



WildTimes

Summer 2022

Dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation and release of Southern California's sick, injured and orphaned wildlife

Don't be a Birdglar!

By Denys Hemen

Each spring CWC gets hundreds of calls from the public regarding baby birds that have fallen from the nest. This can be a very stressful moment for everyone. Seeing a baby bird appearing "helpless" on the ground can induce panic. Being on the phone with the person who sees this baby bird on the ground can be even more panic inducing! So, stay calm and follow these guidelines if you encounter young birds on the ground.

Baby birds seem very delicate, vulnerable, and begging for your help, but not all of them need our attention. Some are fledglings and don't need any assistance at all. These birds can perch, have most of their feathers, and some can even fly a little bit. It's natural for most songbirds in our area to leave the nest before they can fly. Having 4 or 5 large baby birds in one nest is a sitting target for a predator. So, they disperse before they can even fly sometimes. This is a way of hedging their bets against a predator taking out an entire generation. If there are no injuries, it is best to leave these birds alone and let the parents continue doing their job. Keep pets and children away. And never, ever, ever leave your cat outside. Of course, if there are injuries to the bird, give us a call.



House Finches found with nests intact are prime candidates for re-nesting
Photo by Cambria Wells

Sometimes baby birds can use a hand. This is the case when the bird is a nestling or a hatchling. These birds are generally helpless. They are not very mobile, do not have their adult feathers yet, and are unable to perch. If the entire nest has fallen and you see the nesting material next to the baby birds, you can put the birds and the nest up someplace high in a tree closest to where you found them. The nest will likely need some extra support like a shallow Tupperware with lots of holes for drainage or a plastic berry clamshell. Be sure that whatever you use is about the same size as the nest. Form the nesting materials into a bowl shape inside your container. Now attach it to a sheltered limb by using some twist ties, wire, zip ties, or twine. Avoid using tape because the adult birds and the babies can get stuck to any exposed adhesive. Once the artificial nest is firmly attached to a nice shaded, unexposed limb you can carefully place the baby birds back in. Keep an eye out for signs of the parents returning to the nest but stay back as far as possible. Give it a couple of hours. If they do not come back, call CWC!



These fledgling Northern Mockingbirds would not need assistance if found uninjured
Photo by Cambria Wells

If you find one or two babies on the ground, but no nesting material, it is not advisable to try to create an artificial nest. For these animals, the original nest may still be in place. The parent is unable to sit on both the original and the artificial nest, leaving the babies out in the cold. Look carefully above you because the original nest can be very small and hidden in the tree. If you are able to locate it, the babies can be picked up and placed back in the nest. Be sure to check for any obvious injuries before doing this. Keep an eye on the area from afar for parental activity. If you see no activity for 2 hours or if the fallen babies have obvious injuries, call CWC.

Following all these steps can help more babies stay with their mothers in nature and avoid an unnecessary trip to a Wildlife Rehabilitation Center. Thank you for reading and please do not be a bird glar.

Inside: Flocks of Finches, Seal-ebration,
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Flocks of Finches

By Dr. Guthrum Purdin, DVM

If you have a birdfeeder in California or have an eye for birds flittering by the side of the trail, you've seen House Finches. They're small, lively, streaky grey birds; only about 21gm (0.74oz) on average. The males' heads, chests, and shoulders are boldly colored red or reddish orange, looking like they've been dipping a little too deeply into somebody's red wine! Last year, CWC received just over 300 of these little birds that had been rescued by the public, many of them babies still dependent on their parents (or we humans as substitutes) for care.



Photo by Dr. Guthrum Purdin, DVM

Considering this species ranges so widely, from southern Canada, through the United States, and all the way to Central America, living in often harsh environmental conditions, you'd think they would be easy to raise — but you would be mistaken! Baby House Finches (or HOFIs) require very specific food and handling.

Most baby songbirds, regardless of what they eat as adults, are fed an insect diet by their parents. This is done because insects are high in protein — just the thing babies of any species need to grow. Adult HOFIs on the other hand, feed their chicks mostly seeds (including poison oak) and just 2% of the diet is insects. To match these nutritional needs, we mix together the formula diets of two different kinds of birds—those that eat only seeds and those that eat mostly animal protein. It took a lot of experimentation but this mixture provides exactly what HOFI hatchlings, nestlings, and fledglings need.

But that's not all! Chicks energetically beg food from their parents from sunrise to sunset. Their one job is to eat and grow, and they take that very seriously! As long as it's light in the room, someone must be ready to feed them. That's every 30 minutes for hatchlings and every 45 minutes for nestlings and older. When you've got racks and racks full of hungry mouths cheeping and waving their yellow beaks & red mouths around, it's exhausting to keep up. Fortunately, once the lights are out they go right to sleep. As long as they get a good meal before it's dark, their metabolisms will slow, processing the formula through the night. When morning comes, it's right back to work for everyone. House Finch parents work hard, and so do our staff and volunteers!



