

RESCUING A BIRD

KNOW WHEN TO INTERVENE
AND HOW TO SAFELY SECURE

STEP 1: IDENTIFY THE TYPE OF BIRD

UNDERSTANDING THE BIRD'S CATEGORY WILL GUIDE YOU IN DECIDING THE NEXT STEPS.

BABY BIRDS		NATIVE BIRDS	
HATCHLING A bird that is featherless and has its eyes closed. These altricial birds are completely dependent on their parents for warmth, food, and round the clock protection. 	NESTLING A young bird with some feathers but still unable to leave the nest. It cannot feed itself and relies entirely on its parents. 	COMMON Birds like tui, kererū, silvereyes, or fantails, which are widespread and often seen in gardens. They are integral to the ecosystem and are usually protected. 	RAPTORS Birds of prey such as ruru and NZ falcon. These birds have powerful talons that lock automatically, requiring specialist handling to ensure safety. 
 FLEDGLING A bird that is fully feathered and actively hopping or flapping as it learns to fly. It is partly independent but may still need parental help.	 JUVENILE A bird the size of an adult but with dull, often camouflaging speckled plumage. It will develop full adult colouring and reach sexual maturity over time.	 ENDANGERED Rare species like kōkako or little blue Penguins that require special care. Do not intervene directly—call the DOC hotline for guidance.	 SEAGULLS Species like grey back gulls, red-billed gulls are common in coastal or urban areas. Black-billed gulls are critically endangered and require special attention.
INTRODUCED BIRDS		PET OR DOMESTIC BIRDS	
DUCKS Includes mallards and other introduced waterfowl. Be sure to differentiate from native ducks like whio or brown teal by their distinctive plumage and size. 	CITY PIGEONS Common in urban areas and often affected by stringfoot or parasitic infections. Look for signs like, puffed up feathers, swollen feet or lethargy. 	POULTRY Includes chickens, geese, quails and other domesticated birds kept for egg or meat production. Often identifiable by leg bands and location near farms or gardens. 	RACING PIGEONS These birds often have leg bands for identification, becoming disorientated during races. They require human intervention to return to their lofts. 
 GARDEN BIRDS Small introduced species like sparrows and blackbirds, often preyed upon by cats. Their saliva causes sepsis, requiring immediate antibiotics.	 CARNIVORES Birds like starlings, magpies, & kookaburras that need a specialized diet of meat and insects. Imprinting can make them territorial toward other birds.	 PARROTS Cockatiels & conures, or other escaped exotic parrots. Look for signs of ownership such as clipped wings, identification tags, or an unusually tame demeanour.	 AVIARY BIRDS Aviary birds, such as finches or budgies, may escape and require specialized care as domesticated species struggle to survive outside.

STEP 2: ASSESS THE SITUATION

DETERMINE WHETHER THE BIRD NEEDS IMMEDIATE HELP

SEVERE INJURIES		MINOR INJURIES		SICK OR STUNNED	
					
SEVERE TRAUMA Injuries such as open fractures, deep wounds, or organ damage that are life-threatening and impact mobility or feeding.	CRITICAL INJURIES Continuous bleeding, neurological damage, or exposed bone or muscle tissue requiring urgent care.	WING OR LEG FRACTURES Sprains or minor fractures without skin breakage, causing discomfort but not a critical threat.	SMALL WOUNDS OR BRUISING Surface abrasions, mild bruises, or minor feather loss that do not affect flight or survival.	SIGNS OF ILLNESS OR SHOCK Birds appearing weak, puffed, lethargic, or struggling to breathe, stand, or maintain balance.	SIGNS OF WINDOW STRIKE Dazed, lying on its side, sometimes bleeding from nostrils, or struggling to regain balance or consciousness.
ACTION Contact your local vet immediately – Flock Birdcare cannot treat severe injuries.		ACTION Secure the bird and move on to Step 3: How to Secure the Bird Safely.		ACTION Secure the bird and move on to Step 3: How to Secure the Bird Safely.	
					
LOST OR IN DANGER Stranded waterbirds, including petrels or penguins, that cannot take flight and appear exhausted.	IMMEDIATE DANGER Birds trapped near roads, predators, or harsh weather conditions and require urgent assistance.	FLEDGLINGS NOT ORPHANED Fully feathered young birds that are mobile but still rely on parents, often seen exploring or practicing flight.	SIGNS OF PARENTAL LOSS Nestlings or hatchlings found cold, weak, or left alone for over two hours without being fed by parents.	CAT SCRATCHES & PUNCTURES Visible wounds from cat claws or teeth that introduce harmful bacteria and cause fatal infections. Requires immediate attention.	SALIVA CONTACT Even without visible wounds, bacteria like Pasteurella multocida in cat saliva can cause sepsis within 24-48 hours.
ACTION Secure the bird without putting yourself at risk. If needed, contact DOC/SPCA, then move on to Step 3: How to Secure the Bird Safely.		ACTION If the bird has been observed as truly orphaned, secure it and move on to Step 3: How to Secure the Bird Safely.		ACTION Suspected cat interaction always requires antibiotics. Secure the bird and move on to Step 3: How to Secure the Bird Safely.	

