Rescue Advice

If You Find A Baby Bird

Is the bird injured (bleeding, broken bones, puncture wounds, been in a cat's mouth, open wounds, etc.)?

- If YES, take the bird to your nearest wildlife veterinarian or call: Wildlife Care Alliance (hotline): 540-587-4007
- If NO, see below.

Is the bird fully feathered?

- If YES, any fully feathered baby bird found on the ground, seemingly unable to fly, is probably just fledging - a natural state of development in the bird's life. If it appears to be uninjured, leave the area, and do your best to keep pets and children away from the bird. The parent(s) will not feed the youngster while people are around
- If NO, attempt to find the nest. An uninjured bird found on the ground with few or no feathers needs to be returned to the nest. Look around in trees and bushes to see if you can locate the nest. Correct identification of the nestling or of the parents will help locate the nest (i.e., bluebirds are box or cavity nesters, morning doves build basket nests on horizontal branches or in a tree fork)

Can you find the nest?

- If YES, simply put the bird back. However, make sure the young are warm to the touch. If the baby is not, you can simply warm the bird in your hands before returning it to the nest. Returning a young cold bird to the nest will sometimes encourage the parent to push the baby out of the nest, as it is trying to remove a cold object away from other warm eggs and/or young. If the nest is unreachable, construct a substitute nest of a similar size and shape (small berry baskets, or margarine tubs with drain holes punched in the bottom, filled with grass make fine substitute nests) and securely attach it as close as possible to the original nest site. Contrary to popular belief, the parents will not be frightened off by your "scent" and will return to feed the baby if it calls for food. If you want to be sure the parent(s) will continue to feed the baby, watch the baby from a safe distance, preferably indoors. Do not be alarmed if you don't see the parent return. Typically wild animals will not return to the nest if you are visible and/or in the area.
- If NO, you can't find the nest, construct a substitute nest in the place where the nestling was found. Watch from indoors to see if a parent returns (be patient, it may not happen immediately). If a parent does not visit the nest for more than half a day, contact a licensed songbird rehabilitator for advice. Wildlife Care Alliance (hotline): 540-587-4007

Please give baby birds the best possible chance for survival and leave them in the wild where they belong! Never attempt to treat or raise a baby bird on your own. Despite your best efforts, most hand-raised birds will die.

The best baby bird rehabilitation is prevention. Educate your friends, family, neighbors and yourselves about the fledging process. It is normal for birds at fledging to be on the ground unable to fly! Birds need several days - up to four weeks, depending on their species - to learn how to fly and forage for food. One or more parent will feed them during this period. Know where nesting sites are located and keep cats and dogs indoors around the time you think the birds will fledge to avoid predation. Ask neighbors to take responsibility for their pets as well.

NOTE: Raising a wild bird in captivity is illegal unless you have both state and federal permits. For information on how you can become a licensed wildlife rehabilitator, contact the Wildlife Center of Virginia, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, or your state's wildlife agency.
**If You Find A Baby Deer**

White Tail Deer fawns are born April through July, with the majority of births in June. Most does will have one fawn each year, but occasionally twins or triplets are seen. From birth the fawns are left alone while their mothers go off to feed. The mothers will stay away from the fawns to avoid leading predators to their location. They will return at dusk and dawn to move and/or feed their young. If you find a deer fawn:

**Is the fawn injured (bleeding, broken bones, wounds, caught on a fence, etc.)?**

- **If YES**, contact your nearest [wildlife veterinarian](#) or call: Wildlife Care Alliance (hotline): 540-587-4007 for treatment.
- **If NO**, it is normal for fawns of any age to be left alone all day. Never expect to see the mother come back to the fawn while you are in the area. The mother will return to care for it if you leave it alone [If a fawn is found in a ditch next to a road, it can be moved a short distance to a safer location.] You can check back in 24-48 hours. The mother should have moved the fawn. Never chase a fawn to capture it.

**Exception:** if the mother is known to be dead (you have seen the fawn near the body and know it to be the mother), contact a [state licensed deer rehabilitator](#) in your area. Orphaned fawns will need to be cared for until they are old enough to be released in early fall.

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**If You Find A Baby Opossum**

Opossums breed two or three times each year, from February through September. The average litter contains six to nine babies. Opossums remain in the mother's pouch until they are two months old. Between two and four months of age, they may ride on their mother's back and are dependent on the mother for help in finding food and shelter. If you find a baby opossum:

**Is the animal injured (bleeding, broken bones, wounds, deformity, etc.)?**

- **If YES**, contact your nearest [wildlife veterinarian](#) or call: Wildlife Care Alliance (hotline): 540-587-4007
- **If NO**, opossums that are at least 8 inches long from tip of nose to the base of the tail (do not include the tail) and weigh more than 7.25 ounces or 200 grams are old enough to survive on their own in the wild and do not need human intervention.

