

Doing Nothing to Help Animals

by Michelle Justin

Picture this. You are walking along a street near your home. You see a baby animal lying on the ground. It could be a bird. Perhaps it is a squirrel. If you live in a rural area, maybe it is a woodland creature, such as a deer. You think the little critter might be sick. You would like to help the poor thing. What is the best thing you can do? The answer is probably...nothing.

This may sound cruel and heartless, but it is not. It is good advice. When humans interfere in an animal's world, often they do more harm than good. Why is this? Animals can usually care for themselves. For example, suppose you see a baby rabbit lying on the ground. You might think its mother has abandoned it. In fact, the mother rabbit may be out looking for food or doing some other important task. She may check her baby's nest only two times each day, but she does check. She will most likely be back soon. If her baby needs help, *she* is the best one to give it.

Suppose the animal is a bird. You see it on the ground, so you jump to the conclusion that something is wrong. Actually, the bird may be 100% healthy. When most baby birds first learn to fly, they start on the ground. This makes excellent sense when you think about it. If they took their very first flying lesson from a nest in a high tree branch, the results could be tragic. If the bird has feathers, even if it still has some baby-bird fluff on it, the bird is probably in good health. Its mom and dad will take care of it at ground level.

Having said that, be aware that you might come across a bird that really *does* need help. If the bird has no feathers, it probably would be helpful if you—or, better yet, an adult—are able to return the little chick to its nest. You may have heard that people should never, under any circumstances, touch a baby bird because the scent of human skin will stick to the bird, and its mother will smell the scent and peck her baby to death. This is not true! Birds have a very weak sense of smell, and this bit of “wisdom” is a myth—not a fact. Still, it would not hurt for you or your adult helper to wear gloves if you ever have to handle a featherless bird that really does need to be returned to its nest.

Most of the time, a young animal that seems to be separated from its parents and lost, is neither separated nor lost. Its parents are probably nearby. If you leave the animal alone and stay clear, the mom or dad will return. If you stick too close, the adult animal will be scared off. In your misguided attempt to help the baby, you will actually hurt it or prevent it from getting help.

- 11** This article is **mostly** about helping animals by
- A** calling for expert help
 - B** taking over for their parents
 - C** reuniting them with lost parents
 - D** leaving them to be cared for by their parents

- 12** Which of the following sentences from the article states an **opinion**?
- A** This makes excellent sense when you think about it.
 - B** Animals can usually care for themselves.
 - C** When most baby birds first learn to fly, they start on the ground.
 - D** If you leave the animal alone and stay clear, the mom or dad will return.

- 13** Read this sentence from the article.
- If you live in a rural area, maybe it is a woodland creature, such as a deer.**
- The word “rural” means
- A** polluted
 - B** congested
 - C** in the city
 - D** in the country

- 14** The author **most likely** wrote this article to
- A** describe an injured animal
 - B** tell a story about a baby animal
 - C** persuade the reader to care for animals
 - D** give information about how to help animals

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Describe what you would do if you saw a baby bird on the ground. Use details from the article to support your answer.
