



Wildlife Classroom Series: Baby Birds!

Wednesday, April 10, 2013

Comment From Elizabeth @ WCV:

looking forward to the class!! and want to share a "kudos" to Raina, she did a program at Austin's (my oldest son) school yesterday, and even a "WCV kid" learned a lot! Yay Raina!!!

Comment:

Soon time to learn about baby birds with Miss Amanda - cluck cluck!

Comment:

Ok, I'm here, I'm ready, but can only stay till 1:20, then I have to go back to that thing they call a job! I wish my job was as rewarding and fun as Amanda's, Elizabeth's, Raina's, Randy's or anyone else there! But I am ready and willing to learn as we have a few birds who are working on nests at our house now. (we put up three bird houses so far and at least one is being prepared for babies as we speak!)

Comment:

Tweet...tweet...present and waiting..(the early birds catch the worms..)

Comment:

I don't care what anybody says... there is just nothing cuter than a baby GHO! (Although I'm certainly willing to learn about more baby birds too... hint, hint...)

Comment:

Our kids are here and so excited to learn about song birds! They have wee WCV puppet gifted them by Judy W. and cannot wait!

Comment:

I have my song bird sitting on my computer here at work. I'll be "present" until my phone rings!



Wildlife Center Classroom Series: Baby Birds! Join us here on the moderated discussion on Wednesday, April 10 at 1:00 p.m. EDT.

Comment:

Please hold.

Comment:

OK. Now I'm ready.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Oh good.

Comment:

Yea! I didn't miss anything! I'm ready!

Comment From Elizabeth @ WCV:

me too!

Comment:

We're here Miss Amanda!!!!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Hi everyone!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Today's Wildlife Center Classroom Series is all about baby birds! I thought that since we're soon to be in baby bird season ... it is a timely topic.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Those of you who follow us regularly: you probably know we talk about the rehab staff gearing up for "baby season" (in general) in February. Squirrels are the first to arrive ... then rabbits ... sprinkle in a Great Horned Owl maybe ... and then comes April.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

And in April ... we typically get the first of our orphaned/injured songbirds. Not too many at first – but it only builds through April. And then it's May, and then it's pure chaos for the rehab staff (fawns arrive, and they are a lot of work).

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

But baby birds really change the mentality of those who work in the ICU (orphan room) ... and it changes the pace of everyone in the hospital!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Hopefully this class will foster an appreciation for the complex world of birds ... and also will help you better picture how we care for baby birds at the Center! It's going to be interactive ... so prepare to interact!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

First, just a brief biology lesson: if I say “biological classification” – what does that mean to you?

Comment:

scientific name?

Comment:

what genus (I think that's the right word..)

Comment:

attributes of the species

Comment:

what birds are made of ie skeletal frame

Comment:

Species and genus

Comment:

Passerine specie that is considered.

Comment:

same group

Comment:

where birds fit in the system?

Comment:

oooooh, very smart people here. I will just read and learn.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Yup, you guys are on the right track. We're talking about the method used to categorize organisms into groups such as genus or species.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

So, for example: Bluejays are in the “corvid” family ... does anyone know other birds in the same family?

Comment:

cardinals

Comment:

Cardinals?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Nope, not cardinals ...

Comment:

robins?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Not robins ...

Comment:

Flicker?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Nope ...

Comment:

Crows?

Comment:

Crow

Comment:

Crows?

Comment:

crows

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Yes!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Crows, Ravens, jackdaws, magpies ... they're classified in the same family because they have similar characteristics to one another [with intelligence being one of those things!]

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

So when we run through the biological classification categories, it goes like this: Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, Species.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

And many of the baby birds that we see here at the Center are in the "passerine" [Passeriformes] order. Does anyone know what that means?

Comment:

(I had better get my bird book out if you are asking these questions)

Comment:

Hope there's no quiz later!

Comment:

would that be migratory?

Comment:

Songbirds?

Comment:

perching birds

Comment:

You can kind of get an idea of which species are classified together when you look through the bird ID books--they usually group them accordingly.

Comment:

Birds of prey?

Comment:

Darn phone call....I'm here now.....hawks or falcons?

Comment:

Passive...live in harmony so to speak?

Comment:

Passerines are songbirds

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Yup, flyndflower has it the closest ... Birds in this order are also sometimes called the “perching birds” ... also “songbirds”, though this isn’t really as accurate for all passerines (crows are passerines, they don’t really have a melodic voice, though they have TONS of cool noises!)

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

They share some characteristics: their feet all have the three-toes-forward, one-toe-backward arrangement (called anisodactyl arrangement – there’s your vocab word of the day!). They also have “altricial” chicks – meaning that they are blind and featherless when they hatch from the egg (read: require A LOT of parental care!)

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Most of the birds that we’ll talk about today are passerines.

Comment:

We've already heard about a dozen new vocab words !!!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Does anyone know the #1 passerine species [most numerous] we admit at the Center?

Comment:

titmouse?

Comment:

robins?

