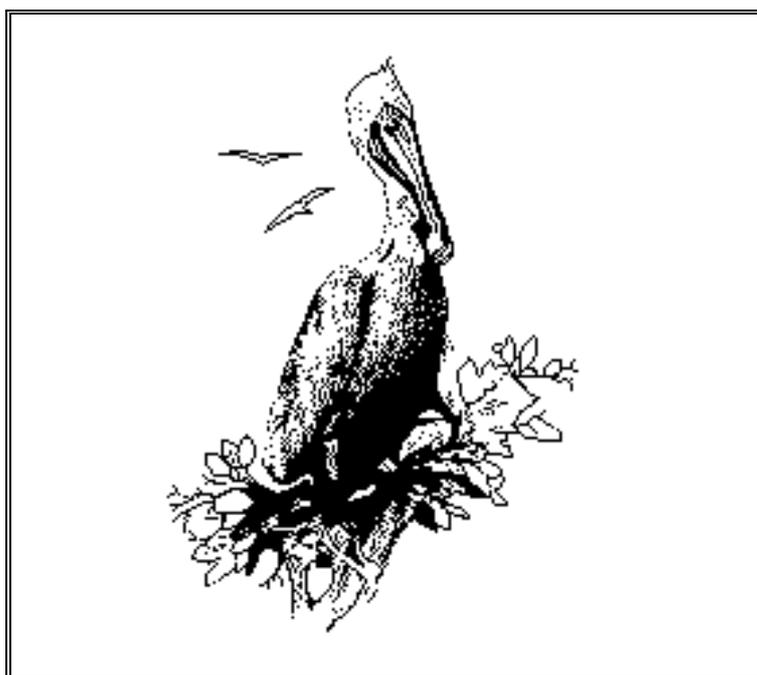


BIRD CARE & CONSERVATION SOCIETY
CARING FOR RESCUED BIRDS SERIES
(ADELAIDE AND ENVIRONS)

**MANAGEMENT AND RELEASE
OF
RESCUED BIRDS**

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RECEIPT OF THE BIRD

Always take the name and address of the caller, the exact spot where the bird was found and question the caller as to the reason for rescue. This can help when determining the type of injury or trauma e.g. found in gutter beside road - the bird may have no visible sign of injury but is unresponsive this can indicate concussion.

Remember it is better to do nothing, than panic, take a few deep breaths.

Place the bird in a quiet place for half an hour before examination, **unless:**

- The bird is having difficulty breathing:
Action- check for obstruction to throat and remove
- The bird is bleeding profusely
Action- apply gentle pressure for a few minutes to point of haemorrhage, if this doesn't stop the bleeding, apply friars' balsam or ferric chloride.

Observe the bird carefully, before handling to ascertain what is wrong.

- Are the wings and body symmetrical?
- Are the eyes wide and clear with the pupils the same size and do they constrict with light? Is the third eyelid covering them? Are the eyes flicking from side to side? Any of the above could indicate brain injury.

A very sick or badly injured bird usually will not defend itself and can appear tame. **Never assume that the bird likes you if it does not struggle it merely means that the bird is very sick or very scared.** Do not expect the bird to behave normally. A **frightened** bird will scream and struggle to escape. A **terrified** bird will be silent and still.

A mistake often made by beginners is to assume the bird has been hand raised or likes being handled by humans. This can lead to an extra burden of stress, in addition to the pain shock and injury the bird is already suffering. In many cases this will lead to death which could have been avoided had common sense been used.

Once the bird has been stabilized place in a cardboard box with a soft covering such as **clean** towel on the bottom. Place the box somewhere away from noise and activity. Visual stress can be very severe so do not touch or look at the bird until it is necessary.

Shock can affect the bird severely, always keep it warm - **if a thermometer placed next to the bird does not read 28- 30 degrees centigrade it is not warm enough.** Place a bowl of water near the heat source (if this can be done safely), or place a damp piece of cloth in the corner of the box with the bird to supply moist heat (this may help prevent dehydration).

If the bird is one with high energy needs such as a lorikeet immediately offer nectar, or sugar dissolved in warm water. Otherwise, leave the bird another half hour before offering it water. **Never** force the water down the bird's throat because this may cause it to inhale the water and drown. Drip the water over the top of the bird's beak so that it runs down and into the corners enabling the bird to swallow small amounts at a time.

