

Basic Suggestions for Finders of the Injured

Because the injured can vary from finches to falcons, the following ideas are fairly general and may need adjustment according to the situation. These are the first steps preparatory to getting the bird to a specialist

- Have a cardboard box or carton ready with some cloth on the bottom. Cardboard cat-carriers from Humane Societies and vet clinics suit most needs. Sacks are poor because they get dust in the eyes. If judged too difficult to handle, I have used a broom or branch to gently shoo the bird into a clean empty garbage-can placed on the ground. Why not? A garbage can has lots of air, provides full darkness and has nothing on which the bird can damage itself. For a long gangly bird such as a heron, use an old sheet. See Herons, below.
- It is better to avoid dog/cat carry-kennels because they are hard material, they have apertures that allow in light and through which long wing or tail-feathers can poke out and get damaged, and they are difficult to remove the bird later, especially a raptor. **NEVER** use a canary-type or wire animal cage for any wild bird; it is terribly stressful to be in full view of the enemy and they soon damage their beaks, feet and plumage on wire while bashing to get out to safety.
- Take quick note of features: colour of plumage, colour of eyes (the iris, not the pupil) colour of legs and feet, etc., to describe to specialist you call. Identification of species may be important.
- If bird is in a tree, it may be best to make it go to ground first, especially if it is a raptor (bird of prey such as a hawk or owl). They have the advantage over you up there.
- Slowly drop towel over head: (bird's head, that is, unless finder is in despair) bird then can't see, slows down or stays still and can be picked up in the towel if necessary. Bird should be facing away from handler when being picked up—beak and claws are then facing away too.
- Gloves are not needed to keep human scent from plumage, as birds have very little sense of smell. The “parents won't accept their baby back because of the smell of human hands” is a foolish myth. Babies should be left with their parents anyway.
- For handling raptors, gloves may give a sense of confidence, but they are not very useful because they make the grip clumsy, and they are made of animal skin, which is what talons are designed to penetrate. Raptors are not *aggressive*, that is, they are not trying to hurt you; but they are *defensive*, and in their struggles may accidentally hook a hand that is too close. Badly injured and starved birds, however, offer very little argument.
- Do not try to pick up a raptor if it is lying on its back with its talons at the ready: it has to be turned over onto its belly first, which may take a few tries. It is their talons, not their beaks, that need respect. For a large bird whose talons might be dangerous, put hands on back of bird, press down a bit to engage the claws with the earth, slide fingers down sides and lift, about the way you might pick up a cat, and lower into the nearby box. Keep hands away from talon area.
- About biting: most birds don't, but for those that do such as gulls and some falcons, gloves protect the hands, but not the wrists or forearms. To prevent being bitten, keep hands away from face; if a hand has to go in that area, move it slowly, as hunters instinctively snap at fast-moving things. When holding a bird, keep a finger under the chin, or a hand high on the neck of a long-necked bird. Most bites only rate an “*@ Ouch!” and the only one I fear is a healthy-feeling adult cormorant, an excellent fish-hunter with a very fast strike with a hooked beak that rips. I don't accept

them any more. I remember one that came from a clinic where a vet had had a nasty bite before he even got it out of a wire animal cage (another reason not to use those awful things). He sent it to me. As I looked down into the battered cage, the cormorant shot his long neck up through a gap and raked a piece out of my cheek. And I still have a 25mm scar on my forearm from the next cormorant I received. The fault is mine, not theirs, because I have seldom had cormorants and have very little understanding of them. Having most of my fish-hunter experience with Great Blue Herons who very rarely strike people—at least nobody at ACRF has ever been struck, after admitting 355 of them. So unless you are familiar with handling cormorants, be careful!

