



Alta Rancho PET & BIRD HOSPITAL

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Hand Feeding Baby Birds

Prepared for <Animal> <Last-Name>

Often times, bird owners are called upon to feed baby birds by hand. This can be due to the pets being orphaned, the biologic parents are not doing the job properly or the baby has been rejected by the parents. Hand raising a baby bird can help them become a better pet since they will become used to being handled, and they will not fear humans. Hand feeding is a big responsibility and requires time, patience and a complete commitment. The little bird in your care is entirely reliant on you for everything.

When do I start hand feeding a baby bird?

A chick may be removed from the parents any time before weaning, but many suggest leaving the babies with the parents for up to 3 weeks. Older birds may prove to be more challenging in their acceptance of hand feeding.

Where do I keep the baby bird?

A plastic tub that is easily disinfected makes a good home for young chicks. Paper towel, diapers, hand towels or other soft, disposable products can line the bottom of the brooder and provide secure, clean, dry footing for the bird. The bottom liner must be changed frequently to keep the bird(s) clean. If the bottom texture is too smooth, the chick's legs may splay out to the side leading to permanent deformity. You must also check that there is nothing in the cage for the bird to get its wings or legs stuck on that might cause injury or deformities.

Precise temperature and humidity are essential for optimum growth of newly hatched birds. Relative humidity greater than 50% is required initially, so you will need a humidifier. Purchasing a combination digital thermometer/hygrometer (moisture content reader) will be very useful (readily available on Amazon) to monitor temperature and humidity.

The following table will guide you through the proper temperature ranges for your baby birds.



Stage of Growth	Temperature	Comments
Hatchlings (no feathers)	95-97F (35-36 C)	
Pin Feathers present	75-85F (24 – 20 C)	Lower temp by 1 degree from 95 every 2-3 days of feather growth
Fully Feathered	Room temp 70-74F	

Always monitor your bird for signs of overheating, chilling, poor digestion or illness.

Overheating symptoms:

- Wings extended or drooping
- Panting.

Signs of being too cold:

- Shivering and cuddling together
- Feathers “fluffed Up”

Signs of poor digestion:

- Delayed crop emptying can be caused by infections of the digestive tract, improperly mixed hand feeding formulas, improper temperature of formula or improper environmental temperature and humidity.
- Undigested seeds in droppings may indicate that the bird is not hulling the seed and may be too young to try feeding seed.

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What should I feed my bird?

There are numerous commercial hand-feeding diets available today. They come as a powder and must be mixed with warm water to create a feeding solution. Exact, Kaytee, and Harrison's are well known products. Choose one diet and use it until the baby is weaned. Changes in diet may be stressful on the baby's digestion.

How do I feed my baby bird?

All food *must* be prepared fresh for every feeding. Leftover food is an ideal place for harmful bacteria and yeast to grow and using it can make your bird sick.

Any food prepared or heated in the microwave oven ***must*** be mixed thoroughly to blend hot and cold spots. Try to achieve homogeneous food temperatures of 102° - 106°F (39° - 41°C). ***Use a thermometer to test the temperature, do not trust your fingers.*** Food that is too hot will cause severe burns to the crop. Food that is too cold will not be accepted or digested well and may cause an obstruction in the crop.

In general, the younger the bird, the thinner the mixture should be. The day old chick requires a more dilute mixture (90% water) as it is still utilizing the yolk sac. Chicks older than one or two days should have food with 70 - 75% liquid. Syringes are the preferred feeding tool, but some still prefer a spoon with the sides bent up and inward. Using syringes allows you to keep track of how much you actually are feeding your bird.