Comment:

Robins?

Comment:

Robins?

Comment:

Cardinals(VA state bird)

Comment:

robins?

Comment:

Bluebirds? or Cardinals

Comment:

carolina chickadee? house wren? I have all of these in my yard. Plus a bunch more

Comment:

Robins?



American Robin

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

In 2012, we admitted 142 robins. And 639 of the birds we admitted in 2012 were passerines!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

So, the rehab staff having mixed feelings about baby birds – Amber, for one, is VERY excited about baby bird season. Kelli is more of a “mammal person”, I think.

Comment:

What is the hardest or most critical aspect of having the baby birds at the center?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

That's what I was going to ask you guys -- no matter how you look at baby birds, I think it's fair to say that baby bird season is challenging for the staff. Any ideas why?

Comment:

feeding them

Comment:

that's a lot of babies to take care of!!

Comment:

the required amount of feedings daily

Comment:

imprinting/humanizing

Comment:

Constant feeding? And warmth?

Comment:

round the clock feedings, keeping them warm

Comment:

Babies have to be fed often!

Comment:

keeping them warm until they can maintain their own heat

Comment From Elizabeth @ WCV:

how many we can have at any given time

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Tons! I need to keep better track of that this year ... but ... easily 50 ...

Comment:

And varied diets?

Comment:

Teeny tiny mouths, no way to control, have to feed every 20 minutes or so

Comment:

I suppose they need many feedings a day.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

And yes, all of these answers are correct -- it all makes it challenging!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

The number of feedings a day, meeting nutritional needs, keeping up with the constant rounds of feedings

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

And, one of the very first tricky things that we experience ... is identification!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

One of the very first things we have to do – which is sometimes pretty challenging! – is figure out exactly what we’re dealing with when a baby bird comes in.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Being able to properly identify the songbirds that come in is very helpful – so we know what normal behavior is, we can assess whether or not we can and should re-nest that healthy young bird, it helps us consider dietary requirements and future husbandry requirements, and it also allows us to properly match up two single baby birds of the same species to be new “siblings”!

Comment:

I would guess, since they don't have feathers, kind of hard to identify

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Yes -- it can be tricky, the younger they are!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

So, we’re going to test your identification skills.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Identifying young birds can be difficult sometimes – many of them do not look like their adult counterparts. The hatchling birds are very small and have no feathers ... the nestling birds are typically just starting to grow in feathers, but the colors can be quite misleading ... and the fledglings start to look more like adults, but even they are tricky to identify sometimes.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

We have a couple of charts that help us at the Wildlife Center, as well as some picture guides (something that we created in-house years ago from our pictures).

Comment:

So can we use the cheat sheets too?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

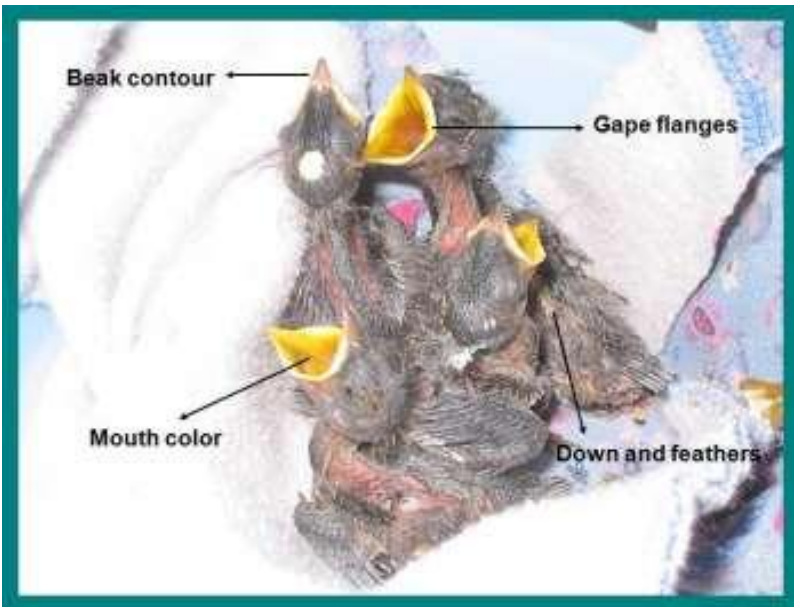
I couldn't figure out a way to make handouts available for our class. So you guys will have to muddle through and know you have a hard job! :)

Comment:

Cool! I want to volunteer there while the baby birds are there!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

In general, we look at a few things:



Baby bird clues

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Beak contour: The shape of the beak can give some clues as to what type of “eater” the bird will be when it gets older – an insectivore, a seed-eater, an omnivore, etc. So that can help narrow down the field.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Gape flanges: This area is the where the upper and lower beak joins together. This area can be quite pronounced in young birds [giving some birds an appearance of having “lips”, like starlings] and can be bright in color.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Mouth Color: The color inside of the bird’s mouth varies depending on species – some are deep red, some are bright yellow, some have really crazy special characteristics like these Cedar Waxwings!



