



## **Be a Baby Bird Buddy**

When you find a baby bird chirping and fluttering its wings in your yard, the temptation to "help" by bringing it indoors and away from harsh weather, predators and other hazards can be overwhelming. Doing so, however, is not only illegal but can harmful to the bird by depriving it of necessary survival skills and nourishment it can only get from its parents. Fortunately, you can take advantage of these easy ways to help baby birds without ever intervening directly in a baby bird's life, but still ensuring that it has a safe, suitable environment to grow up in.

### **1. Use Safe Birdhouses**

Many birds nest in birdhouses, and choosing safe birdhouse designs will keep baby birds away from threatening predators or harsh climates. Choose birdhouses with the proper dimensions for those birds commonly seen in your yard. Selecting a design with an extended portal will help protect hatchlings and nestlings from predators. For further protection from climbing predators, wrap metal flashing around the base of a tree or wooden post where the birdhouse is placed, or purchase a metal pole with a predator baffle. Position each birdhouse properly to be shielded from the worst sun and wind, and be sure they're clear from rain or storms.

### **2. Eliminate Insecticide Use**

Baby birds require tremendous amounts of protein for proper growth and adequate nutrition, and their parents provide it through frequent feedings of live insects. Avoid using insect sprays in your yard that would deprive them of this ready food source. Similarly, avoid any harsh chemicals on the lawn or bird feeders that might contaminate the adult birds.

### **3. Keep Bird Feeders Clean**

Parent birds need to keep up their strength when caring for hungry hatchlings and clean bird feeders will be a welcome, easy food source without risk of spreading diseases through mold, mildew or bacteria. Wash feeders and bird baths regularly with a weak disinfectant solution, and keep feeding areas clear of feces and spoiled seed.

### **4. Offer Good Food Sources**

When baby birds begin to venture out of the nest, their parents will lead them to easy food sources and healthy bird feeders are a convenient option. Offer the best possible food sources for fledglings, including sunflower seed, millet and other top birdseeds. Suet is another good food source that will provide fat and protein, as will small pieces of nuts. Avoid feeding bread to young birds, however, since it lacks the nutrition they require.

## **5. Choose Bird-Friendly Landscaping**

A bird-friendly yard has native plants that offer natural food sources as well as excellent shelter from potential predators. Choose locally native plants and create clusters of plantings in your yard that can be a safe haven for immature birds. At the same time, add a water source for critical drinking and bathing so all of a young bird's needs are met in your yard.

## **6. Keep Predators Away**

Young birds are not experienced at avoiding predators, and helpful backyard birders will take steps to protect birds from hazards. Predation by domestic cats is a leading cause of death or injury to birds. Keeping your cat inside and encouraging your neighbors to do the same can help ensure the success of bird nests in your yard. Children should also be taught to respect wildlife and to leave nesting birds and their young undisturbed.

## **7. Prevent Window Collisions**

Birds often collide with the windows in our homes which can cause death or injury. In the eyes of a bird, the reflection of open skies and trees in a window appears to be an extension of their environment. Other times, windows may appear dark and be seen as shelter by a bird in flight. Homeowners can prevent window collisions by covering the outside of windows with screening. Various screening materials are available at home improvement stores or from online sources.

## **8. Look before You Cut**

Nesting season coincides with the time of year when homeowners are actively working in their yards. Postpone trimming or removing trees and shrubs until mid September after nesting season. If this is not possible, always check for active nests in shrubs, vines, trees (including hollows and branches), before you trim or cut. Homeowners should also take care when making outside repairs or moving hanging baskets as many species choose to nest under the eaves or other sheltered areas of a house.

## **9. Help Babies if Necessary**

It is occasionally necessary to help a baby bird, particularly if it is too young to be out of the nest, if it is injured or if it is known to be an orphan. Contact the Alabama Wildlife Center's Help Line at (205) 663-7930, ext. 2 and a trained specialist will call you back within the hour (7 days a week from 8am-8pm) to help you determine if a bird truly needs you to intervene.

## **10. Support Wildlife Rehabbers**

The nonprofit Alabama Wildlife Center cared for over 1,000 injured, sick or orphaned baby birds in 2010. There are expenses for food, medicine, medical care and housing. While there is no charge for bringing a wild bird to the Alabama Wildlife Center for care, donations are always welcome. If you prefer not to make financial donations, you can purchase much needed supplies of bird food sources, cleaning supplies and other items – you'll find AWC's wish list online at [www.awrc.org](http://www.awrc.org). Volunteers are also welcome to help care for the birds or attend to different tasks at our rehabilitation facility.