Do not supply food until the bird has stabilised then offer food that is appropriate for the species and leave it completely alone in a quiet warm spot (covered to reduce visual stress), until your attention is needed for replacing food again, or cleaning. With an adult bird this may not be until the next day.

If a trip to the vet is necessary, transport in a box appropriate to the bird, i.e. small bird, small box. Do not transport in a birdcage. Frightened birds can crash into the wire causing injury. Always place a towel in the bottom of the box so that bird can grip with its claws to maintain some balance.

MANAGEMENT AND RELEASE OF BIRDS

(A) MANAGEMENT

Quarantine a new bird for at least 2 weeks before introducing it to other birds. Remember many birds do not like other birds. This is especially true if it is of another species. They will be happier if they cannot see other birds *unless* they are a flock species. Flock species should be kept in pairs or small groups after the quarantine period.

When trying to rear a baby bird for release we must imitate the parents as closely as possible. To try to prevent the bird from imprinting BCCS encourages crèching of juveniles. If the bird is a juvenile, crèching of the same species is very successful. This way the birds can identify with each other and can be released with their crèche group.

Always adjust a bird gradually to outside temperatures if it has been in a hospital box or living inside. This can be achieved by moving it in stages away from the heat source until it is finally outside in an aviary.

The feathers must be perfect prior to release to allow the bird to fly perfectly.

(B) CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE RELEASE

Wild birds should never be imprinted if they are being prepared for release. They will behave differently and will not be accepted by others of their kind. Birds imprint sexually as well as relying on humans for a source of food.

Some species of bird such as the Australian Magpie or raptors such as falcons or the Wedge-tailed Eagle are very dangerous to humans if released after imprinting.

It is also important that birds have not become used to domestic pets and thus do not perceive them to be a threat. The household cat or dog might be tolerant but others might not.

If the bird is an adult and has only been in captivity for short time i.e. 1-2 weeks, less exercise will be needed prior to release. If it has been inactive for an extended period, a longer preparation time will be needed to build up the muscles, which have wasted during the convalescent period. Sometimes up to 2 months or longer of flight exercise is necessary.

(C) RELEASE

Release adult birds where they were found if they can be released within a short period of time (two to three weeks) and if the area is appropriate. Variations of genes can occur in different populations and should not be interfered with if possible.

Juvenile birds being released with their crèche group need to be in an aviary at an appropriate release site for some weeks prior to release. This will ensure that the

juveniles stay around the release site for supplementary feeding until completely independent.

Magpie Larks and New Holland Honeyeaters should be released while they still have their juvenile plumage and before they have the adult eye colour. At this stage they are still somewhat submissive to the resident adults of their species and are accepted more easily by the adults, as they see them as less of a threat.

This may well apply to other species.

A single adult flock bird such as a lorikeet should be released into a feeding flock.

Juvenile Rainbow Lorikeets should be released in a group from the crèche site and supported with food until independent. Juvenile Musk Lorikeets and juvenile Purple-crowned Lorikeets should be released with the crèche group into a feeding flock of their species.

Adult Noisy Miners, wattlebirds and New Holland and White-plumed Honeyeaters should always be released exactly where found. Juveniles of these species should always be introduced to each other before fledging to prevent aggression and be released with their crèche group. If released alone they may be attacked and killed by other birds, even of their own species.

Noisy Miners released from a crèche site into the back yard will do well **but** they will probably drive resident wild birds away and may not allow the release of other birds into the backyard. They are extremely aggressive and territorial.

Magpies and ravens should be released with the crèche group from the crèche site after the breeding season is over and after the first autumn rains, ensuring a food supply for the inexperienced juveniles. They can also be supported with food until independent. Never release a hand-reared juvenile magpie alone because it is unlikely to survive.

Hand reared cockatoos are reliant for a long time and therefore imprint dramatically - release is not recommended.

Diurnal (day) birds should be released in the morning after feeding, nocturnal (night) birds in the evening after feeding.

Do not release birds during a heat wave or during periods of heavy rain or high winds.

Do not release a bird in the middle of winter if it has been in care for an extended period. It will not be used to the cold and wet of winter and there is very little food available.

Do not release a nectivore, e.g. a lorikeet, during a long dry spell when there is little nectar available.

Timing the release is vital. It is not wise to release an adult bird during the breeding season unless its exact territory is known and it can release within 1-2 weeks of rescue.

(D) SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR RAPTORS

Raptors e.g. eagles, harriers, hawks, falcons, kites and owls need specialised accommodation and care.