Cedar Waxwing nestlings

Comment:

Oh my!

Comment:

Look at all those cute little hungry birdies!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

See their crazy iridescent marks in their mouth?

Comment:

too cute!

Comment:

hungry babies! They are darling!

Comment:

Big mouths!

Comment:

Boy, mom can't miss that mouth!

Comment:

pink and orange mouths

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

And then we also look at the birds's down and feathers: This is probably obvious, but the color of the bird's down and feathers can also give clues as to what the species is. But ... these can be tricky!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

What color are the feathers on this bird?



What color are the feathers?

Comment:

blue/gray

Comment From Randy @ Wildlife Center:

Blue.

Comment:

Blue?

Comment:

Periwinkle

Comment:

Gray? Brown?

Comment:

blue'

Comment:

But they could be gray once they actually come in?

Comment:

Looks blue

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Trick question! We can't tell yet. These are the "pin feathers" -- and they can be very misleading.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

These developing feathers are "blood feathers" -- so they have a blood supply to them, which makes them look dark-colored. So the blue-ish color you see isn't the feather color at all (or rather, maybe the feather MIGHT be blue ... but we don't know yet!) So don't let pin feathers fool you.

Comment From Randy @ Wildlife Center:

You are very tricky, Ms. Amanda.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

I am tricky.

Comment:

I am constantly fooled by pin feathers

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

And as a side note, the advantage of identifying birds in-person is that we can also look for behavioral cues to help with identification (or sounds too). Cardinals do this little "shivering" move when they gape for food.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

And just to catch up on those earlier photos, since folks were asking -- the labeled photo of the four baby birds -- those are Barn Swallows. And the intro photo (advertising class) -- Bluebirds.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

So ... identification. Ready to give it a try?

Comment From Randy @ Wildlife Center:

Yes, ma'am.

Comment:

yes

Comment:

ready!



What are they?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

So these are nestlings ... they don't have too many feathers yet, but they do have pin feathers that are starting to unfurl. You can see they are a rust-brown color ...

Comment:

Other than cute, haven't a clue.

Comment:

they look like aliens!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Ooooh, Randy and Sue in CT have it ...

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

The beaks are fairly wide and conical in shape ... so that says to me that they will probably grow up to be seed-eaters.

Comment:

I'm not falling for that pin feather deal again.

Comment:

wren?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Nope, not wrens ...

Comment:

sparrows

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Not sparrows ... though those are seed eaters too ...



Any ideas?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Same species, just older! Now in the fledgling stage ... any guesses?

Comment From Randy @ Wildlife Center:

Northern Cardinal.

Comment:

baby cardinals

Comment:

cardinals?

Comment:

cardinal

Comment:

cardinal

Comment:

cardinal

Comment:

That one looks like a cardinal.

Comment From Randy @ Wildlife Center:

I'm sticking with Northern Cardinal.

Comment:

cardinal?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Northern Cardinal! Bonus points to Randy for the proper name.

Comment:

Never would have guessed cardinal from their baby pictures.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

It can be very tough!

Comment:

Is it the male or female?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

We don't know yet! All the juveniles have these rust-brown color.

Comment:

I must be a slow learner--I couldn't get that one, but it seems so obvious now that everyone says it!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

So, just to share a few natural history factoids about Northern Cardinals – or “NOCAs” [ornithological abbreviation that we use in-house].

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Last year we admitted 31 cardinals.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Cardinals typically lay their eggs in March or April – there are one to five eggs in a nest, typically about 2-3.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

The female cardinal builds the nest – and the male feeds his mate during the nest-building process as well as the incubation period.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

According to the Birds of North America online, the female cardinal's song from the nest provides the male with information as to whether he should bring food to her.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Nestlings cardinals fledge about 7-13 days after they hatch; and then are independent about 25-56 days after that. Both male and female cardinals care for nestlings, though the male contributes more food.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Okay next ID:



Can you ID me?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

So you can't see inside the bird's mouth in this photo ... but you can definitely get an idea of the contour of the beak. You can also see some small, pale cream-colored gape flanges ... and those feathers are starting to come in!

Comment:

robin?

Comment:

robin?

Comment From Randy @ Wildlife Center:

Northern Mockingbird.

Comment:

starling?

Comment From Elizabeth @ WCV:

MODO?

Comment:

Road runner?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Nope ... no right answers yet ...

Comment:

blue jay

Comment:

a seed eater

Comment:

CUJO

Comment:

Blue Jay

Comment:

Crow?

Comment From Elizabeth @ WCV:

starling?

Comment From Randy @ Wildlife Center:

Any "close" answers?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Now we're getting it -- Barb and Terry !

