if it is too weak to move into the shade. Additionally you run the risk of 'fly-strike'; flies will lay eggs on immobile/sick birds which can then hatch out into maggots.

**Picking up Raptors:** Always use extreme caution when handling birds of prey such as Hawks and Owls. Be especially careful of the talons and the beak which are extremely sharp and strong. The bird will be most easily caught by covering it with a towel and restraining the feet. If available, thick leather gloves can be worn but do not depend on them for total hand protection. **If you are at all unsure of how to approach these birds, call HART for advice.**

## What can you feed a bird until you are able to get it to HART?

Babies should be fed at least every hour and every half hour for featherless babies. If you live far away and are unable to get the bird to HART right away, you should try feeding the bird. It is important to identify the bird before any feeding is attempted as different birds have different dietary needs. If you do not know what kind of bird it is, call the HART and we will help you with identification.

Babies should be fed three to four mouthfuls of food every hour from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm. Feeding can be done with a small brush or tweezers. Each feeding should be followed with a couple of drops of water from the brush or dripped off the end of a finger on to the beak; do not squirt water directly down the bird's throat and take care not to get the water into its nostrils. Avoid holding the bird while giving food and water unless absolutely necessary as this is very stressful for them. Care should be taken in giving food and water since too much of either could easily choke or suffocate the