STEP 3: HOW TO SAFELY SECURE

FOLLOW THESE STEPS BASED ON THE BIRD'S TYPE AND SITUATION:

CATCHING		CONTAINMENT		CARE AND HANDLING		ENVIRONMENT	
							
NET Use a net larger than the bird's wingspan to contain it gently, avoiding harm from hard rims. Approach calmly to reduce panic and minimize stress.	TOWEL Slowly approach the bird to avoid startling it. Gently toss a soft towel over the bird, ensuring its wings are contained without pressure to avoid further injury.	AIR FLOW Choose a ventilated box or carrier with air holes to allow airflow. This ensures proper breathing and keeps the bird secure and comfortable during transport.	SUBSTRATE Line the bottom of the box with a towel or paper. Roll a towel into a doughnut shape to create a supportive nest or perch, keeping the bird stable and comfortable.	SUPPORT Hold the bird securely but gently, ensuring minimal pressure on its chest to avoid restricting breathing. Proper support prevents further injury or distress.	BABY & SICK BIRDS Maintain warmth by placing the bird in a heated room or near a safe, indirect heat source. Always provide space for the bird to move away if it becomes too warm.	DARK Keep the bird in a dark, quiet space to reduce stress. Darkness helps calm the bird, conserving its energy and aiding in its recovery until professional care.	QUIET Avoid loud noises or disturbances. Place the box in a peaceful environment to prevent unnecessary stress and ensure the bird feels safe and secure.

STEP 4: TIPS & WARNINGS

HOW TO SAFELY CAPTURE THE BIRD:

AVIAN POX 	DRINKING 
WARNING ! Red lesions or boils on the legs and face are highly contagious. Avoid handling infected birds to prevent spreading to others. Contact a vet for further guidance.	CAUTION ! Birds have a glottis, an airway opening at the base of the tongue. Pouring water directly into their mouths can cause aspiration, which can result in fatal pneumonia.
BABY BIRDS 	HOURLY FEEDS 
GOOD TO KNOW Only feed if begging and unable to reach a rehabilitator for several hours. Use mashed egg or kitten food as a last resort, specialized avian diets are required for long-term care.	CAUTION ! Baby birds need hourly feeds from sunrise to sunset. They require specialized care and should never be kept at home professional rehabilitators provide the best chance of survival.
CAT BITES 	HOT WATER BOTTLES 

WARNING ! Birds bitten by cats may seem fine initially but deteriorate rapidly due to bacteria. Suspected cat contact requires immediate antibiotics to prevent fatal infection.	CAUTION ! These provide warmth but become heat sinks as they cool, leading to hypothermia. Safer heat sources include a heated room or indirect warmth from a controlled heat pad.
PROTECT YOURSELF 	WASH YOUR HANDS 
CAUTION ! Raptors and seabirds can cause serious injury. Use protective gloves and eye protection when handling to prevent bites or scratches that may require medical attention.	GOOD TO KNOW Always wash your hands thoroughly after handling birds. Birds can carry zoonotic diseases that may spread to humans through direct or indirect contact.
MINIMIZE HANDLING 	GREEN LIQUIDY POOPS 
CAUTION ! Frequent handling causes stress and exhaustion. Limit interactions to only what is necessary to keep the bird safe and secure, allowing it to rest undisturbed.	CAUTION ! Often a sign of illness or starvation. If noticed, seek help immediately as it may indicate dehydration, infection, or severe malnutrition.
TRANSPORT LIMITATIONS 	SUPPORTIVE CARE 
GOOD TO KNOW Flock Birdcare cannot provide transportation as our team must remain at our facility to care for current patients. Arrange safe transport with a trusted rescuer or contact a wildlife service.	GOOD TO KNOW Providing warmth, quiet, and darkness gives the bird the best chance of survival until it reaches a professional rehabilitator for specialized treatment.

RESOURCES

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION (DOC): Website - www.doc.govt.nz Hotline - 0800 362 468	SPCA WELLINGTON CENTRE Website - https://www.spcanewyork.org/
FLOCK BIRDCARE WELLINGTON Website - www.FlockWellington.com	AVIAN EMPIRE THE NEST Website - www.avianempire.co.nz Website - www.wellingtonzoo.com

REFERENCES

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