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

This is a Bluejay nestling.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Both Blue Jay (BLJA) parents gather materials to make their nest and both contribute to the constructions process, though typically the male does more of the gathering, and females do more of the building.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Blue Jays typically lay about 2-7 eggs in a clutch. Eggs hatch after 17-18 days. Only the female incubates the eggs, and the male brings her food. The babies fledge at about 17-21 days ... the male does the feeding of the female and the young for the first week of the nestling phase.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Blue Jays typically only have one brood per year – the nestling and fledgling phase is a bit longer than in some of the other birds we'll discuss – these “big babies” can require parental care for at least a month or two after fledging.

Comment:

But his feathers are black!!!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Well, he has a lot of grey down ... and then the tips of his feathers that are starting to unfurl are actually white! But yes, they do have black in their feathers too!



Blue Jay feathers

Comment:

Do they and the cardinals lay more than one clutch during a season?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

The cardinals do typically shoot for more than one clutch, yes.

Comment:

Are songbirds monogamous?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

A lot of it depends on the species -- many of them are seasonally monogamous ... but may not be with the same mate each year. And of course, with closely studied species, there is some evidence of "straying" ... there's even some unusual accounts of three birds raising a family!

Comment:

Blue jays are not very friendly to other birds - at least not in my yard. They are very loud as well.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

They can be a bit loud and bossy. They're awesome. :)

Comment:

Will they use the same nest for more than one clutch in the same season or build a new one each time?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

I believe many of the species use the same nest during the season -- but then next season, they start fresh.

Comment From Randy @ Wildlife Center:

You are like "Ask Mr. Wizard", Ms. Amanda.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

I have some practice. Don't ask me about history though.

Comment From Randy @ Wildlife Center:

And Blue Jays do a nice job of sounding the "hawk hawk" alarm!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

And they're SO smart! Same family as crows and ravens!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Okay, next ID!



Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

This one is a tough one. Fairly long beak, but still wide. So probably could eat a few different things. Not too much to go on with the feathers since the bird still has a lot of pin feathers ... but it has some crazy fluffy grey down on top of its head ...

Comment:

nuthatch?

Comment:

Cedar Waxwing?

Comment:

Bluebird?

Comment:

Tufted titmouse

Comment:

hummingbird

Comment:

chickadee?

Comment:

I have no clue

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Nope ..

Comment:

Mocking bird? Grey fluffy stuff....

Comment:

Robin

Comment:

dove



... a little older ...

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

... a little bit older ... is that more helpful?

Comment:

Some kind of woodpecker?

Comment:

Pterodactyl?

Comment:

GN in a bird costume? What about a woodpecker?

Comment:

Robin?



... how about now?

Comment:
woodpecker

Comment:
robin

Comment:
robin?

Comment:
ok--that has to be a robin

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Yup, American Robin!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
American robins are pretty common and widespread throughout the U.S., and they are definitely the most represented of our songbird species at the Wildlife Center. Last year, we admitted 142 robins.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Any ideas on the four-letter avian abbreviation code we use?

Comment:
AMRO

Comment:
AMRO?

Comment:
amro?

Comment:
AMRO

Comment:
AMRO

Comment:

AMRO ???

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Yup, all right!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

In the robin world, the female selects the nest location and does most of the building. This can take her 5-7 days, or up to two weeks – some of it is weather dependent! Conditions can't be too wet or too dry for mud – because she needs mud to build the nest.

Comment:

And they will build where ever she wants, like on top of my outside light fixture!

Comment:

I had robins to build a nest in the planter right outside my backdoor. It was amazing to watch from eggs to fledge

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Once the female lays eggs – about 3-4 in a clutch – she alone incubates them, but takes frequent breaks to eat. When the nestlings hatch, they compete with one another – the loudest and most persistent gets the most food. Both parents feed the young.

Comment:

Do they lay bluish eggs?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Yes, blue-ish in color.

Comment:

I love listening to robins in the spring--they scold and chase each other around, then they sing so wonderfully!!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Young robins fledge at about 13 days of age – and they are fed for the following three weeks. Robins typically have two broods a year, so if the mom is ready to start nesting again, the dad will provide more care for the fledglings and will take them to a communal roost at night. At about 4 weeks old, they are independent.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Okay, next ID!



Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Another tough one! No feathers, just down to speak of ... long beak, but still fairly wide ... so maybe another omnivore ...

Comment:

chicadee?

Comment:

Wow. Tiny and unidentifiable.

Comment:

woodpecker

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Nope, woodpeckers aren't passerines ...

Comment:

Starling?



Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Nice open mouth in this one ... any ideas?

Comment:

FEED ME!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

This is a Northern Mockingbird.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Mockingbirds can sometimes look like robins at certain parts of the developmental process, but they are a species that give them away once they start food-calling – they have a very loud persistent peep!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

In the courting phase, male mockingbirds will build several nests in about mid-April. The females will then choose which to use and will finish off the nest by constructing the lining. Only the female incubates the eggs and broods the chicks – she takes breaks to eat and stretch.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Both parents feed their offspring – and they are very defensive parents! I thought this was interesting, from BNA Online:

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Furthermore, the strength of defense displayed by mates was correlated. Adults learn to recognize individual humans who repeatedly intrude onto their territory during the nesting season and will selectively mob those individuals while ignoring other humans that pass through their territory.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Young mockingbirds typically fledge from their nest at about 12 days of age and they are able to fly within 8 days of departure from the nest. Mockingbirds can have 2-3 broods/season – and they commonly overlap. So if the mom mockingbird returns to the nest to lay eggs/incubate, the male will care for the fledglings.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Last ID question for you!



Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Here's a fledgling aged bird ... a little blue on the wings ... lots of grey feathers too ...

Comment:

Awww. This one is very cute!

Comment:

I don't what it is, but it's wicked cute!

Comment:

bluebird?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Yes!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Eastern Bluebird.

Comment:

absolutely adorable!

Comment:

adorable!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Last year, we admitted 24 Eastern Bluebirds – EABL.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Eastern Bluebirds like to nest in naturally occurring cavities or nest boxes – just the “cavity” part is really important to them! Actually, bluebird population numbers have been helped a bit by those who put up nestboxes for them (particularly ones that are protected from starlings and house sparrows).

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

The female bluebird builds the nest and lays 3-6 eggs on average. She incubates the eggs for 11-19 days – and then also incubates the new nestlings for the first several days of their life. Both parents feed their offspring.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Young bluebirds leave the nest at about 17-18 days of age, and then they remain undercover for the next week until they're better at flying.

Comment From Elizabeth @ WCV:

is he chubby or "fluffed-up"?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

He's just a ball of fluff!

Comment:

I have a bluebird house and am trying to create an area that a bluebird family would love to move in to!

Comment:

We had Bluebirds raise 3 clutches one year. Then the squirrels got to them the next year, bugged them and they haven't been back.

Comment:

when should one put up nest boxes for these guys?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Now! Well, some of that probably depends on nesting season in your area. We're into nesting season here in VA ...

Comment:

I have 2 bluebird boxes Amanda and sometimes spiders get in them so have to watch them carefull ;-)

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

And I just want to throw in a little natural history information of one more bird too – one that is NOT a passerine though! Some of you who tuned into last Monday's "Cam in the Classroom" discussion may have seen Mrs. Matheson's third-grade class's questions about mourning doves – since they are watching a nest that is at their school. These are pretty interesting birds!



Mourning Dove squab

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

So far, we've talked about passerines – but mourning doves are "non-passerines". They are in the "columbiforme" order. One interesting thing about these types of birds is that can drink by suction – they don't need to lift their heads and tilt them back to drink.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

In the Mourning Dove world, both the male and female will incubate the eggs and will brood the new nestlings. Eggs hatch about 14 days after they are laid.



Mourning Dove squab

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Both parents feed their offspring – but they don't just gather food nearby and bring it to the nest – they actually make it! Both parents feed their young "crop milk" -- something that they secrete from the cells of their crop. The crop milk is high in protein and fat -- and doesn't contain carbohydrates.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

But ... as adults, they pretty much eat a ton of carbohydrates -- they are seed-eaters! The parents start to introduce seed into the baby doves' diets once they are several days old -- and then by the time they are ready to leave the nest, they are ready for a grown-up diet.

Comment:

Do they all have the white nose spot?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

That's their egg tooth -- the very very young ones do!

Comment:

Do you ever get Baltimore Orioles at WCV? (asking cause I really like them)

Comment:

A friend told me to cut oranges in half and hang them in my yard trees to attract Baltimore Orioles. True? I have Trumpet vine which is supposed to attract them as well, but have no seen any

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

We've seen a few orioles in here at the Center -- not something that we see commonly though. Their habitats may be a little more specialized -- though I think they like to be in open woodland, forest edge, and orchards. Oranges ... because of a nectar thing? Or to attract insects for them to eat?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Whew ... almost 2:00 p.m. ... I'd better speed through my next section!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

So, when these baby birds are at the Wildlife Center ...

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

So, for the most part, it doesn't matter TOO much what the specific species is in order for us to care for a baby bird – though figuring out that order is important! Many of the passerines eat the same diet – a special formula that the rehabilitators make several times a week. This diet is either syringe-fed to the babies, or fed in small smooshy bits with the non-cotton end of a cotton-tipped applicator.



Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

The diet is balanced for these birds with high protein and fat demands. Very nutritious stuff!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

The birds also receive a variety of insects, and as they get older, they're introduced to their "adult" (species-specific) diet.

Comment:

So you have to have staff there 24 x 7 during these times..

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

No, fortunately not round the clock -- they don't eat through the night! The birds keep the rehab staff (and their students) on their feet all day – from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. The littlest birds have to be fed every 15 minutes! Many people usually help out in the baby bird area in the morning – getting all the birds weighed (important for monitoring – they do this every day), into clean enclosures, and fed.

