

Mother birds do not abandon their young because they can smell humans on them, you can handle a baby bird and the parents will almost always come back and take care of it. Birds in general have a very poorly developed sense of smell. The parental bond is very strong, and the parents will continue to care for their young. Mother birds will abandon their young if you constantly disturb the nest or baby.

Wildlife's natural parents are always better at caring for them than human foster parents.



A wild animal's chance of survival is greatly increased when left in its natural environment. Over 75% of young birds that are rescued by people with good intentions, are in fact not orphans at all, are being well cared for, and don't actually need anyone's help. Most of the time, the best thing you can do for a baby bird is simply to leave it alone. If you spot a baby bird that appears to be all alone, watch it for a while, make sure it is unhurt and do not intervene unless you are sure it is orphaned.

All birds, as is all native wildlife, are protected under the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 2000*. It is illegal to trap, kill or harm them in any way.

Wildcare Inc is a non-profit organisation, which provides a support network for carers of sick, injured and orphaned wildlife. The primary objective is to rehabilitate and release these animals back into their natural habitat and to raise community awareness concerning the care and conservation of native animals.

For more information on Wildcare Inc or information provided in this fact sheet contact Wildcare at PO Box 464, Palmerston NT, go to www.wildcarent.org.au or phone 89886121

❖ Wildcare Inc cannot be held liable for any information provided in this fact sheet.

Sponsored by



ORPHANED BIRDS



Top End birds breed all year round in Darwin but the peak time is October to January. Fledgling and baby birds are often found on the ground, especially after storms and high winds or after taking their first flight. Only about 25% of babies are actual orphans.



Altricial and Precocial

Altricial young at hatching are completely helpless, usually naked, have their eyes closed and are totally dependent on the parents for food and care. They are hatched in nests in trees & shrubs, and are called nestlings. Altricial birds include doves, lorikeets, honeyeaters, pee wees & owls. Nestlings grow very quickly, become feathered and leave the nest in 2 to 4 weeks. When they leave the nest they are called fledglings. Most fledglings are still tended and fed by their parents (even on the ground) for a short time until they become completely independent.



Precocial birds are much more developed at hatching. They are covered with down feathers, have

their eyes open, are able to run or swim soon after hatching & can feed themselves at an early stage. They grow slower than altricial birds - which makes them look cute & helpless. Precocial chicks are usually hatched in nests on the ground and may remain with their parents until self-sufficient. Precocial birds include ducks,

plovers, curlews, waders. Orange footed scrub fowls chicks are fully independent from hatching. Many precocial chicks are mistakenly picked up by well meaning people thinking they are helpless & abandoned, which is not the case.

Hatchlings and Nestlings

Hatchlings have mostly exposed skin, and either no feathers, or a light downy coat, particularly on their heads, and may have small developing pin feathers on their wings and tail. They are unable to perch. Hatchlings fall from the nest because of damage by wind, or storms or removal by predators & humans. Re-nesting these babies is extremely difficult. They cannot survive very long without warmth and food from their parents.



Partially feathered young have still got some exposed skin, particularly on the belly. They may have a mix of down and pin feathers, but will also have a good covering of true feathers, particularly on their backs, wings, & tail. Either return to original nest (if safe), or make an artificial one using an old ice cream container with some drainage holes, hanging

planter or basket, lined with dry grass. Hang on a tree branch closest to where baby was found, 2-3m off the ground if possible and well away from the trunk, with overhead branches for protection from the sun. Keep all activity, children and pets away, or the parents will be too nervous to return to feed the baby. Observe from a distance for 2 hours. Once left alone, the parents should return and begin feeding the baby.

Fledglings

Are fully feathered all over, and have no exposed skin. They are able to perch, and will be experimenting with flight. If the baby bird is fully feathered and hopping around, it will usually be no more than 2 - 5 days away from flying. At this age, birds often jump or tumble out of the nest. The mother will continue to protect and feed it on the ground while it learns to use its wings. This is completely normal.

If the parents are still feeding or calling to it, DO NOTHING, or for protection perch the bird in a heavy shrub or low tree. You may want to make a small, secure twig pile that the baby can hop into for protection. ALL pets and children should be kept clear until the baby is flying. Observe from a distance for 2 hours. If the mother doesn't appear within this time, phone for advice.