

## BITS AND PIECES

### THE 10 WORST DIETS FOR BABY BIRDS\*

10. *Commercial baby bird formula.* Designed mainly for parrots, cockatiels, etc. they are inadequate for the special needs of most song birds.
9. *Earthworms.* Although eaten in the wild, they are part of a large variety of items consumed. In addition to not being a balanced diet, some worms carry a parasite which, left untreated, can kill a baby bird.
8. *Hamburger.* No calcium, too much fat. Leads to a horrible condition (Metabolic Bone Disease) which turns the bird into a "boneless, rubber chicken."
7. *Cheetos, crackers, bologna, hot dogs.* Junk food no matter who or what is eating it.
6. *Egg; whole, yolk or whites; cooked or raw.* Hard-boiled yolk is used as an ingredient in some diets but is totally inadequate as the only food.
5. *Any mammal milk or milk formula.* When was the last time you saw a bird sucking on a cow?
4. *Bread soaked in milk.* See #5.
3. *Bread soaked in water.* Your standard bread and water, starvation diet.
2. *Sugar water with an eyedropper.* Liquid down the windpipe, which is right behind the tongue, is a very real danger and, essentially, a death sentence. Not only does the bird die but it dies sticky.
1. *Water.* Absolutely no nutrition and not even very good to correct dehydration. See #2.

So, what should you do when you find a baby bird? First, you need to understand that a baby bird, with little or no feathering, cannot maintain its own body temperature. Without its nest and the warmth provided by its nest mates, it can freeze to death on

a warm, summer day! To check the baby's temperature, hold it in the palm of your hand. Forget the gloves; human scent is NOT a problem! A bird's normal temperature is between 102-104°F so it should feel warm to a person (98.6°F). If it feels cold, it is! DO NOT ATTEMPT TO FEED IT ANYTHING if it is cold. Make an artificial nest by lining a berry basket or small plastic container with a paper towel and provide a soft padding of toilet paper or Kleenex. Place the bird in the "nest", the "nest" in a box and the box on a heating pad set to low. If you don't have a heating pad, try placing the box under a light bulb. Check the baby's temperature periodically by touch. It should feel comfortably warm, not hot. We don't want to roast the little thing! Obviously, as you are making your baby comfy-cozy, you should be arranging to transfer it to an experienced rehabilitator as soon as possible.

But, what if you simply cannot transfer it quickly? We understand that these emergencies have a way of arising at the most inconvenient time. If you should come upon a baby bird late in the day, say near or after dark, please remember that most birds, no matter how young, do not eat at night. They're not dummies, they go to sleep! Don't kill yourself getting up all night trying to feed your baby. If you have followed the above directions and made it warm and cozy, it will not starve to death by morning. Also, keep in mind that unfeathered birds that fall from their nests drop like rocks! If they hit a hard surface; i.e., driveways, sidewalks, etc., it is possible no amount of care is going to save them. Sadly, the best you can do is keep them warm and safe from predators. If they survive the night, get them to an experienced rehabilitator first thing the next morning.

If you acquire the baby during the day but cannot transfer it and feel you must feed it, try soaking dry

puppy chow in warm water until it is soft. This could take an hour or more allowing plenty of time to be sure the baby is warm. The chow should NOT be liquid or mush; you should be able to pick up small pieces (the size of a pea) in your fingers or with tweezers. If the baby is begging (opening its mouth whenever you come near), take a small piece of chow and place it in the bird's mouth. It should swallow with no problem. The baby must be fed at least every hour (there are exceptions which cannot be covered in this article). Do not give any liquid, it gets all the moisture it needs in the food. If the baby is not begging, PLEASE do not force it. You may well do more harm than good. Softened puppy chow will be an adequate, short-term diet for most birds (again, there are a number of exceptions).

Caring for baby birds is a very complex, labor-intensive procedure. There are many variables that cannot be explained quickly and simply. If you really want what's best for the bird, you will make every effort to transfer it to an experienced rehabilitator as soon as possible. PLEASE do not think that these simple, basic guidelines cover all you need to know to "do it yourself." An experienced rehabilitator should have about a 60% chance of successfully raising a baby bird; for the inexperienced citizen, the chances are 10%, at best. Please give wildlife their best chance for survival - take them to a qualified rehabilitator.

If you wish to discuss this further, please feel free to contact us. Perhaps you can volunteer to help care for the babies at Second Chance.

\* Many of these items are used as part of a varied, balanced diet but none are adequate as the ONLY source of nutrition.



Reprinted from "Second Thoughts" newsletter – April 1996.  
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