

Wildlife Rehabilitators of North Carolina

Reuniting Nestlings

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It is frequently possible to return an “orphaned” hatchling or nestling to the parents. Unless the parents are known to be dead, an attempt should be made to renest, uninjured and healthy baby birds that have fallen out of the nest. The location of the correct nest should be positively identified.

There are many reasons why you or a rescuer should reunite baby birds with the parents. Most Mom & Dad birds know much more about raising baby birds than we do. Renesting can prevent overcrowded nurseries during “baby season.” Many people do not realize that they are “kidnapping” baby birds. It is an opportunity to educate the public and involve the finder in a positive experience. Endangered or species of concern should be put back if at all possible.

Only babies that are warm and active should be renested. It is often possible to remove the baby from the nesting site, warm it and then return the bird to the nest. Do not renest orphans that are infested with parasites.

When determining whether to reunite nestlings with parents, know the circumstances involved. Did the baby fledge? Is the baby healthy? Are the parents near by? How long has the baby been separated from the parents. Is it vocalizing? Is it capable of flight? Is the nest location and condition appropriate and accessible? Is the finder cooperative and supportive? Will the finder monitor the nest?

Never have the rescuer/caller leave a nestling alone unless it is known that the parents can brood it. Do not put a nestling in a container separate from the main nest. The parents cannot keep both nests warm. The rescuer should watch the nest from a distance. If the parents have not returned in two hours or by dusk, have them retrieve the babies, put them in a box in a warm, quiet, dark place and bring them to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator.

If the nest has been destroyed, a substitute nest can be made. Use some of the original materials if possible. The nest must have adequate drainage so it does not fill with water. It may be possible to use a craft store bird’s nest, a hanging basket with drainage holes or a straw basket. Line it with debris from the original nest or clean straw. Do not use grass or paper; they can become mildewed. If the nest can’t be replaced in the original spot, select a place as close as possible. Use wire, string, or bunji cords to attach & secure the new nest if necessary. Be sure that there are no loops or sharp ends that could injure or tangle the bird. Be sure there is some protection from direct sun, wind, and rain, and that it is out of reach of cats and children.



returning chimney swifts to nest

After the nest has been replaced it should be carefully monitored for at least two hours for the return of the parents. If the parents do not return to feed and brood, the babies will need to be taken to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator. It is frequently possible to reunite the baby with the parents after a day or two.

Some adult song birds, such as purple martins and chimney swifts, will accept another member of the same age. Some communities have volunteer monitors who may assist with replacing nestlings. The most common include: Bluebirds, Purple Martins, Chimney swifts, Colonial nesting Waterbirds, terns, and endangered species.

Not all renestings are successful. Sometime the parents do not return. Be prepared to take babies to the rehabilitation center. Don't be discouraged, not all attempts are successful.

Work with the finder. The best finder wants the best for the baby bird. Follow up with the finder. Are the parents caring for the baby? Or, let the finder know how it is doing at the rehabilitation center. Treat the finder with respect. Hesitant finders want the best for the baby but often need reassuring. The Know-it-all finder knows all there is to know about wildlife rehabilitation and knows that you know nothing! Leave this finder with options and follow up, if needed. Thank all finders for their concern and cooperation.



great-horned owl replaced in artificial nest



*replacing bald eagle in original nest with parents
in background flying in to be reunited*



baby red-tailed hawks replaced in artificial nest in the first week in June



barn owlets in artificial nest near original nest in a farmer's combine