

Hummingbirds

Wildlife rehabilitators/Centers are issued special permits by the State and Federal governments to care for native wildlife. It is illegal to have native birds and mammals in your possession without the proper permits. Many hours of training go into caring for wildlife. These birds require specialized treatment, care and diets to help ensure a successful release back into the wild.

Hummingbirds are the smallest bird species found in the world. They can hover, fly backwards and at times upside-down! Their wings beat up to seventy-eight times per second. They feed from flowers that contain nectar to support their aerial acrobatics and rapid metabolism. In addition, they eat insects to fulfill their need for protein. Hummingbirds must eat often and may die quickly if no food source is available. If you have found a hummingbird, please call Project Wildlife (or another wildlife rehabilitation center in your area) at once. See the resource section.

COMMON INJURIES/ ILLNESSES FOUND IN HUMMINGBIRDS

Window Strikes

Across North America, an estimated 100 million to one billion birds die each year after colliding with human-built structures. The reflective and transparent characteristics of glass make windows invisible killers. Birds see a tree reflected in a window or a plant behind it, not the glass. A large percentage of injured hummingbirds seen by Project Wildlife are a result from window strikes. If you witness a hummingbird collide with a window, or find a downed hummingbird close to a window, here's how you can help:

- If the bird is not gasping for breath, carefully pick up the bird and place it in a safe place (out of the sun, away from cats & dogs, & elevated above the ground to protect them from predators) to recover.
- If the bird is gasping for breath or you notice bleeding, bring the bird indoors and contact a wildlife rehabilitator/center for assistance.
- If the bird has not flown away within 15-20 minutes, it will need to be fed. See adult feeding instructions.
- If after feeding (at least twice) and the bird has not recovered within an hour, bring the bird inside and contact a wildlife rehabilitator/center for assistance. Contain the bird in a small shoebox or small container with a lid. Line with tissue or toilet paper. (Poke holes for air) Most likely the bird has sustained a significant head trauma, wing fracture or other injuries that require treatment.
- If the bird has recovered, there are no notable injuries, has been fed if needed and is flying well (normal hummingbird flight, fast and furious), the bird can be released. Do not release hummingbirds at night.

For more information on Window Strikes, and suggestions for preventing them, visit www.flap.org

Cat Caught Hummingbirds

It's estimated that cats kill hundreds of millions of birds each year in this country. Due to the flying

agility of a hummingbird, one would think they would not be easy targets for cats, but this is not the case. Project Wildlife receives hundreds of hummingbirds every year that are “cat caught”. Many times the hummingbird has actually struck a window initially and then been discovered on the ground by a cat. It is not unusual for the cat to bring the injured hummingbird into the house to the owner’s dismay. The bite of a cat can be VERY infective and deadly to all birds. More often than not, hummingbirds need to be treated with medication to counteract the deadly saliva which can contain up to 60 different types of bacteria. If you receive a cat caught hummingbird, here are some things you can do to help:

- GENTLY extract the hummingbird from the cat’s mouth if needed.
- Carefully check to see if there are any visible injuries, signs of blood, or labored breathing. Place the bird in a small shoebox or container with lid (poke holes for air).
- Attempt to feed bird, see adult feeding instructions.
- Contact a wildlife rehabilitator/center for assistance.
- For information regarding protecting birds from being cat caught visit: www.abcbirds.org

Sick Hummingbirds

Hummingbirds can suffer from illnesses in the wild. Common ailments include fungal infections and the avian pox virus. Fungal infections can result in black bulbous growths on the bill. The bill looks thickened and many times the tongue will be thick and white, instead of its normal transparent appearance. Avian pox presents with cauliflower like looking growths at the base of the bill, around the eyes, under the wings and on the legs and feet. Normally, a hummingbird that is ill can be identified by its appearance. During the day, healthy hummingbirds should be alert and actively preening, vocalizing, flying and defending territories. Hummingbirds that are seen constantly perching on a feeder, have body feathers that are puffed out like a cotton ball (during the day), eyes closed or have tongues extending out of their bills are most likely unhealthy birds. Hummingbirds showing any of these signs will most likely need treatment by a wildlife rehabilitator/center as soon as possible. The most important thing one can do for these birds is to provide heat and food. See Adult care instructions. To help avoid illnesses/ injuries in hummingbirds:

- Maintain a clean hummingbird feeder at all times.
- Provide fresh sugar water solution on a regular basis.
- Use granulated sugar, no honey, artificial sweeteners or red food coloring.
(4 parts water to 1 part sugar)
- If using an ant trap with feeder, fill only with water.
- Avoid the use of petroleum jelly, cooking oil or tangle foot type products on feeders to deter insects.
- Do not use pesticides in your garden.

