



Rescuing Birds after Window Strikes

Some birds that strike windows are killed outright, with fatalities almost always involving head trauma and brain hemorrhage. Others rebound, flying away from the window with little if any apparent difficulty. But some birds fall to the ground, alive but unable to fly, at least for the moment. Among them, some are merely stunned and can recover without treatment, usually within an hour. However, other birds are more seriously impaired. A common non-fatal consequence of a window collision is an injury somewhere in the shoulder girdle.

When looking at a bird that is perching or standing, many people assume that the prominent bulge near the top of the wing is the shoulder, but it is actually the wrist. In a normal resting wing posture, the elbow and wrist joints are both flexed, with the wrist closer to the head, and the elbow closer to the feet (but usually covered by flight feathers). Birds do not have conspicuous shoulders; instead, the avian shoulder (or pectoral) girdle is compact and close to the center of the body. Therefore, if the chest rather than the head takes the impact with the window, the shoulder girdle may be injured. A bird with a fracture in one of the pectoral bones may hold its wings in a normal position and may even be able to fly short horizontal distances. However, a wing with an injured shoulder cannot achieve the downstroke needed for flight up from the ground.



If a songbird is found alive on the ground after a window collision, it should be retrieved and removed from harm's way. Especially if it is a species capable of a strong bite (say, a cardinal or grosbeak), gloves can be worn, or the bird can be gathered up in a light towel. A good place for the bird to rest and



potentially recover is a cardboard box lined with a rumpled towel or piece of clothing such as an old sweatshirt or t-shirt. Place the bird in the box in an upright position, supporting the body if necessary with padding along its sides. Then secure the lid (air holes may be punched first), put the box in a safe, warm, quiet place, and wait an hour. Finally, take the box outside, place it on the ground, and remove the cover. A bird that had merely been stunned will fly up and out of the

box, but an injured individual will stay on the bottom of the box. Never force a bird to attempt flight by removing it from the box and tossing it into the air.

The recovery box must be too tall for the bird to escape from by jumping. If a bird with an injured shoulder hops out of the box, it may run or fly low to the ground quickly enough to elude recapture. However, a bird unable to achieve upward flight will be vulnerable to predation and starvation. If a cardboard box is unavailable, an alternative suitable for songbirds is a large, sturdy grocery bag; again, a towel can be placed on the bottom, and the edges of the top stapled or taped together until it is time for a flight test.

Many shoulder fractures and other collision injuries can heal, but may require skilled treatment and follow-up care. In some cases, recuperation may take several weeks. If the bird does not fly up and out of the recovery box after a period of rest, replace the cover, return the box to a safe place, and call us at 207-382-3013 (or contact another wildlife rehabilitator who can provide triage and continuing care).