

Injured Wildlife

What To Do If You Find an Injured Baby Bird

WHEN TO HELP & WHEN TO LET NATURE BE

Have you ever stumbled upon a tiny baby bird on the ground and wondered if you should do something? You are not alone. During spring and summer here in the Bay Area, young birds are everywhere—many of them taking their first leap from the nest. While our instincts often tell us to step in and help, the truth is, not all baby birds need rescuing. At the store, we get this question all the time: “I found a baby bird—what do I do?” The answer depends on a few key details. Before you take action, take a moment to observe. The two main types of baby birds you might find are **nestlings** and **fledglings**—and they need very different things.

Nestlings are very young birds that haven’t yet developed feathers or the ability to hop around. They have bare skin or only a few tufts of feathers, eyes are closed or barely open, lying on the ground, clearly out of the nest, too young to survive on their own. Look for a nest nearby—it’s often within a few feet. If you can safely reach it, gently place the bird back in the nest. The myth that mother birds abandon their babies after being touched by humans is false. Birds have a very limited sense of smell and will not reject their young. Returning a baby to its nest is always the best first step.

Fledglings do NOT need help. Fledglings are young birds that have left the nest and are learning to fly. It may look like they are in trouble, but they’re right where they’re supposed to be. Look for a fully feathered body, bright eyes, alert, maybe hopping or fluttering, hanging out on the ground, near shrubs or trees. Just let them be. These birds are exploring and building their flying muscles. Their parents are most likely nearby, still feeding and watching over them. Unless the bird is clearly injured or in danger, it’s best not to interfere.

WHEN TO INTERVENE

- It’s injured (bleeding, limping, or wing dragging).
- It’s been attacked by a cat or dog—even if no wounds are visible.
- It’s cold, fluffed up, and unresponsive.
- It’s sitting in a high-risk area, like the middle of a road. In these situations, contact a licensed wildlife rehabilitator.

HOW TO CREATE A SAFE YARD FOR BABY BIRDS

- Plant native shrubs and trees. They offer natural shelter and food.



- Offer nesting material. Never use dryer lint. We carry natural options in the store.
- Keep cats indoors. Outdoor cats are one of the biggest dangers to fledglings.
- Provide shallow birdbaths. Parents need water to care for their young.
- Avoid pesticides. Insects are baby bird food!

RESOURCES

For a deeper dive into how to help birds, here are some places to start:

birds.cornell.edu/home/seven-simple-actions-to-help-birds/
scvbirdalliance.org/baby-birds
phs-spca.org/wildlife/backyard-birds/

phs-spca.org/found-an-animal-south-bay/

nativeanimalrescue.org/found-an-animal/hummingbirds/
wildlifeservices.org/

Helping Birds During Nesting Season

Mar–Aug for many species

- ✓ Before you trim shrubs or trees, make sure there are no active nests hidden within
- ✓ Keep cats inside; they are the number one killer of birds throughout the world
- ✓ Be careful not to use pesticides or insecticides near nests or on a potential food source
- ✓ Keep water and food sources available and clean



Jessica gently rescued this fledgling Steller's Jay after it found its way into her garage. Once outside, it quickly reunited with its waiting parents. ©Jessica Guenther-Dang

IF YOU FIND A BABY BIRD

If you find what you think is an orphaned baby bird on the ground, we encourage you to leave it alone and watch from a distance to see if its parents come down to feed it. Several different species of birds actually leave the nest a few days before they can fly. They hide in the bushes while their parents come down to feed and care for them until they can fly. However, if you have determined your baby bird is in danger and is too young to fend for itself, it is OK to pick up the bird, place it in a box and then call a rescue organization for assistance.

RESCUE SERVICES FOR INJURED BIRDS AND WILDLIFE

SOUTH BAY RESCUE SERVICES

Wildlife Care Center (*Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA*)

Phone: (650) 340-7022

Hours: Open daily from 9:00 AM to 6:00 PM

Website: phs-spca.org/wildlife

Intake Locations:

- Larry Ellison Conservation Center for Wildlife Care*
24103 Congress Springs Rd., Saratoga, CA 95070
- Penitencia Creek Park
3027 Penitencia Creek Rd, San Jose, CA 95132

**The Saratoga facility opened in April 2025 and serves as a new intake center for wildlife care.*

Veterinary Emergency Group (VEG) – San Jose

Phone: (408) 834-8180

Address: 725 Ridder Park Dr. #85, San Jose, CA 95131

Hours: Open 24/7 for emergency care

Website: veterinaryemergencygroup.com/locations/california/san-jose

SANTA CRUZ RESCUE SERVICES

Native Animal Rescue – Santa Cruz

Phone: (831) 462-0726

Address: 1855 17th Ave., Santa Cruz, CA 95062

Website: nativeanimalrescue.org

Services: Native wild animals including birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians



LOS GATOS BIRDWATCHER

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Our mission at Los Gatos Birdwatcher is to educate, share adventures, and have fun through the love and experience of birds and nature.