Trapped Hummingbirds

Hummingbirds often become trapped in homes, offices, and garages. This situation can be very frustrating. One may have all doors and windows open to enable the bird to escape, but the bird seems to concentrate at the ceiling or windows located high above. This is the bird’s natural inclination and it will need to be coaxed into coming down.

Try the following:

- The objective is to tire the bird out by keeping it flying as much as possible. This can be done by using brooms, pool scoops or anything that has a long handle and waving it in the air.
- Once the bird becomes fatigued, one should be able to gently retrieve the bird.

- It is crucial that these birds be fed before released. If not fed, they may not have the energy to get to a food source.

See adult feeding instructions. Do not release hummingbirds at night.

For more information regarding trapped hummingbirds visit: www.hummingbirds.net

Injured or orphaned hummingbirds require a very specialized diet. Feeding them only sugar water or “nectar” is like feeding children soda pop – it contains no nutritional value whatsoever! Babies fed sugar water or “nectar” may develop deformities or die.

Important: Do NOT feed injured or orphaned hummingbirds sugar water or “nectar” longer than 72 hours.

CARE

Adults - have a bill longer than three-quarters of an inch and may have some bright color on the head or neck. They have visible/long tail feathers (unless caught by a cat). If the birds eyes are closed and/or the feathers are puffed and the bird looks like a “cottonball”, you will need to warm the bird before feeding.

- Hold the bird in the palm of your hand with your thumb covering the tail and wings so the bird can't fly.
- Hold the bird about one inch away from a light bulb (a goose neck lamp works well) until eyes open and feathers are sleek on the body (usually about 3-5 minutes).
- If the bird starts to open its' mouth to breathe, it is too hot. Be careful, do not OVERHEAT.

HOW TO FEED:

Prepare a sugar water solution by mixing 1 teaspoon of sugar (no honey or artificial sweeteners) with 4 teaspoons of water. With an eyedropper or syringe gently guide the bird's bill into the tip of the dropper or syringe. Do not squeeze the dropper you may drown the bird. If the bird is eating his tongue can be seen moving and bubbles will be seen in the liquid. If the bird gasps, or bubbles are seen at the side of the mouth, STOP, let the bird calm down and try again.

Offer sugar water every thirty minutes until help can be reached.

Birds have a poor sense of smell and will not abandon their young if they have been touched by people.

Hatching Hummingbirds - (0-9 days)

Newborn hummingbirdBaby hummingbirds are born the size of a plump raisin. They have no downy feathers. They have yellow straw-like strands down the middle of their back. If they are very young their short bill is yellow progressing to black as they get older. Their eyes are closed and their bodies are black/gray. At this age, they cannot regulate their body temperature. The female hummingbird sits on (broods) the babies to maintain their body temperature and keep them warm.

IF YOU FIND A HATCHLING HUMMINGBIRD, DO NOT ATTEMPT TO FEED IT! GET HELP IMMEDIATELY.

- Try to keep the baby in the nest if possible.
- If not, line a plastic margarine cup with tissue and keep the baby warm (this is essential) by placing it under a gooseneck lamp about 5 inches away from the bulb.
- Do not overheat the bird. If it starts open-mouth breathing or its neck is outstretched, it is too hot. Overheating can kill the bird.
- Keep the baby warmed to an outside temperature—between 85—90 degrees.

Nestling Hummingbirds (10-15 days)

NestlingsBaby hummingbirds begin developing “pin” feathers (they look like porcupine quills) at approximately 10 days of age. Normally one sees two tiny beaks sticking up above the nest. Mom will stop sitting on (brooding) her babies at this age. She no longer broods them at night as well. The babies can now maintain their own body temperature. Many people think that the mother has abandoned her babies when she no longer sits on them. This is usually not the case. If you have doubts about abandonment, PLEASE WATCH THE NEST CONTINUOUSLY FOR ONE-HOUR FOR THE RETURN OF THE MOTHER. She will fly in to feed them, which takes only 3-5 seconds, 4-6 times an hour. In our experience, mother hummingbirds normally do not abandon their young unless something has happened to the female.

Baby hummingbirds use silence in the nest as a defense against predators. If the babies are vocalizing by constantly “peeping” for more than 10 -15 minutes they are in trouble (starving) and need help immediately. Silent babies are usually healthy babies!

