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# If You Find a Baby Quail...

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## HOW YOU CAN HELP BABY QUAIL SURVIVE

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photo: Dave Mills



Gambel's Quail [*Callipepla gambelii*] are some of the most beautiful birds in the Southwest! They will fly short distances, especially if startled, but primarily live and nest on the ground. Quail are social birds and live in coveys, usually comprised of a Sentry Quail and one or more families. During spring and summer most of us have been fortunate to see a family of quail, anxious and watchful Mom in the lead, followed by a bevy of barely-inch-high, fuzzy buff and brown striped chicks, Dad bringing up the rear with many "quail comments" and excited exclamations! While this is a picture we all like to cherish, the hard reality is that most of these adorable babies will not survive to adulthood. Predators, including bullfrogs, roadrunners, woodpeckers, grackles, javelina and ants will eat them! Quail parents may make a brave effort to defend their chicks or distract predators (including us), but eventually they will have to abandon the chicks and escape with their lives to produce more chicks or continue to raise those chicks they were able to rescue.

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<sup>1</sup> [an organization devoted to quail rescue and rehab.](#) 602-996-1934.



This technique ensures the survival of the many (or the species) over the survival of the few.

However, natural predators or “nature taking its course” is not the issue here. The chicks we are dealing with are at risk due to non-nature related threats. Try to follow these rules when you’re not sure if a chick needs to be rescued. (1) A chick that is alone for over 10 minutes needs help. Standing near the chick will keep the parents away, so observe from a distance. If the parents don’t call or come for the chick, it’s lost and needs help. (2) Any chick that is in the garage, carport or house, in the mouths of pets, in the hands of curious children, in swimming pools, under mowers, in flowerpots, in tree wells or built-up flower beds, in streets where they can’t get over curbs to follow their parents (even if they escape traffic), or fallen into storm drains are obviously in need of immediate rescue, but what should you do to help it? Until you can get the chick to a volunteer specializing in raising Quail, here are some very important tips to help it survive.

photo: Jeani Garrett

1. Catch the chicks even before you call us! If you leave the chicks to call for help, they may be gone or dead before you return, so pick them up immediately! If the chick is cold, heat a small dry towel in the microwave until it is very warm (not hot) on the inside of your wrist, and tuck the chick into it. (Even if it appears dead try warming it as it may just be so cold it can’t move.)



Please put the chicks (and any eggs that are left behind) in a box with a warm, dry towel and call us. Don’t turn the chicks loose before we return your call, even with adult quail nearby, unless you are certain it’s the right parents! Baby quail without their parents will not survive. They will get cold, starve or be killed by predators. If you turn them loose with quail other than their parents they will be pecked and chased away, and will not survive.



2. Please resist the temptation to try to raise it yourself! It always turns out badly for the quail! If you love and respect these beautiful little birds, please see to it that everything done is in their best interest. (Quail rehabilitators love quail just as much as you do, and have all the right feed, equipment, and experience to keep

photo: Jeani Garrett



them healthy and eventually, free!). We have normally well-meaning people bring us chicks they've kept for several days because "the children wanted to keep them" or "they are so cute," but are now near death because they weren't kept warm enough, not fed the right foods or were handled too much. Yes, they are adorable, but being cute shouldn't be a death sentence! They are not toys or pets and they deserve to grow up and live in their natural environment. In addition, you need a Game &

Fish permit to raise or keep native Arizona Wildlife. Please don't demand that we tell you how to care for them. You are asking us to break the law and jeopardize our permit, and worse, you are asking us to do something that will most likely result in the death of the chick. Even if it survives, you can never safely release just one or two quail. They need to be released in large groups when they are old enough (usually three months). Quail raised in captivity and not properly prepared for eventual release usually die, and that death isn't a kind one. They will suffer fear, pain, and finally, starvation. Quail have a well-defined social structure and a chick raised away from others of its kind will be an outcast with no knowledge of "proper quail manners," predators, mating behavior, or even where to find water!

3. Keep the chick warm and dry. This is a must! The bird's environment must be 90-100 degrees. They are desert birds and, unlike us, do not appreciate an air-conditioned room! It can kill them in a short time! An empty fish tank, or a box that the chick can't jump out of, with cloth towels (not paper as the quail may eat it!) in



the bottom and a heating pad set on medium under the aquarium is ideal. Be sure the chick doesn't get under the towel. It can cook or suffocate.

4. Don't attempt to water or feed the chick until you talk to a rehabilitator! Never force-feed or water baby quail. They will peck on their own. Never use an eye-dropper to give liquid to any bird. The opening to the windpipe is right behind their tongue and they breathe at a rapid rate, especially when stressed. We get chicks that are dying because they have inhaled fluid into their lungs. Baby quail aspirate easily. Don't put a container of water in with them. Quail chicks can drown in a few drops of water, or at best, will get wet and cold. Baby quail do not eat honey, milk, crackers, cornmeal, cat or dog food, sugar water, pancake batter, most commercial baby bird formulas, or any kind of alcohol! Their beaks are too small and soft to eat quail block unless it's finely crushed. In case of a delay in getting the chick to us, they can be temporarily fed game bird/turkey starter, poppy seed, finely chopped broccoli tops or crushed hard-boiled egg in small quantities for them to peck at. Again, do not force-feed them.

photo: Jeani Garrett



5. Don't let people handle them or play with them. Baby quail are very fragile and can easily be injured if they are squeezed or jump out of your hand. Also, the oil in our skin can prevent their fluff from keeping them warm.

Remember...these are only temporary measures until you can reach help. Please don't hesitate to call me at 602-996-1934. Be sure to leave your phone number. If I have not returned your call in an hour, please call one of the following drop-off locations for Arizona Covey:

**WildWing Rehabilitation, Inc. - 480-893-6660**

**Wild at Heart - 480-595-5047**

**Nights & weekends: Paradise Valley Emergency Animal Clinic - 480-991-1845**