- If all these suggestions sound like too much, use the garbage-can trick instead.
- Birds cannot have rabies; their blood temperatures are too high. In our experience (handling 7,300 birds and doing 2858 post-mortems so far) diseases we need to be concerned about are extremely rare. West Nile virus is from mosquitoes, not from birds.
- Do not try to give it water by eyedropper etc. The bird may inhale it instead. Avian fluid needs are designed quite differently from mammalian ones; avian blood-pressure does not fall when they lose blood. ***Fluid replacement is not first priority as it is in mammals. Stress reduction is the first priority.*** Besides the fact they are as frightened as if they have been captured by a terrorist, if they have an internal haemorrhage—very common—resting in safe, quiet darkness gives the damaged area a chance to form a clot.
- Unless you know the identity of the species and are sure it is starved, do not try to feed it. Birdseed is useless to owls; canned tuna is useless to fish-hunters who need to recognize a whole fish; bread is no use to any bird. Fresh accident victims are usually already well-fed and at that stage most are too terrified to think of eating anyway. If you had just been in an auto accident, bloodied, hurting and shaken, would you feel like eating?
- Make absolutely **no** attempt at bandaging, splinting or applying greasy antiseptics.
- Do not wrap the bird up or try to keep it warm; they overheat easily and can die of it, especially in very humid weather. We have had several DOAs from **hyper**thermia—steamed loons and owls, mostly. Birds have no sweat glands and a higher body temperature than mammals. Whatever the weather, they are dressed for it.
- Lower bird into cardboard box with cloth on bottom, and close flaps. Cartons are excellent containers: they are soft material and the full darkness provides rest and safety. ***Rest is THE vital treatment*** for stress, fear and those frequent internal haemorrhages that follow an accident.
- The bird should be belly-down. Their lungs are tight up against their backs and any free fluids such as blood will flow into them. If it has a balance problem and keeps rolling over, the folds in the cloth help to keep bird upright.
- Never leave water or food in the box. Wild birds seldom drink, don't eat in the dark and will only become sodden or soiled.
- Do not allow container to rest in the sun—it becomes an oven (steamed birds again!). Best to keep box shaded and cool, even in cold-climate winter. Winter birds are fully equipped for cold weather already.

- Keep dogs, cats and children away from box.
- Resist peeking. Bird may suddenly escape, or a close-up eye at a hole may get a surprise poke from a foot or beak. A reasonable sized box doesn't need holes anyway.
- **Hérons.** Once the head is covered the bird is harmless and can be folded up quite neatly. Keep the eyes covered! To transport, we like an old sheet spread on the ground, heron lowered onto it with beak at one edge, and bird rolled over twice. This keeps the legs and wings from flailing and as the beak-tip should be at the edge of the roll, the heron can breathe but not see. Never tape a heron's beak. The roll can be placed belly-down on a car seat or even in the trunk as long as it is propped so it cannot roll over. More details are under [Hérons](#) on this website
- **Loons.** If it can be caught or picked up in shallow water or on a beach it is very ill and probably gives no argument. If it is found on a road, it may be quite feisty and healthy. Cover the head and take it immediately to the nearest available lake or river. If travelling any distance keep loon cool, especially its feet, which do most of the thermoregulation. (Note for coastal areas: oiled loons or loons taken from ocean nets have been reported to be chilled.) See my trauma book called *Loons, Ospreys and Grebes*. More details may be under [Loons](#) on this website
- Call someone who knows birds. Not usually a veterinarian: it is not a slight to their profession to state that they are mammal specialists without training in bird biology and care. I'd run like hell from most of those fourlegged things with teeth, but our speciality is avian trauma, anatomy, and biology and we solve quite a few "bird found" problems by telephone. For long distance help with willing finders, we go through a step-by-step examination to identify the bird, to identify at least some of the trauma, and make a plan for immediate care or immediate euthanasia. Within our range of travel, we hope the finder will bring it to us.
- It is against the law to keep any wild bird or animal as a pet, and of course, it is inhumane; wild animals are meant to be wild and stay wild.
- Finally, ***do not take dependent young from the wild.*** There are two parents to give them the best care, protection and teaching. There may be other relatives helping. What do you really know about their biology? The young won't all make it, but don't make orphans. Don't interfere. If you think a dependent youngster really needs help, the best thing is to keep your cat or dog in, watch from a distance, and possibly put the fledgling up on a branch. Sometimes a substitute nest can be arranged near the original nest; we have done that many times. Call quickly for information about that species. Do not take the chick into captivity.
- Believe it: ***hand-raising by humans is a destructive act.*** It has been proven in repeated studies that migrating birds denied the sight of the night sky do not know their migratory routes; that birds denied the company of their own kind do not learn songs and calls needed for socialization and courtship. And it is obvious without any studies that if you are not one of that birdlet's parents you cannot communicate with it to teach it even the most elementary strategies of food-finding, defense, shelter, predator recognition or knowledge of all the living world around it. What is left is a lonely, bewildered juvenile with the equivalent of a lobotomy.

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