- If they have fallen out of the nest, gently pick them up, check to be sure there are no injuries and carefully place them back in the nest. Once again watch for mom’s return. (Always check the nest first for ants or other insects that may be attacking the babies). If there is a problem with insects, an artificial nest can be constructed.
- After placing them back in the nest, it’s important to watch and see that the female continues to feed her young
- If, after monitoring the nest site, it has been determined that the babies are actually abandoned and have to be rescued and readily open their mouth, CAREFULLY drop three drops of sugar water (see adult recipe) into their mouth. Sugar water accidentally dripped onto feathers must be completely wiped off immediately.
- If the babies do not open their mouths, gently guide the birds’ beak into the tip of an eyedropper or syringe full of sugar water for feeding. (See adult feeding instructions)
- Offer sugar water every 30 minutes until help can be obtained.
- Do not feed sugar water or “nectar” longer than 72 hours.

Pre-Fledglings (16-21 days)

Juvenile HummingbirdsPre-fledgling hummingbirds are fully feathered, have very short, stubby tail feathers and a bill less than 1/2 inch long. They are most often found on the ground. Once again, if you know where the nest is, please put them back and watch for mom’s return.

- After placing them back in the nest, it’s important to watch and see that the female continues to feed her young.
- If they need to be rescued and open their mouth readily, CAREFULLY drop 5 drops of sugar water into their mouth. Sugar water accidentally dripped onto feathers must be completely wiped off immediately.

- If the babies do not open their mouths, gently guide the birds beak into the tip of an eyedropper or syringe full of sugar water for feeding. (See adult feeding instructions)
- Feed every 30 minutes until help can be obtained.
- Do not feed sugar water or “nectar” longer than 72 hours.

Whenever you handle a hummingbird, always wash your hands, before and after working with the bird.

CONSTRUCTING AN ARTIFICIAL NEST

Many times the original nest site cannot be located, or it may be too high to access. In addition, the entire nest/nestlings may have been displaced from the site by tree trimming or inclement weather. If the mother hummingbird is seen and/or is continuing to care for the babies on the ground, an artificial nest can be constructed. Here are the recommended steps and materials:

- Small margarine container (poke holes in the bottom to allow for drainage), small tupperware container (again poke holes) or grocery strawberry/tomato basket.
- Tissue or Toilet paper.
- Line the container with tissue or toilet paper up to an inch from the top of the container. The female may not feed her young if they are placed in the bottom of the new nest. In the wild, she will perch on the nest while feeding or even hover if necessary, therefore, the babies need to be easily accessible to the mother.
- Place the “nest” in the closest tree/shrub that the baby was found near. The artificial “nest” must be placed in an area that was close to the original nest site or in close proximity to the location of the female hummingbird. Moving a “nest” from your front yard to your back yard (or vice versa) will most likely be unsuccessful.
- Place the “nest” in a shady area and protected as much as possible from foul weather. If rain occurs and the “nest” becomes wet, the tissue will need to be changed. Soggy tissue will result in wet, cold baby hummingbirds.
- Place the “nest” away from any dogs or cats (keep cats indoors if possible).
- Place the “nest” high up off the ground to avoid predators.
- “Nests” can be nailed to trees, hung by ribbon on a branch, (use ribbon, not string so the female does not become entangled while feeding the young), zip tied or even taped (Duct tape) to a new site.
- The “nest” has to be upright, steady and secure so the female feels comfortable tending to her babies.

If you have the babies AND the nest in your possession you can do the following:

- The nest and young can be relocated if the babies are not cold or injured.
- Cut out a portion of an egg carton that would contain one egg. If possible, carefully poke holes in the bottom to allow for drainage. Place the nest securely in the egg holder. Normally a hummingbird nest fits perfectly in this space.
- Be careful that the space is not too tight, babies need room to grow.
- Place the nest back at the original nest site or as close as possible to the original nest site.
- Use zip ties or Duct tape to secure the nest. The “nest” has to be upright, steady and secure so the female feels comfortable. In the wild, she will perch on the nest while feeding or even hover if necessary, therefore, the babies need to be easily accessible to the mother.

It is of utmost importance when utilizing an artificial nest or new nest site that one monitors the babies until the mother has located the nestlings and you witness her feeding them. If she has not responded to the babies or new nest location within an hour, follow the previous rescue instructions and seek help

from a wildlife rehabilitation center.

RESOURCES:

To find a wildlife rehabilitator/center near you visit:

Wildlife International	www.wildlife-international.org
International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council	www.iwrc-online.org
National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association	www.nwrawildlife.org
Wildlife Information Directory	www.tc.umn.edu/~devo0028/contact.htm
Government Agencies:	Contact your State Fish and Game or Natural Resources Dept.
United States Fish and Wildlife Service	www.fws.gov

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<http://www.projectwildlife.org/find-hummingbirds.htm>