



Wild Bird Rehabilitation: *Our mission is to provide care for injured, ill and orphaned native wild songbirds and to release them back into their natural habitat. We also provide public education regarding the humane treatment of wild songbirds and the conservation of their habitat.*

Raising Starlings at Home

In the State of Missouri, raising most baby birds is illegal. Birds are protected not only by Missouri, but by the Federal Fish & Wildlife Department.

There are three exceptions to these rules. They are pigeons, House Sparrows and starlings. These three birds may be raised in the home. No permit is required. These recommendations should be used only for starlings and they are not to be used for raising native species. **It is illegal for anyone who is not licensed to care for protected wildlife.**

These are guidelines to successfully raise starlings. There is no one way to house and feed these baby birds, but if you keep in mind basic needs - variety of food, clean surroundings, consistency of feedings- you should do well.

A. Basics of Starling Care:

1. Naked hatchlings with eyes closed will need to be fed every 15 or 20 minutes for 12 hours sunup to sundown. Birds sleep through the night so no 2 am feeding required! Time between feeding increases as they grow and by approximately 4 weeks the bird should be self-feeding
2. It's important to understand that these diets should not be used for other species of birds which may require a different diet to develop healthfully.
3. Birds must fly (see **E. Ready for Release** for more information) and eat on their own before they can be released – about 5-6 weeks.
4. Basic supplies required (*Mealworms and Exact can be purchased at a pet supply store*):
 - Heating pad (for nestlings)
 - Water
 - Cat food
 - Wild bird seed
 - For feeding: water
 - color paint brushes,
 - blunt end tweezers
 - Live mealworms
 - Exact (manufactured by Kaytee) hand feeding formula
 - 1 ml syringe for feeding
5. Housing Basics:
 - Clean surroundings – change nest and box lining materials when they become soiled.
 - Warmth
 - An option is to use plastic containers and increase the size as the bird develops. Line the bottom of the container with newspaper covered with paper towels. Avoid terrycloth since the bird's foot can get caught in the weave or fraying.

6. Hazards that can cause problems:

- *Aerosol sprays, fumes, etc.*
- *Glass doors, uncovered windows*
- *Open toilets, uncovered pots on stove*
- *Vacuum cleaners*
- *Area behind refrigerator*
- *Pets, children, guests*
- *Terrycloth*
- *Drafts from air conditioner, fans, heaters*
- *Doors: birds love to perch on top of doors*
- *Predators: never leave a bird container unattended unless secured so bird cannot escape*

7. The following describes the housing and dietary requirements at the various stages of the bird's development.

B. Naked Hatchlings with Eyes Closed:

1. Environment: Position "nest" in a warm area.

- Start with a small container as a nest. The goal is to have a tight fitting nest. Line the bottom and edges of container with a folded paper towel and wind a length of unscented toilet tissue (2 - 3 feet long) loosely around hand to form lining of nest. If hatchling is very tiny you may need to add second lining. Add 2 or 3 sheets of toilet paper, pushed into center of nest. This can be changed as nest gets soiled.
- Place nest on towel over heating pad (low setting). Position as follows: Nest, towel, heating pad. Cover the nest loosely with a tight-weave towel or dishcloth (not terrycloth). Baby should feel warm.

2. Feeding:

- Feed every 20 minutes for 12 hours sunrise to sunset. It's important that the bird is fed consistently for proper development.
- Feed *Exact* and live mealworms (about 5 mealworms) at each feeding. Mealworms provide protein which is necessary for proper development. Use 1 ml syringe to feed *Exact*. Follow preparation instructions on the *Exact* container.
- Feed a small amount at a time. Watch the crop (right side of neck just under lower beak) to make sure food empties before feeding again. Make sure to put the food to the back of the mouth. If the bird has trouble swallowing, dribble a drop or two of water with the paint brush on the outside tip of the beak. Make sure the bird has swallowed before giving more food. Be sure to clean any food from around bird's face. Dried food can not only clog the nose and eyes, but can lead to infection.
- Follow feeding with water. Use paint brush to paint water on beak from junction to tip of beak.

C. Eyes Open with Feathers:

1. **Development:** This stage is typically within 5-7 days of birth.
2. **Environment:** Increase the size of the container.
 - Line the container with newspaper and cover with a paper towel for easier cleaning and to provide a non-slip surface for the birds. Cover the top of the container with a pillowcase.
 - Continue to use the heating pad under ½ of container.
 - Roll a cloth towel (not terrycloth) and wrap with paper towels and place in container to help the bird begin to perch.
3. **Feeding:**
 - Stretch out the feeding intervals to every 30-45 minutes.
 - Continue with the *Exact* diet and mealworms. After 10-14 days supplement with cat food soaked in warm water over night, using tweezers to feed. As the bird grows increase the soft food amount and decrease the *Exact*.
 - Provide water after feeding by painting on the beak.
 - Include small shallow dish of drinking water in bird's container.

D. Fledgling:

1. **Development:** At this stage the bird begins to hop around. This occurs at approximately 3 weeks.
2. **Environment:**
 - Increase the size of the container and cover with a pillowcase.
 - Include branches suitable for perching and optional greenery. Branch should be large enough so that when the bird is perched the toes don't touch and not so large that they cannot get a grip.
 - Keep the housing basics in mind. Make sure part of the cage has access to sunshine-either on an enclosed porch or sunny window (open window). Sunshine is vital to development of strong bones and feathers.

- To “water proof” the bird provide a larger shallow dish for bathing. This stimulates preening. Without waterproofing, feathers will not repel water. This will not only inhibit flying, but will also affect their ability to stay warm.

3. Feeding:

- Feed at 1-2 hour intervals. At this stage they should start to become self-feeding.
- **Diet:** Feed dry cat food soaked overnight in warm water; supplement with apples (chopped) and/or basic birdseed. Put in a dish in the cage to encourage self-feeding.
- Offer food from the dish with blunt end tweezers. They are not expected to eat much on their own at first, but need to start on the road to self-feeding.
- Make sure there is a small dish of water in the cage.
- By approximately 4 weeks, they should be self-feeding. The bird should be encouraged to be self-feeding without being dependent on you for a successful release.

E. Ready for Release

1. **Development:** This should occur within 5-6 weeks. Birds must fly and eat on their own before they can be released. When you think it is nearing time for release, flight test daily for a week in the house or an enclosed area. This is important to build strength. The bird should be able to reach ceiling height from the floor before release.
2. **Release:** The bird can be released in a park, cemetery or your own back yard. If transporting put the bird in a paper bag. Fold over the top of the bag and clip.

*If you have questions,
please call:*

Wild Bird Rehabilitation
9624 Midland Blvd, Overland, MO 63114 (314)
426-6400
www.wildbirdrehab.org

Wild Bird Rehabilitation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization staffed primarily by volunteers who donate their time to help area birds. WBR receives no federal or state funding and is supported totally by donations from individuals, corporations and fundraisers. Last year WBR cared for over 2000 native wild songbirds.