Comment:

(and cleaning up all the poo?) Whose job is that?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

The rehab staff -- it's not all glamorous work like feeding! :)

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Once that is under control, one person is a slave to the kitchen-timer! The timer is set for every 15-20 minutes, depending on the age of the baby birds ... and if there are few enough baby birds in the room, the person responsible may have a couple of minutes in between rounds of feeding to maybe wash a few dishes or do something else productive. If we have a lot of baby birds, the person usually ends up doing a round of feeding ... and then starting all over again!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

As the birds get older and get to that fledgling age, the rehabbers will start to move them outside, to the Center's aviary.



Aviary hallway

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

At this point, the birds may be living outside – but the rehabbers still need to hand-feed them! They run out about once an hour to provide a hand-feeding – but at this point, the birds are starting to eat a bit on their own too.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Once they are old enough and are flying around the aviary well, are completely self-feeding, and don't want any more hand-feedings from the rehab staff, then the rehabbers will consider them ready for release!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

That's the basic overview of feeding. There of course are a lot of other important things the rehabbers do when they care for baby birds – providing proper perches, keeping the birds very very clean, misting them regularly, setting them up with others of their own species ... but ... I'll try to keep it basic for today! And of course, those are the healthy birds ... that doesn't even begin to speak about the injured ones that might come in (mostly from cat attacks).

Comment:

So which bird has babies that have to learn to fly from the ground, & may get to be considered "lost?" Found some last year, didn't bother them, though.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Ah yes ... that's my next section. the "prevention" section!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

So we talked a lot about the baby birds in our care – so hopefully that gives you an idea of what goes on in terms of their rehabilitation. But ... let's spend a little time talking about "prevention"! Because really, in many ways, the animals we help best are the ones that never come in!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

So, our first course of action during baby season – whether someone calls in about a baby bird, or just brings one in to the Center – is to really assess the situation, get a good look at the bird, properly identify it, and see if reuniting is a consideration. Many (many, many) times, the bird is just fine – and is not orphaned! That's good news -- that means we can get it back to mom and dad.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Hatchlings and nestlings are baby birds that still need to be in the nest. These young birds are not fully feathered yet. If you find a nestling out of the nest ... look around and see if you can locate the nest. The thing about nestling birds is that they can't have gone that far – they don't have feathers and can't fly yet!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Of course, correct identification of the nestling or of the parents will help locate the nest (are you looking for a cavity nester, or a bird that nests on flat surfaces, or shrubs, etc).

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

If you find the nest ... you can put the bird back! However ... does anyone know the most important part of putting a young nestling bird back in a nest?

Comment:

?

Comment:

no

Comment:

Don't fall off the ladder?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Well, yes, that is pretty important too!!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Make sure they are warm to the touch!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

If the baby is cold, you can simply warm the bird in your hands before returning it to the nest. Returning a young, cold bird to the nest will sometimes encourage the parent to push the baby out of the nest, as it is trying to remove a cold object away from other warm eggs and/or young.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

If you're dealing with several nestling birds that have come from the same nest – say, the original fell out of the tree and damaged – you can make a new nest and place the birds back in that.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

You'll want to use a container than is similar in size and shape to the original nest -- small berry baskets, or margarine tubs with drain holes punched in the bottom work well. Securely attach it as close as possible to the original nest site.

Comment:

Never would have thought of that.....warming the baby. Thanks!

Comment:

never thought of that--makes sense

Comment:

Oh my - would not have thought about that

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Now, one important note – you can't split up nestling birds into multiple nests. So if one nestling fell out of the nest, and you just can't access the original nest with the siblings – or it's not safe to do so, well ... we can't have one nestling bird by itself, because, depending on the age, the parents may still need to brood the young bird at night.

Comment:

I have a question for class today. I have learned from you that it is ok to put baby birds back in a nest if they fall out. How in the heck to do you get them back in the nest when there appears to be no room because of the other baby/ies? Hold their wings in? Would it work to use a knitted nest right next to the original one is too full? Wouldn't want to hurt the baby/ies trying to help. Hope this makes sense.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

That's a good point -- it can be a tight fit in there! Yes, tucking everyone's wings in and then settling them in together is best -- it'll be a snug fit. It's designed that way so they can help keep each other warmand so they develop correctly as they grow!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

We also get many, many calls about fledgling birds.



Fledgling

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Birds at this age, as we just learned, are out of the nest ... but that doesn't mean that they fly well yet. Many new fledges stay close to the nest and try to stay undercover, until they really figure out how to fly well. But ... you know how things go ... they may not always stay hidden, particularly with humans out and about doing yard work, etc.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Fledgling birds are fully feathered on their bodies and wings – typically the last set of feathers to grow in all the way are the tail feathers. So if you see a bird hopping and making short flights – check out the tail feathers. If they’re not fully grown in yet ... you’re probably looking at a fledgling.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Who knows what you should do if you find a healthy, fledgling bird by itself?

Comment:

leave it alone, but monitor it

Comment:

Leave it alone.

Comment:

Leave it alone as mom and dad are probably nearby.

Comment:

return the fledgling to a protective area like a bush or hedge ?

Comment:

Leave alone and watch for parents to come and help it.

