

Baby Birds

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) was formed in 1889. It is the biggest conservation charity in Britain. It protects birds and other wildlife in the UK and around the world. This extract from the RSPB's website is all about the challenges that face baby birds.

Cute, fluffy — and hard as nails!

Baby birds are undeniably cute. With their unkempt, fluffy feathers and insistent, squeaky begging calls, they look very appealing to human eyes as well as to those of their parents.

5 Though things might look idyllic when you see young birds in your garden being fed by attentive adults, life is far from easy for birds.

If an egg is incubated* to the hatching stage — having avoided being eaten, chilled or damaged — the chick's first task is to break free of the shell. Inside the egg, the young bird develops an 'egg tooth' — a hard tip to the upper part of its beak which helps it emerge — but despite that, hatching is physically exhausting.

10 Birds have evolved different strategies to maximise the survival of their offspring. While songbirds emerge from their eggs in a blind, naked state, and are quite unable to do anything for themselves for several weeks, other species — primarily ducks, waders and gamebirds — are ready to go from hatching.

These ground-dwelling birds need to be able to fend and feed for themselves. Though their parents care for them, all hatch with a covering of down* which keeps them warm and camouflages them among

15 the vegetation where they feed. It's crucial, as newly-hatched chicks are popular prey items for many predators, and time is of the essence — pheasant chicks are able to fly after only 12 days!

I'm a fledgling* — get me out of here

Leaving the nest is a hazardous time for all young birds. As well as learning to fly, birds must also learn how to feed and develop predator awareness — the price for not learning quickly enough is high. [...]

20 Baby birds in your garden?

It can be tempting to try to 'rescue' a baby bird apparently in trouble. Here are some things to remember:

- The adult birds are much more skilled at looking after their offspring than humans will ever be!
- It's very likely that the bird's parents are nearby, waiting for you to leave the area. [...]
- 25 • Try to avoid interference wherever possible. It really is best to leave baby birds alone.

An abridged extract from www.rspb.org.uk

Glossary

to incubate (as a bird) — to sit on eggs to keep them warm until they're ready to hatch
down — small, soft feathers fledgling — a baby bird that's ready to leave its nest

1 "Cute, fluffy — and hard as nails!" (line 1). What does this line tell you about baby birds?

☐
1 mark

2 "fluffy feathers" (line 2). This is an example of (circle one):

- a. onomatopoeia b. a metaphor c. personification d. alliteration

☐
1 mark

3 Why are songbirds very vulnerable when they first hatch? Explain your answer.

☐
2 marks

4 What word could the author have used instead of "hazardous" in line 18?

☐
1 mark

5 Why are lines 17 and 20 written in bold?

☐
1 mark

6 What is the "price" (line 19) of baby birds not developing quickly enough?

☐
1 mark

7 Why do you think the author chose to use bullet points in lines 23-25?

☐
1 mark

8 Why do you think the RSPB published this article? Explain your answer.

☐
2 marks

Total
out of 10