

## Some common questions . . .

***My child picked up this baby bird, and now we can't put it back because she touched it. How can we care for it?***

Every spring and summer the McHenry County Conservation District's Wildlife Resource Center receives numerous calls very similar to this one. Typically, our most frequent response is "put it back." Most birds do not have a well-developed sense of smell, so the human scent does not deter the parents from caring for their handled young. The best thing you can do for a baby bird is to leave it be.



***My son found a couple of speckled eggs in his schoolyard. He couldn't find a nest anywhere. How can we incubate them?***

What looks like abandoned eggs isn't necessarily so. Put the eggs back where they were found. Killdeers are long-legged birds who inhabit open fields. They do not build nests. Instead they find a prairie, pasture, gravel road, trash pile, sometimes even a gravel roof, and lay their eggs in a scraped, shallow depression. Within hours after hatching, the precocial, self-feeding young follow their parents around to learn what to eat. In approximately six weeks they will be able to fly.

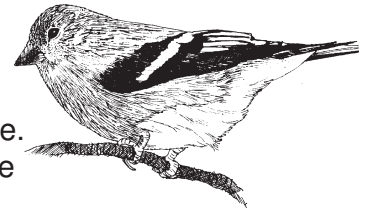


***A little, black bird is clinging to the wall of my fireplace. How did it get there and what should I do?***

Aerial insectivores, chimney swifts have adapted to nesting deep inside chimneys. To fashion the nest, the adults use saliva to "glue" twigs to the inside wall of the chimney. Sometimes the nest becomes unglued and falls, along with the babies, into the fireplace. Place the babies in a shallow container lined with paper towels. Place this substitute nest on the closed damper or the shelf inside the chimney. If the babies are feathered, place them above the damper on the inside wall of the chimney. They should cling to the brick. Close the damper or wedge a piece of cardboard in the chimney so the babies can't fall back into the fireplace. The parents will return to feed them. When the young are old enough to fly, they will fly out the top of the chimney with their parents to forage for insects. If you don't want them nesting the following year, have your chimney cleaned and capped in the fall after they have left on migration.

***What do I do with a featherless baby bird that I found on the ground?***

Small, naked or down-covered birds, called nestlings, sometimes fall from their nests. If one is found on the ground, gently pick it up and place it back in the nest. If the whole nest has fallen, a substitute nest can be built using a small plastic container with drainage holes and lined with dried grass. Secure this temporary nest as close to the original nest site as possible. Parents will hear the nestlings' cries and return to care for them.



***My cat caught and injured a bird. How can I help it?***

Many facilities and individuals are licensed by state and federal governments to rehabilitate injured wildlife. Call the Wildlife Resource Center at (815)728-8307 for more specific advice.

**Please note:** Feral and free-roaming cats kill millions of birds every year in the United States. Contrary to popular belief, house cats are not natural predators in the environment. Pet cats do not need to eat these animals to survive, but often kill just for sport. If you own a cat, please keep it indoors or on a leash when outside, ideally all the time, but particularly during nesting season.

***A baby bird is hopping around in my backyard. What do I do?***

Leave it alone. Fledglings are fully feathered young birds not yet capable of flight. They jump from the nest and frequently end up on the ground. If they are in a hazardous place (e.g., the road), gently pick them up and place them in or under a nearby bush or tree, then leave the area. Their parents are usually close by and will continue to feed and care for them. During this stage of their life, fledglings are being taught "how to be a bird," something no human can duplicate. They usually do not return to the nest.



***A bird is lying on my porch, not moving. What can I do for it?***

Frequently a bird found near a home has flown into a window and is suffering from a mild concussion. If no blood or broken bones are obvious, gently pick up the bird and place it in a large paper grocery bag. Fold over the top, and place the bag in a quiet, protected, shaded spot. After an hour or two, carefully open the bag (do this outside!). If the bird does not fly out, call the Wildlife Resource Center for more specific advice.

## LEAVE THEM BE



In the spring and summer months, people frequently come into contact with infant wildlife. Unlike human children, young animals very often are left alone, sometimes for hours at a time. While away from a nest, a parent may be foraging for food, watching out for potential predators, or just staying away so as not to draw attention to its defenseless young. It is important to remember that the best care an infant can receive is from its wild, natural mother. Besides supplying the proper nutrition, she also teaches her youngsters the essentials for survival. Over 75% of young birds do not make it through their first year of life even with parental care. Predators are simply a natural part of a youngster's existence. This is all part of the balance of nature.

Please remember, even though it may not be an easy choice, a "hands-off" policy is usually the best choice when dealing with wild animals. If you do happen across a wild youngster and aren't sure of what to do, please do not hesitate to call the Wildlife Resource Center for advice. **In addition, please keep in mind that it is against federal and state laws to keep wild birds and mammals captive.**

For more information, please contact

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## Wild by Nature: Birds



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