Intensive Care Facilities

Hospital boxes similar to those used for other birds are appropriate for injured raptors in shock and those that have leg problems and should not or can not stand.

The box should provide a warm, dark, quiet environment away from all-household noise and activity. It should be large enough for the bird to stand fully erect and to lie fully extended across the box without danger of damaging feathers. Remember any damaged feathers will have to moult out or be repaired before the bird can be released (this may mean holding it captive for up to 12 months).

The carer must always have easy access for examination, treatment, feeding and cleaning the bird.

If a hospital box is not available, the following is offered as a temporary substitute.

For the first few hours, a strong cardboard box can be used. Make sure that it is the right size i.e. long enough to prevent damage to tail feathers. It must be dark and warm. Unlike parrots, raptors are not destructive and will not chew their way out. However, they may get out of the top of the box so make sure that lid is fixed firmly.

Place a towel in the bottom so that the bird can grip and maintain balance. A hot water bottle or electric blanket (placed under the box) can provide an emergency heat source. Take care that the hot water bottle does not get cold. A constant heat of 28-30 degrees Celsius should be provided.

Intensive Care Accommodation

In some cases the bird recovers sufficiently to be removed from the hospital box, but is not yet strong enough for an aviary. If this is so, a wooden crate or purpose built box will be required. Do not use a wire cage as this will damage the bird's feathers and cere.

Raptors are easily stressed and many do not adapt to captivity so keep the box completely covered and well away from noise, children, cats, dogs and any other disturbance. A sheet or towel can be placed over the box so the bird feels safe and can hide.

All birds should have a perch, otherwise tail and wing feathers will be damaged and in some cases, damage may be so severe that the bird will have to moult out the damaged feathers and grow new ones before release.

If the bird is able to stand but is unable to perch well, providing a stable log may make it easier to keep the tail feathers off the ground and away from its droppings.

Tail feathers can be further protected by inserting them in an envelope cut to fit and attached to the feathers with paper tape. Also place a strip of paper tape on the end of the envelope to strengthen the bottom. This is easily removed before release.

Intensive Care Aviary

Once the bird no longer requires a hospital box, it may still need to be caught for examination or force-feeding. In this case it should be housed in a fully enclosed purpose built or modified aviary, away from visual or auditory disturbance and with maximum protection from extremes of climate. The ideal intensive care aviary is described below.

The aviary can be constructed of fibreboard such as Hardiflex or with part of the roof enclosed. The rest of the roof may be made of wooden slats placed slightly apart so that sunshine can enter. Shade cloth could also be used to prevent it from becoming too hot.

The aviary should be built in a position that will not allow it to become damp and mildewed.

Ideally, the aviary should be 3 metres in length, width and height and have no projections, which could injure the bird. The floor may be grass or a mixture of small pebbles over a concrete base. If using grass, provide some pebbles as it is thought that raptors use them to aid digestion in the same way granivores use grit.

Supply a few perches of natural branches (taken from non-toxic species of trees) of different diameters this will help to prevent diseases of the foot, which can occur in captive raptors. These should be placed in the aviary so the bird can hop from one to another should it be unable to fly.

Perches must be placed in positions to give easy access to the patient. Provide a shallow bathing facility like a large heavy pot plant base unless the bird is strapped and must be kept dry.

These suggestions are ideal for a raptor. If housing is urgently needed for a raptor, it may be necessary to improvise but try to make the aviary as suitable as possible.

Some suggestions for improvising

Cover the inside wire of the aviary with shade cloth, wheat bags, old sheets, brush or wooden slats (placed slightly apart) to prevent damage to cere and feathers in panicking birds.

Release aviary

This should be as large as possible but as a generalisation, the minimum size should be 6 metres long 4 metres wide and 3 metres in height to allow maximum flight room.

A Wedge-tailed Eagle needs an aviary about 10 metres long, 4 metres wide and 3 metres high. For smaller species of raptor, it should be at least 2 metres high, 1.5 metres wide and about the same in depth.

All raptors need perches and hides where they can shelter and feel safe. Many species like to bathe, so provide shallow bathing facilities.

Walls should be constructed of vertical wooden slats and/or shade cloth.

The aviary should be fully enclosed on three sides and part of the roof. This will give protection from the elements with a secure hiding spot yet will permit the bird to bask in the sunlight if it wishes.

It is important that raptors have somewhere to hide. Visual stress can be severe.

Healthy wild raptors successfully catch prey only once in about seven attempts, therefore the bird must be 100% fit to be released, or it will not survive.

