

So You've Found a Baby Bird...Now What?

Most likely, the bird you think may have fallen from the nest, or has been separated from his parents, has indeed reached his “teenage” years. Though these nestlings look fragile and helpless due to the fact that their full primary feathers have not yet replaced the soft, downy feathers that they are covered with; this is a normal course of progression for the native birds in and around College Park.



These fledglings jump or leap from the nest to the ground to begin their “grounded” phase. Never fear, mom and dad are never too far away! The purpose of this grounding is to give the young ones a chance to learn to “be a bird.” Though the parents will continue to feed their young until they are flighted, the young birds will tend to be seen hopping around our yards and parks in search of food and shelter on their own.

During this phase, the young bird may appear injured or helpless as he attempts to gain flight with his primary feathers continuing to develop and the fledgling appearance is replaced with that of an adult bird. Feeble attempts of flight may resemble that of a bird in distress as multiple attempts will result in multiple fumbles to the ground. If you should notice a fledgling in your yard, you may want to take special care to avoid the area that he has been seen in. Parents of the young one may be overly protective and may screech and possibly even dive after potential threats.

Natural predators such as free-roaming cats, raptors, and even raccoons may try to take advantage of the young bird in their learning period, but with parents close by singing a threatening song, many predators remain at bay. Dogs may find these fledglings especially fun to play with, but they should be leashed if possible while the young bird is noted in the yard to avoid unnecessary injury to both the baby bird and the dog. Some dogs have a natural instinct to hunt birds, and others may just find the antics of the fledgling amusing and wish to play with it. Unfortunately, the playfulness of a 50-pound Labrador is no match for a young bird weighing just ounces. A protective mother of any species is also a formidable opponent.

It is natural to seek assistance for the wildlife we deem are in trouble, but as long as the young birds you find are standing or sitting up, eyes wide and alert, or even hopping around with their attempts at flying, these babies are well on their way to becoming grown-ups and will be building their own nests in the coming months!