If the opossum does not meet these size and weight criteria, contact a [state licensed wildlife rehabilitator](#) immediately. Opossum babies are often found crawling around next to their dead mother [often after the mother has been killed by a car] and will not survive at this age without human care.

**NOTE:** Each animal's nutritional, housing and handling requirements are very specific and must be met if they have any chance of survival. Raising a wild animal in captivity is illegal unless you have a state permit. For information on how you can become a [licensed wildlife rehabilitator](#), contact the [Wildlife Center of Virginia](#), the [Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries](#) or your state's wildlife agency.

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**If You Find A Baby Rabbit**

Cottontail rabbits nest from March through September and may have as many as four litters per year. The average litter contains four to five babies. Young rabbits disperse from the nest at 15-20 days old. By three weeks of age, they are on their own in the wild and no longer require a mother's care. If you find a baby rabbit:

**Is the rabbit injured (bleeding, broken bones, puncture wounds, been in a cat's mouth, open wounds, etc.)?**
If YES, take the rabbit to your nearest wildlife veterinarian or call: Wildlife Care Alliance (hotline): 540-587-4007

If NO, see below.

**Is the rabbit fully furred with its eyes opened?**

- If YES, if the rabbit is larger than a baseball and weighs more than 4 ounces or 100 grams, it is on its own and does not need human intervention.
- If NO, attempt to locate the nest (a shallow depression on the ground possibly lined with rabbit fur and/or grass; cottontail rabbits do not burrow) and put the rabbit back. Nests that must be moved (due to construction) may be relocated up to 20 feet away from the original site (scoop up and rebuild the nest with the mother's fur and place the babies inside). Check back briefly once a day for two days. If the rabbits appear to be plump and healthy, leave them alone. Mother rabbits feed at dusk and dawn. You are not likely to ever see the mother. If the rabbits appear thin and weak, have wrinkled, baggy skin, contact a state licensed small mammal rehabilitator in your area immediately. Rabbits may be temporarily moved for mowing if they are returned to the nest before dusk. Do not attempt to mow within 10 feet of a rabbit's nest if there are babies present. If you suspect the nest is abandoned, you can sprinkle the area with flour or cross two twigs over the nest and check back in 24 hours. If there is no sign of activity at the nest, you will then need to get the bunnies to a licensed rehabilitator.

**If You Find A Baby Squirrel**

Gray squirrels nest twice each year, in early spring and in late summer. Gray squirrels commonly have litters of three or four. Babies' eyes open at four weeks of age and the young are often out of the nest by six weeks. At eight to nine weeks of age they are on their own in the wild and no longer nurse from the mother.

If you find a baby squirrel:

**Is the squirrel injured (bleeding, broken bones, wounds, been in a cat's mouth, etc.)?**

- If YES, take the squirrel to the nearest wildlife veterinarian or call: Wildlife Care Alliance (hotline): 540-587-4007 (for juvenile squirrels, wear thick leather gloves when handling. Even young squirrels can have a vicious bite!)
- If NO, squirrels whose tails are fully fluffed out like a bottle brush and weigh more than 6.5 ounces or 180 grams are on their own in the wild and do not need human intervention. If the squirrel does not meet these criteria, see below.

**Is the squirrel fully furred with its eyes opened?**

- If YES, and the squirrel weighs between 75 and 150 grams (2.6-5.3 ounces), his tail is flat or not quite full, and may seem "friendly", the squirrel still needs nursing and care from its mother. Mother squirrels may "rescue" stray babies by carrying them by the scruff back to the nest. For very small squirrels, attempt to locate the nest (big ball of dried leaves at the top of a tree) and try to get the baby to climb up the trunk. Alternatively, place the baby in an open box [without a lid] at the base of the tree. Check back several hours later to see if the baby is still there. If the baby has not been fed or attended to for an entire day, contact a state licensed small mammal rehabilitator immediately. If the squirrel is old enough to run from you, it is old enough to be on its own and does not need human intervention.
- If NO, and the baby is not retrieved by the mother for an entire day, contact a state licensed small mammal rehabilitator immediately. Keep predators (cats and dogs) away from the area if the baby is on the ground.

**NOTE:** Each animal's nutritional, housing and handling requirements are very specific and must be met if they have any chance of survival. Raising a wild animal in captivity is therefore illegal unless you have a state permit. For information on how you can become a licensed wildlife rehabilitator, contact the Wildlife Center of Virginia, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries [PDF] or your state's wildlife agency.