Comment:

Leave it alone - but watch to see if it is ok

Comment:

Keep an eye on it to see if any parents or a nest are apparent in the vicinity.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Right -- glad to see so many people saying leave it alone (but watch) ... that is right. The best thing we can do is just leave it alone!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Fledging is a very natural part of growing up! Mom and dad are in the area, defending their young, and continuing to feed their young.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

But this is the equivalent of the human kids going out to ride bikes in the driveway while mom and dad are inside getting some other stuff done. They’re young ... they’re not on their own yet ... but they can have some independence and don’t always have to be right there by mom and dad! No need for the social worker to run over to the house and kidnap the kid off of his bike!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

So, the very best thing we can do for birds at this age is to leave them alone – and keep kids, dogs, and cats out of the area.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

One other very important preventative thing we can do to help baby birds is to keep cats indoors. I know that this can sometimes be a very “hot button” topic – but given what we see here at the Center, and what we know from our patient statistics ... outdoor cats really have a profound effect on wildlife. So we very very strongly encourage cat owners to keep their cats indoors. In addition to helping save wild lives, it’s healthier for the cats too!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

So, I hoped you guys enjoyed today's Wildlife Center Classroom Series on baby birds. I'm going to go through and answer some questions before entirely wrapping up ... but for those of you who need to leave, I hope that you learned a little bit more about some of the birds you might see in your backyard – and now you can hopefully envision what the rehabbers are doing during baby bird season!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

And, we still have our special Spring Caring for Songbird packages still available – you can purchase a “standard” package, or we do still have about 34 packages of cookies left, so you can order a Deluxe package with cookies and a puppet! We won't reorder these, so we are limited by what we have in-stock ... and we should probably move them on out before it's too hot to mail those cookies!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Feel free to order if you (or someone you know) would appreciate helping us care for the hundreds of baby birds we'll get in this season ... they are a lot of work ... and they're due any day now!!
http://wildlifecenter.org/news_events/news/spring-caring-critters-2013

Comment:

My feathered relatives, the American Robins, appreciate all you, and other wildlife lovers, do!

Comment:

yes thx u amanda

Comment:

thanks so much-learned a lot

Comment:

One note also, when returning young to the nest, be very slow as the other nestlings don't fall out or get scared out of the nest - then you have an even bigger problem of getting them all back in!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Also a good tip!

Comment:

Very informative session today, Amanda!! Thanks for enlightening us on the world of baby birds! :o)

Comment:

Do you have to be worried about baby birds being imprinted on humans?

Comment:

With birds that are so young, how do the rehabbers make sure they don't get imprinted them?

Comment:

how does the staff prevent imprinting while hand feeding ?

Comment:

Amanda, how do you prevent imprinting?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

The nice thing about most of these songbirds is that they don't imprint TOO easily on humans. Or rather, I should say, with our simply "hands off" method of raising wildlife, we're in good shape.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

We don't get them one-on-one attention in terms of talking to them, petting them, interacting with them a lot -- we make sure they have other bird friends that are housed with them, and we just interact at feeding and cleaning time.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Even though we're feeding them a lot, we still have a "hands off" approach because we're not talking to them, and not treating them like pets.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Housing them with others of their own species also really helps!

Comment:

Do you ever get hummingbird patients @ WCV ???

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Yup, we sure do! If you ever want to check and see what patients we regularly admit, you can take a look at some of our annual reports: <http://wildlifecenter.org/about-center/publications>

Comment:

When you have a bunch of baby birds, how do you know which patient # each one is?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

We have small temporary bands on their legs. We take them off prior to release, because they're not the official kind of bands you'd use to band birds ... but they help with ID.

Comment:

In the aviary, are the species only with their own kind?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

We'll mix species that get along with one another -- so, birds in the thrush family, maybe ... robins and mockingbirds, etc.

Comment:

I love doves. We have a pair that build a nest every year on a wreath above our garage. our driveway is a mess during nesting season

Comment:

Lydia, according to Birds and Blooms - that I just happen to have on my nook, it says oranges and grape jelly - they like the sweetness.

Comment:

QQ: Is there such a bird as a mudhen?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

I think this is a nickname for the Coot.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

(which is a marsh bird)

Comment:

What happens if you mess up and put different kinds of babies together?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

That's okay! We usually can get bird in with their own species, but it's more important for them to have some sort of a buddy -- so we can temporarily do two "single species" together until we can get them in with their own kind.

Comment:

Do you label the little nests? For those of us new to baby bird feedings?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Each bird has a color band -- and then each enclosure (aquarium or reptarium) has a cage card on it with the ID key.

Comment:

do most eat bugs?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Many of the birds do feed insects to their young -- even if as adults, they primarily eat seed.

Comment:

B Bird ??.....when you see cardinals that appear normal size, screaming and screaming, and then a normal size comes up and feeds it.....are these baby's that are like gluttons? like jays that won't grow up.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Right -- the big fledges! Some take awhile to grow up! It all really depends on the species.