Experience has shown that a raptor must not be released if it has more than four broken (mid shaft) feathers on either wing unless they have been repaired.

Imping (repair of feathers)

It is important that the correct feathers are used. It is simply shaping and gluing the replacement feather onto the broken feather using imping needles. These can be bamboo or fibreglass splinters or sewing needles fitted and glued into the feather shafts joining the base of the broken feather and the shaft of the replacement feather.

If a bird needs feathers repaired so that it can be released, contact the Committee to arrange this.

Hacking and release of juvenile raptors

Before fledging, juvenile raptors *must* be hacked to prevent imprinting and adults have special requirements for their rehabilitation and release.

Never use wire cages or aviaries to accommodate adult or juvenile raptors, as damage to the cere (nostrils) can occur when they panic damaging the baffles needed by some raptors to breathe whilst flying at high speeds to catch prey.

Wire also damages the feathers. If only wire cages and aviaries are available, cover the inside of the wire with shade-cloth (old sheets or sugar bags can be used in an emergency) to prevent feather damage. This is recommended for all species, not just raptors.

Hacking is providing an artificial nest for orphaned nestling raptors. It is always better to hack the orphaned nestlings in the area where found as prey species are usually abundant when the orphans are ready to fledge.

A city backyard or the local park is not a suitable site for a hack-box. A site where there is no sign of human activity i.e. cars, houses, people, and domestic animals is required.

Nestling raptors should be placed in the hack-box as soon as they can pick up food. This should be encouraged from the day of arrival. Once they recognise food, a healthy orphan will snatch it from forceps. The food should be held lower and lower until it is on the bottom of the container being used to house the nestling and it will soon learn to pick it up, usually in only two or three days.

Whole bodies of chicks and mice should be left with them at all times as they will begin to eat unaided sooner than expected. It is critical that the bird does not associate humans with food. It is easy to rear a healthy raptor, but it can also be easily imprinted and therefore un-releasable.

Hacking is most successfully achieved if a group of raptors of the same species is hacked together. It is less successful if done with only one bird and it is generally pointless to hack a bird that has already fledged. Orphans should be placed in the hack box weeks before fledging. Provide a nest of sticks woven together to copy those used by the parents in the wild.

Supply a shallow water bowl for bathing to help keep the feathers in good condition and to promote preening.

The hack-box should be opened just before the birds fledge. At this stage, they would normally be hopping from branch to branch.

For the first few weeks after fledging, they need to return for feeding and bathing. Supplementary food should be left at the site. A water bowl provides extra encouragement for them to return. When fledged and until they are fully independent, young raptors normally return near to a natural nest site for food provided by the parents. If they stray too far on their first flight, they will rarely find their way back. The BCCS hack-box is approximately 2.5 metres square, is on stilts and is built of wooden slats placed slightly apart. It has a chute at the back so that food can be dropped down it while the rehabilitator remains unseen by the birds. The front can be lowered to form a platform upon which food and water can be placed at release.

The local birds such as magpies soon learn that food is being left so enough should be provided to allow for this. Tie the food down to make it harder for the local birds to steal it. Food should be left at dawn for diurnal birds and dusk for nocturnal birds.

When leaving food at the hack site ants can be a nuisance. This can be avoided by placing a container for water under the stilts when the box is built or by greasing the stilts.

It is vital that large trees are near the hack site so the birds can fly to them when released. They will sit in the trees observing the hack-box to see if it safe to approach to feed or bathe.

If a hack-box is not available at the planned release site, it will be necessary to improvise.

(E) BANDING

Banding is the only way of assessing the success of release techniques and identifying individual birds. Contact one of the banding team or the BCCS committee to arrange for birds to be banded prior to release.

(F) POINTS TO CHECK BEFORE RELEASE

- ◆ Can the bird feed itself?
- ◆ Does it recognise and eat its natural food?
- ◆ Does it catch live food e.g. insects, if that is what it eats?
- ◆ Can it cope with normal temperature variations?
- ◆ Can it fly well enough to survive?
- ◆ Does it recognise and display alarm at predators, including humans?
- ◆ If juvenile has it been with and does it recognise its own species?
- ◆ Does it object to human handling?
- ◆ Is it at optimum weight?
- ◆ Has it preened and is it waterproof? Check this by spraying the bird lightly with water to see if the water will bead on its feathers.
- ◆ Has it all its feathers and are they clean and unbroken?

If the answer is not yes to all the questions above

DO NOT RELEASE!

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