

What to do when one finds an injured or orphaned raptor

For the process of raptor rehabilitation to play a serious role in the conservation of raptors it has to be scientifically-based and practiced by qualified people with relevant experience. A good working knowledge of captive husbandry, progressive medicine (supervised by an experienced veterinarian), combined with a biological understanding of how a raptor lives in the wild is necessary for the successful identification, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of an injured or orphaned raptor. If a raptor allows you to approach it, pick it up and handle it, there is something wrong. Surmise that one of the following reasons is applicable:

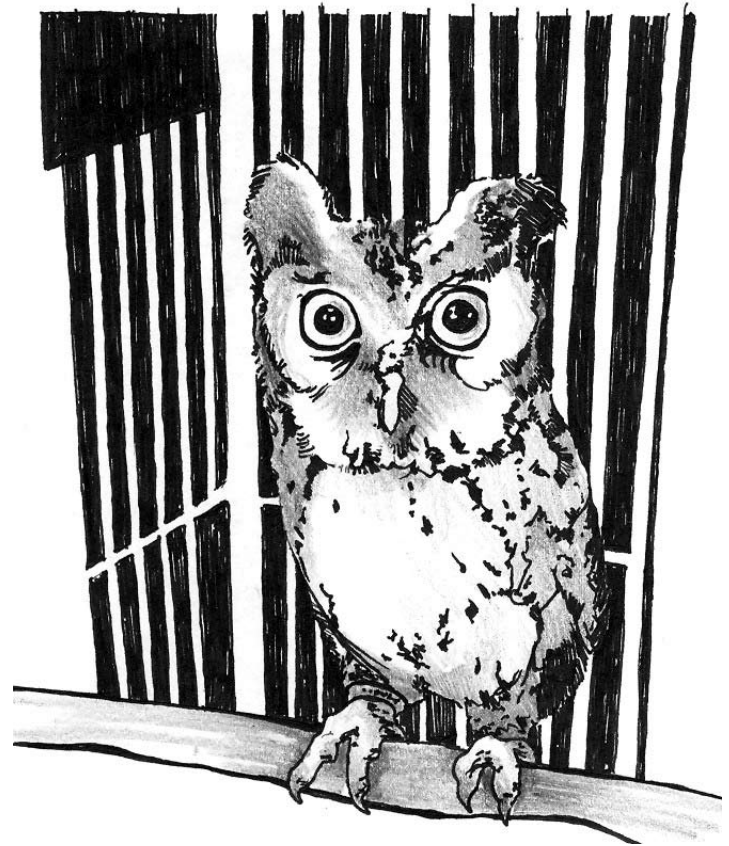
- The raptor has sustained an injury and is unable to fly away.
- It is weak from disease and therefore unable to fly away.
- It is too young to fly away.

Injured raptors

Injuries are not always visible and can therefore be difficult to detect. However, just because you are unable to see it does not make it any less dangerous to the bird. Broken bones need to be immobilized as soon as possible. Stress also needs to be taken into account, as this is the number one killer of any injured wild creature. There are a few basic steps which one can follow in order to minimize further damage.

Do

- Assess the danger and, if assisting the bird will place you at risk, call your local nature conservation office, registered rehabilitation centre or the SPCA.
- Dogs are naturally inquisitive creatures and it is therefore a good idea to put your dogs away (if it is in your garden) until you are able to secure the bird.
- Get a suitably sized cardboard box or pet carrier ready. Put a towel, cloth or piece of carpet into the



bottom of the box to provide a non-slip surface.

- Raptors defend themselves with their feet, and can inflict injury with their talons and not necessarily their beaks, so be careful!
- Place a large towel or small blanket over the bird, making sure you cover the eyes. Place your hands over both wings with your thumbs in the centre of the birds back, like you would hold a rugby ball. Gently push the raptor onto the ground holding the bird's wings against its body, then lift and place the patient into the prepared container
- Take the box and place it in a quiet, dark, warm area.
- Contact your nearest rehabilitation facility, nature conservation authority, veterinarian or the SPCA.

Do not

- Do not handle the bird too much. Immobilize the raptor and place him straight into the box. The more you handle the bird, the more risk there is of further damage and stress.
- Do not continually open the box to check on him. Any sick or injured raptor needs to be left quietly. An injured bird is usually suffering from severe shock and further disturbance will make the condition worse.
- Do not try to provide the raptor with food and water.

Orphaned raptors

It is not uncommon for a young raptor to fall from its nest during its first attempts at flight. This situation is not an unnatural one and the parents are often close by. In the case of owls, many species will nest on or close to the ground, e.g. the Spotted Eagle-owl will often nest on the bare ground. If you are ever presented with a situation where you think you may have encountered an abandoned youngster, the best course of action is to observe from a distance. Stay hidden from view for as long as possible. It is important to keep your distance as your presence may stress the parents, and they will not return. Remember owl parents will only return to feed the chick at last light or when it is dark.

If you can see the nest and it is accessible, put the youngster back into it (watch out for irate parents) and, once again, from a distance, monitor the situation. It is a fallacy that the parents will reject their young because they can smell the presence of humans on them.

Raptors sense of smell is not good; they rely mainly on sight and sound. If it is obvious that the parents are not returning, or the bird is in immediate danger, only then remove the chick. Before you 'rescue' a baby owl, please contact a rehabilitation centre who will gladly assess the situation and assist you.

IT IS IMPORTANT NOT TO TRY TO RAISE AN ORPHAN RAPTOR YOURSELF! This is unfair and cruel on the bird, and you are breaking the law. Please contact the nearest licensed rehabilitation centre.

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