Photo by Dr. Guthrum Purdin, DVM

Relying on their parents to decide how much food they should eat, young HOFIs don't know when they're full and it's time to stop begging. So, they beg and gape, gape and beg until their crops can become overfull and stretched out. A 'crop' is an out-pocketing of the esophagus at the base of the neck, used to store food between meals in some species. Birds that feed on sporadic food sources in the environment use crops to fill-up between foraging opportunities. But the chicks don't know when enough is enough, so their crops can become stretched out with food and sit there becoming a petri dish for bacteria, yeast, and protozoal parasites. To deal with this we closely control how much they get at each feeding, checking crops before feeding a nest of hungry mouths. If a bird has slow crop clearance or looks "out of sorts" we take a sample of crop fluid, check it under a microscope, and assign the appropriate medication for whatever organisms may be freeloading in their crops.

So, 'Don't Feed Too Much' is a major rule with HOFIs. Feeding too little is a different problem. If not enough food is given while they are growing, they can become weak and develop poor feathering that may never improve, leaving them flightless or unable to survive the chill of winter.

Hatchlings have no feathers except a few wisps on their heads and are kept warm by their parents until they grow feathers. Consequently, housing is a warm incubator unit for the youngest HOFIs. Once feathered, nestlings are okay for room temperature housing. A fledgling will hop out of the nest, but still can't quite fly. They want to be away from the nest as soon as they can because nests are at higher risk of predator attacks.

Unfortunately, kindhearted people sometimes find these flightless youngsters and think the parents have abandoned them. If you see a cheeping, feathered little grey bird like this, watch it from a distance. Chances are the parent is just out of sight waiting to feed the little one.

At this stage we offer them a tempting selection of chopped greens and seed. Their beaks are still soft, and they aren't experienced in how to shell seeds, so the greens, like broccoli florets, are the first thing they'll eat. An adult may shell and swallow a seed in less than a second, while a fledgling may carry a seed around for 20 minutes, practicing handling (beaking?) techniques. In the wild, once fledglings start to fly, they follow their father closely for a few weeks learning what to eat. In human care, as they make the transition to independence, teenage HOFIs have to learn to feed themselves and we are there to support them while they finish growing up.

Only a few short weeks after hatching, they're self-feeding and ready for the aviary. We raise groups together and after they've had some time to exercise and stretch their wings, the whole group will be returned to the wild together — a brand new flock like a busload of teenagers heading off to college.

Dr. Guthrum Purdin, DVM, co-authored the chapters covering House Finches and Blackbirds in the text *Hand-Rearing Birds, 2nd Edition*, which is an indispensable resource for rehabilitators and other animal care professionals. He also co-edited *Topics in Wildlife Medicine Vol. 4: Orthopedics*, in which he co-wrote chapters covering fracture repair in songbirds, doves, and hummingbirds.



CWC spends hundreds of thousands of dollars every year on the care and rehabilitation of sick and orphaned Northern Elephant Seal pups. With diminishing fish sources in the ocean, these young animals struggle to find enough food to thrive. Join us in celebrating seals and consider making a tax-deductible donation to help support these amazing patients in need! Visit our website at cawildlife.org or use the included envelope.

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From Volunteer, to Intern, to Staff

By Delores Chan

My journey with CWC began back in 2019, when I became a volunteer in the Orphan Care Unit. At this time, I was months away from graduating with my bachelor's degree didn't have much of an idea of what to do next. During my time volunteering, I had the opportunity to work with other interns who all really enjoyed their internship, which made me think about applying for the position. I applied and was accepted.



Photo by Cambria Wells

During my internship in OCU, I not only learned more about animal care and rehabilitation, but I also learned how to better my communication and time management skills. I was sad to see my internship come to an end, but I had achieved my goal of leaving with a better sense of what I wanted to do in terms of my career.

Post-internship, I decided to apply to graduate school for a master's degree in environmental science. In December of 2021, CWC was hiring for seasonal wildlife technicians, and I knew I had to apply.



Photo by Kristilee Kodis

Come March of 2022, I am one of three seasonal wildlife technicians. Every experience and opportunity so far has been so educational and fulfilling. This position has not been without its learning curves but having been a volunteer and intern has certainly primed me for what is expected of myself as a seasonal wildlife technician. The rest of the full-time staff have all been so patient and encouraging as we continue to learn and grow in our positions. I am so excited and ready to take on this season with my fellow staff members, volunteers, and interns!