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WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND A YOUNG BIRD

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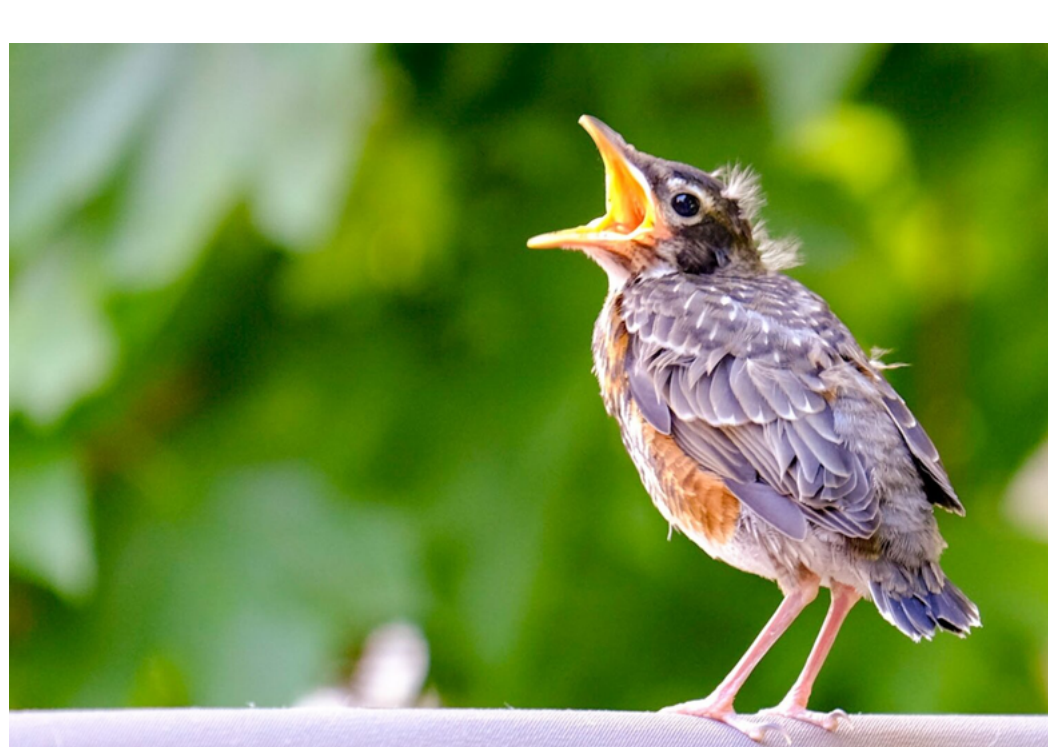
HATCHLINGS AND NESTLINGS

If you find a young bird without fully-formed feathers, it is a hatchling or nestling and should be returned to its nest, if possible. **Hatchlings** are just a few days old. They are either featherless, have thin, fluffy down, or have very stubby feather growth. Their eyes are closed for at least the first week or so after they hatch (varies with species). **Nestlings** can open their eyes (though they are often sleeping). They have the start of feathers over their bodies and the beginnings of flight feathers on their wings. These wing feathers are totally or partly encased in thin sheaths; at this stage, they are called "pin feathers." Because they are not full feathered, they cannot keep warm outside the nest. Nestlings are more mobile in the nest but are not yet able to stand, hop, or walk. A hatchling or nestling's best chance for survival is its parents.



Upon finding a hatchling or nestling on the ground, follow these steps:

- If you can find the nest, put the chick back in it and watch from a distance to see that the parents are visiting the nest. It is a myth that a bird will reject a baby because it was handled by humans.
- If the nest has been damaged, you can make a substitute by poking holes in the bottom of tupperware. Line it with the old nest, grass, or leaves, and hang it from the original tree, structure, or one nearby to protect it from predators.
- Once you've returned the bird to a nest—whether real or homemade—keep an eye out for the parents. If they don't return within a few hours, call a wildlife rehabilitation center for advice. (See our list of [Animal Hospital and Rehabilitation Centers](#) for recommendations on where to take birds.)
- If the bird's nest is high up in a building and there is no way to return it to its nest or suitable location for a substitute nest (as is sometimes the case in New York City), take the birds to an [animal hospital or rehabilitation center](#).



FLEDGLINGS

Young birds become fully feathered by about two weeks of age (timing varies with species), and are then considered fledglings. During the late spring and summer, fledglings naturally begin to jump out of the nest. Unable to fly, these fledglings are sometimes mistaken for [injured birds](#). To confirm that the bird you've found is a fledgling, look for short but fully developed (with no sheaths) tail and wing feathers. Fledglings have fully insulating body feathers and may have a few tufts of down here and there, particularly on the head.

Fledglings are often found hopping on the ground, flexing their wings while learning how to fly, and being fed by their parents. While it can be distressing to watch a vulnerable fledgling from a human perspective, in most cases, **these birds do not need your help!** Fledging is a natural process through which young birds must go. If you return them to the nest they will just hop back out, and if you take the bird to a rehabilitator they have a lower chance of survival. Bird parents are much better at feeding their young and teaching survival skills than humans.

If you or someone you know brings home a healthy fledgling, return it as quickly as possible to the place it was found. It is a myth that a bird will reject a baby because it was handled by humans. If the fledgling is in a precarious place, such as in a road, you can move it to a safer spot nearby, such as under a bush.

In New York City, it is sometimes the case that there seems to be no suitable, safe place to put a fledgling bird. Species such as House Sparrows, Rock Pigeons, European Starlings, American Kestrels, and even American Robins may nest right over the street, in areas with no shrubs, trees, or shelter. *Do not underestimate the abilities of our urban birds to survive in odd circumstances*; if you can find a planter or small sheltered area (ideally with shrubs or plants), that may suffice! If you feel the bird is likely to be stepped upon or otherwise injured if left alone, however, it may be wisest to capture it and take it to an [animal hospital or rehabilitation center](#).

If you are unable to find a safe place to put the baby bird, or if it is visibly injured (bleeding, wings drooping unevenly, attacked by cat/dog, etc.), gently pick the bird up and put it in a paper bag or small box. Do not give the bird food or water, and bring it to a rehabilitator immediately. Be sure to write down exactly where the bird was found so that once rehabbed, the bird can potentially be returned to the nest site. See our list of [animal hospitals and rehabilitation centers in New York City](#) and information on our injured bird transporter volunteer group.

[Need a quick primer on what to do if you have found a young or baby bird? See this fun flow chart by Bird and Moon Comics!](#)

For additional advice during business hours, you can contact us at birdid@nycbirdalliance.org. Having photos of the bird available will help our staff to provide appropriate guidance.



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ABOUT NYC BIRD ALLIANCE

NYC Bird Alliance is a grassroots community that works for the protection of wild birds and habitat in the five boroughs, improving the quality of life for all New Yorkers.

Homepage photo: Wilson's Warbler by Tim Malek/AdobeStock

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