

THE BACK PORCH RANGER

by Melissa Kay Bishop

Bringing Up Baby

the baby back in the nest and it will be well looked after.

If however, the bird is injured, or there is no nest or mother bird in sight and you feel that you have found an orphan, the first thing to do is call the professionals. If you do not have a wildlife rehabilitation center in your area, call a veterinarian. Often times, they will either take the bird or be able to direct you to someone who can. If you get the idea of taking the bird in to raise yourself, think again.

"It is against the law to keep songbirds if you are not licensed," said Jo Ann Thompson, a long-time licensed songbird rehabilitator. "This is true all over the United States." Songbirds are protected by state and

the federal government and you must be approved based on experience and having a facility to keep the birds that meets government standards.



If the thought of going against the law doesn't deter you from bringing home baby, then knowing what you are getting into might. Yes, the thought of raising a wild bird that may turn into a beloved family pet sounds like fun and educational for your children, but if you don't know what you are doing, the educational

experience will be that of teaching how to watch a living thing die due to negligence.

Raising baby birds is very involved and time consuming. First of all, they have to be fed every 30 minutes from dawn until dusk. This alone is a difficult task for those who have their own families to feed and lives to live. And if you feed it the wrong thing, you could kill it. You also have to take the place of the mother bird by making sure they are always warm. A chill could be the end for them.

So, if you find a bird in need, call a professional or look up wildlife rehabilitators on the Web. Good intentions can go awry and this is one way you can help

give songbirds a leg up. The other most important thing we can do is to be a responsible pet owner.

"Fifty-percent of all the birds I get are injured or orphaned because of a cat," Thompson said. Felines are the number two destructive force of songbird populations, only second to habitat destruction. So, if you have a cat that is used to his romps outside, try to limit or do away with this habit during the nest and fledgling season. Distract kitty with a good game of Chase the String and soon he will forget about going out for a hunt.

Melissa Kay Bishop is a journalist and wildlife hobbyist living in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. After years of volunteering and working with creatures great and small, she now chronicles the ones who visit her own yard. She can be reached at backporchranger@gmail.com.

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