



Raptor Fact Sheet: WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND A SICK, INJURED OR ORPHANED RAPTOR

SICK AND INJURED RAPTOR (ADULT BIRDS)

By the time a bird is sick or hurt enough to show signs of illness, it is very sick indeed. By the time a bird is weak enough to be caught by a human being, its condition is extremely serious and it may die if not given immediate treatment.

If you find a sick or injured bird, there are several things you should do.

As with all first aid, assess the danger before planning your actions. If retrieving the bird will place you or others at risk, call for help.

Have a box or pet carrier ready. The floor should be lined with newspaper and an old towel or a piece of blanket.

If you are satisfied that there is no danger, approach the bird slowly with a towel or blanket held in front of you. Try and get behind it if possible and drop the cloth over the bird. Beware of the bird's feet. Raptors have fearsome-looking beaks, but their beaks are not as dangerous as their talons, which they use to defend themselves when they are frightened.

Being careful of any apparent injuries the bird has sustained, gently push the bird down so that it cannot turn and lash out with its feet. Wrap the towel or blanket around the bird to secure the wings and legs, then pick the bird up carefully, supporting its body, and put it in the box. Unless it is very hot, you can leave the towel over the bird inside the box. This will help to keep the bird quiet and warm. Close the box but be sure to leave ventilation gaps somewhere near the top.

It is now time to call for help. There are several options open to you, including:

- Call a member of the Society for the Preservation of Raptors. Contact numbers are listed overleaf. Please do not use e-mail as your contact method. Use the phone.
- Call the Department of Environment and Conservation's Wildcare help line on (08) 9474 9055 for a referral to the closest available raptor carer.
- Take the bird to a vet. In the Perth metropolitan area, there are two veterinary clinics which are open twenty four hours a day: Murdoch University Veterinary Hospital south of the river and Balcatta Veterinary Hospital north of the river. Other clinics are open at various times and you should ring to make sure there will be someone available to help.

When you drop a bird off at a vet, it is critical that you make sure you tell the staff exactly where you found the bird and under what circumstances. This is important for assessment and eventual release. Raptors tend to be territorial and on release, they must be returned to their home territory to maximise their chances of survival. If possible, leave your name and contact phone number so that the wildlife carer who takes the bird for rehabilitation can call you to ask any further questions and let you know when the bird is to be released so that you can participate in its return to the wild if you so desire.

Practice good hygiene. Make sure you wash your hands and thoroughly clean anything with which the bird has had contact. If you have birds of your own, ensure that they do not come into contact with a sick bird and keep up a regular parasite control programme in partnership with your veterinarian.

YOUNG RAPTOR

It can be difficult to judge when a raptor is orphaned. Some species leave the nest very early and may still be in the company of their parents. In all cases, return of the young bird to the care of its parents is the best possible course of action.

If, however, this is not possible due to death or injury to the parents, injury to the young bird, inaccessibility of the nest site or damage to or destruction of the nest site, the young bird should then be taken into care. As always, assess the danger. If rescuing the bird would place you or others at risk, call for help. If you are satisfied that there is no danger, approach the young bird slowly with a towel or blanket held in front of you. Try and get behind it if possible and drop the cloth over the bird. Again, beware of the talons.

Being careful of any apparent injuries the bird has sustained, gently push the bird down so that it cannot turn and lash out with its feet. Wrap the towel or blanket around the bird to secure the wings and legs, then pick the bird up carefully, supporting its body, and put it in the box. Unless it is very hot, you can leave the towel over the bird inside the box. This will help to keep the bird quiet and warm.

Caring for a very young bird is extremely complex. Raptor parents instinctively know what to feed their young and how to encourage and support their development. Human beings do not share these instincts.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND A SICK, INJURED OR ORPHANED RAPTOR (Continued)

In an emergency situation where a bird is starving, it may be offered up to thirty grams of chopped lean kangaroo meat or lean steak, as long as it is willing and able to eat by itself. This should not continue for more than twenty four to forty eight hours or the bird may become sick due to a lack of casting material. An emaciated bird which is going or has gone into shock has more need of fluids and electrolytes than it has of solid food. These fluids must be delivered via crop/gastric tube or subcutaneous injection. These procedures require specialist training. It is therefore essential that a very thin, weak bird be given emergency veterinary attention to stabilise its condition as quickly as possible.

PLEASE DO NOT FEED MINCE TO A RAPTOR. Raptors have a highly specialised digestive system which is not designed to cope with the high levels of fat, chemical additives and low nutrient levels found in mince. Never feed processed meats as raptors cannot digest the salts, cereals, preservatives and other chemical additives. Mince and processed meats will make any raptor, and especially a young bird, very ill.

Young raptors have a rapid rate of development and require a precise balance of nutrients, particularly calcium and phosphorus for the laying down of bone and feather growth. Each species has its own dietary requirements. Some raptors need the chitin found in insects. Others need fish scale, feather, bone and/or fur in their diet, and they need different amounts of all these things at various stages of their development.

Parent birds feed their babies particular parts of prey animals at different stages. To know what to feed a young bird, it is necessary to understand the species, its development, its physiology and its behaviour. This requires a specialist.

Failure to feed a young bird the correct diet can result in weak feathers which break under the stress of normal flight, brittle bones, digestive problems, developmental problems, even neurological problems, and any of these can lead to the death of the bird. Even a youngster which appears healthy may not be strong and fit enough to survive more than a week on release if it has not had the proper nutrition at crucial stages of its growth.

Psychological development is also critical. A young bird must "imprint" on adults of the same species. Many raptor carers keep permanently disabled birds who act as foster parents for orphans. These foster parents know what to feed the young ones and can teach them how to fly, hunt and interact with other raptors.

Many species of raptor do not know how to hunt when they leave the nest. Under normal circumstances, they may stay with their parents for up to three months or more after leaving the nest. During this time, their parents actively teach them how to find and catch food. Specialist raptor carers use special facilities and techniques to ensure the young birds acquire the skills they need to survive. Simply releasing a fledgling bird once it is capable of flight without a proper education and rehabilitation programme can be the equivalent of a death sentence.

Young orphans require:

- A veterinary check up
- Treatment of any illness or injury
- A special diet suited to the age and species of the bird
- Appropriate parenting to avoid inappropriate imprinting
- Flight training / rehabilitation to ensure survival in the wild
- Appropriate release back in to territory suitable for that species.

Anyone finding a young raptor should call for assistance as soon as possible. Please do not keep the bird because it looks cute and "seems fine." Proper nutrition is critical in young birds and delays in admitting the bird to a well resourced facility can be fatal. A very young bird may look "fine" right up until the point where it drops dead. In remote areas, a suitably qualified rehabilitator may be able to provide telephone advice until transportation to a suitable facility can be arranged.

EMERGENCY PHONE NUMBERS:

Perth Raptor Care (Perth) (08) 9250 4759

Western Australian Birds of Prey Centre (Perth) 0438 388 383

Eagles Heritage (Margaret River) (08) 9757 2960

EarthWings (Nannup) (08) 9756 0669

Just Raptors (Geraldton) (08) 9938 1447

Pilbara Wildlife Carers Association (Karratha) 0438 924 842

DEC Wildcare Help Line (08) 9474 9055 (for all wildlife, state wide)

Society for the Preservation of Raptors (Inc.)

PO Box 415 Forrestfield WA 6058

www.raptor.org.au