Comment:

SONGBIRD Question for class: Our kids would like to know what aspect or part of the male songbird's song is most attractive to the female?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Whew ... that's a good question ... that would probably be a whole other class in of itself -- and one that I'm no expert on! This really varies by species too -- different birds look for different things!

Comment:

Classroom series: Do all baby birds have the instinct to poop away from their nest?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Oooh, good question! Many of them do have the instinct to shoot "outwards". But if they're too young to do that, or not skilled enough, mom and dad remove the fecal sacs from the nest to keep things clean. Some birds will actually carry them far away from the nest and will drop the fecal sacs into water -- to get rid of any evidence that there is a nest around!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Sometimes people with swimming pools really get bombarded!

Comment:

Wow Caleb's class! What a question!

Comment:

Do you return these birds to the area they came from? Or in the case of "Common" species, just toss them out the door??

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

We do return them back to where they were rescued -- since we're in the national forest, we aren't really ideal habitat for a good number of these species. And we don't want to release 100 robins here each year!

Comment:

Good afternoon Amanda. Have you ever seen an albino cardinal? The one we have around my area has the red coloured beak and legs, but the body is cream coloured. This is the second year for this bird.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

I haven't! Sounds pretty!

Comment:

Would you ever , or have you ever put baby crows in with Jaz?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

We have not -- since she's imprinted on humans, she wouldn't be a good role model.

Comment:

But as a baby, I would prefer to be friends with someone who feeds me and cleans me up. But it seems to be easier than I thought to not have imprinting occur.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Well, ... not as a baby songbird, fortunately. Baby raptors ... different story. Remember, you can't pain all birds with the same brush. So many differences!

Comment:

With baby birds are they "stimulated" to pee and poop or does that come naturally for them.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

It comes naturally ... and quite frequently!

Comment:

great class miss AA! thank you.

Comment:

Thanks Amanda for such an interesting class. I have one question do all birds have an egg tooth? I have seen them on eaglets.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

I believe so. Most of them lose that after a few days out of the egg.

Comment:

Very interesting class, Amanda! Thanks so much!

Comment:

What a super class ~ Amanda ~ learning so much here all the time ~ thank you ~

Comment:

This was really wonderful, and I learned a lot! Thanks so much for sharing your time and knowledge!!

Comment:

Thanks so much for all the great information Amanda!

Comment:

thx u so much for talking with us we like that without the mods we r lost

Comment:

Caleb - those kids are smart as whips!! Hey kids!! ****Waving****

Comment:

I love to watch families at the feeder! So cute watching the babies learn!

Comment From Elizabeth @ WCV:

thank you for such a wonderful class Amanda, you made coding invoices go by very quickly :)

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Ha -- thanks!

Comment:

This was great!! Thanks Amanda loved learning about the crop milk wow.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

That is a really bizarre/interesting/fascinating thing -- I mean, a bird that makes milk!

Comment:

Good point - last Spring our dog got a young cardinal. We have a fenced in yard, so didn't think twice about letting him out without checking the yard first. I do now. I buried the fledging under the nest tree.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Good point -- I have had the same predicament!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

We had Blue Jays nesting in the backyard one year, and I saw some fledglings out -- so I went out to see if they were in a safe place, or if I needed to go walk my dogs out in the front yard.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

As I was peering over our deck ... one of the parents screamed and came down and clocked me on the head!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Which convinced me to go back inside and leave them alone!

Comment:

Thanks Amanda. Great class. Love learning this stuff!

Comment:

Thanks Amanda! You must spend a lot of time gathering info and preparing for us--we really appreciate all your hard work and dedication--thanks soooo much!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Thanks -- it's fun!

Comment:

AA, you are the best! What's our next topic?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Hmmm, we have some thoughts on that ... :)

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Next class: next month, 2nd Wednesday! So, May 8, 1:00 p.m Eastern!

Comment:

Odd ????: Have a cat who actually got a bird in her jaws, but only held onto it. I finally got the bird out and let it go. Would the bird not survive because of cat saliva, even though not bitten?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Our recommendation is to get the bird checked out by a vet/rehabber ... cat teeth are so sharp, they can make small puncture wounds that are very hard to see.

Comment:

On my calendar!

Comment:

Thanks for fulfilling WCV mission Amanda. These classes are a great way to teach the world to care for and about wildlife

Comment:

Caring for Songbirds is my CFC gift to me, this spring. My love of all critters started as a child watching the birds in our backyard. Thank you, Amanda, for having Songbirds as your topic, today!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Okay guys, I'm going to sign off for now ... thanks again for attending class! If you want to do a last-minute sponsor of the Caring for Songbirds (or the other special critters) ... let us know!

http://wildlifecenter.org/news_events/news/spring-caring-critters-2013

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

(or Lacy and I will eat all the cookies soon)



Thanks for coming to class!

Comment:

Great class Amanda! Got here late and just finished reading back. Thanks so much for all the information!