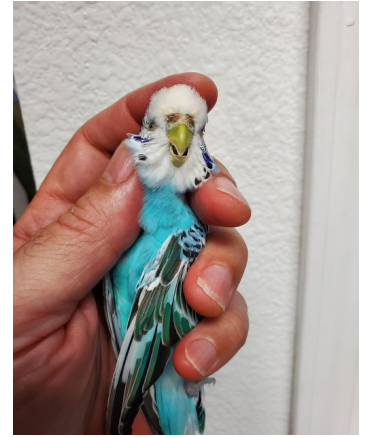


Before feeding your bird, it is important to check that the crop (the storage pouch for food located on the right side of the neck) is empty prior to feeding. If the crop is not emptying within 3-4 hours, check with your veterinarian.

The natural feeding response of a baby bird is to rapidly bob the head in an up and down motion. This action can be stimulated with gentle finger pressure at the corners of the mouth. During this head bobbing, the trachea is closed and large amounts of food can be given relatively quickly. If the bird is not displaying a strong feeding response then do not attempt to feed, as there is an increased chance of aspiration of food into the trachea and lungs, leading to death.

To feed the bird:

- Mix the food and check the temperatures
- Load the syringe with food
- Test that the food can be pushed through the syringe
- Hold the bird in your non-dominant hand (if you are right handed, hold bird in left hand Use your fingers to stabilize the birds head as shown in the picture
- Gently squeeze the sides of the mouth to start the feeding response
- Slowly press the plunger on the syringe and allow the baby to swallow the food.



How often and how much do I feed?

The amount and frequency of feeding depends on the age, growth rate of the bird, and the diet used. The frequency of feeding for young birds is greater than that of older birds. The following is a guideline.

Stage of Growth	Times per day to feed
Hatchlings (no feathers) up to 7 days	6-10 (every 2-3 hrs)
7 days till Eyes Open	5-6 (every 3-4 hours)
Eyes Open	3-5 (every 5 hours)
Feathers coming in	2-3 (every 6 hours)

The crop should appear full when feeding is finished. Feeding between 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. is not necessary except for the first 5-7 days of life. The best indication of a healthy, growing chick is a good, strong feeding response at every feeding, with the crop emptying between feedings and regular production of droppings (feces). Monitoring and recording weight gain (at the same time each day) on a gram scale provides an accurate record of growth.

When do the birds wean?

When to wean is often a difficult decision for both the owner and the bird. As the bird gets older and develops a full complement of feathers, weaning should be encouraged. Some babies start weaning themselves by refusing some feedings. The bird should be offered a variety of formulated foods including fruits and vegetables at this time to encourage exploration and experimentation. As this food introduction continues, you can slowly start to withhold some of the feedings, starting with the mid-day feeding. As time goes on, the morning feeding may be withheld, and lastly the evening feeding. Some birds learn quicker by watching other birds or older babies eat.

When weaning a hand raised bird, it is best to offer pelleted diet as their first food. This will allow us to wean them on to a more balanced diet than seeds and eliminate the need to teach them to eat pellets later in life. Our goal is to feed 80% pellets and in separate dish fresh foods that are high in protein. These include the bean family, dark leafy greens, boiled egg with the shell (for calcium) (see avian nutrition handout on our website).

Should I be concerned about disinfection?

Baby birds have poorly developed immune systems and are more susceptible to infections. The brooder should be disinfected regularly. All feeding utensils must be cleaned and stored in a disinfecting solution between feedings. The disinfectant should be changed every day to avoid contamination. Thorough rinsing is required before the next feeding.

Using separate feeders for every individual bird is recommended. If using feeding needles rinse the syringe and the needle with disinfectant and flush thoroughly with water. A simple disinfectant can be made using 1/2 oz of bleach in 1 gallon of water.

How do I know if something is wrong?

If you suspect something is wrong then immediately contact your veterinarian. Signs to watch for are included in the following list:

- Chirping or crying all the time
- Fussing a lot and not sleeping
- Listless, droopy wings or head
- Not accepting food
- No feeding response
- Not emptying the crop
- Poor weight gain
- Abnormal growth
- Abnormal posturing or wing and leg positions
- Abnormal or lack of droppings
- Wet area over or near the crop (may indicate a burn)



