

SPRING A CRITICAL TIME FOR BIRDS

Spring has arrived. Days are longer and warmer, plants have new growth and birds are returning from their wintering sites. Ah yes, summer evenings are just around the corner.

Local wildlife also looks forward to the spring and summer. Spring represents more food as Mother Nature begins to provide her usual bounty of fruit, seeds and insects. From the eyes of our birds and mammals, this cornucopia must seem like a Thanksgiving and Christmas feast rolled into one. There are, however, some things to remember as our backyards once again become sanctuaries for local wildlife.



Not only does spring signify a greater variety and abundance of food but it also means the introduction of newborn wildlife. Many juvenile animals are vulnerable as they try to make sense of backyards and parks and learn about the dangers. In particular, young birds are especially susceptible to urban hazards. The Wildlife Rescue Association of BC receives many injured and orphaned birds throughout the spring and summer months, many of which end up in care due to the public's lack of understanding about appropriate intervention. With a little bit of knowledge, people can make a big difference to a young bird in distress.

Juvenile birds belong with their parents because they obviously do a better job of raising them than humans do. But when is a bird truly orphaned? What should one do to help an orphaned bird? To answer these questions, it is important to know that a bird has two stages of development, that of nestling and fledgling. A nestling is a newly hatched bird. It is naked or only partially feathered. Helpless and unable to stand, they belong in their nest. If you see a nestling on the ground try and locate the nest and gently put the bird back into it. It is a myth that the parents will reject a bird touched by human hands. Keep an eye out for the parents and if they do not return within one or two hours the nestling may be orphaned and will not survive much longer. Call WRA if this is the situation.

Fledglings are the stage between nestling and adulthood. A fledgling is well feathered but is not quite ready to fly. At this age they are usually out of the nest and seen

hopping on the ground with the parents nearby teaching them how to fly. If you see a parent, leave the bird alone and keep the area safe from cats. Using water hoses or squirt guns is a good method. If the parent is not nearby, gently place the fledgling on a branch and watch from a distance for the parent to return. If there is no sign of a parent after a couple of hours, call WRA for advice.

With the best of intentions, many people bring young birds to WRA in the belief that the birds are orphans when they are probably not. If in doubt, call WRA. The staff is trained to handle all calls and advise the appropriate actions. We all want what is best for the animal. Together we can make a difference.