



# Imprinting for Life

## Part 1

**Teacher Reads** When a bird hatches, it must quickly attach itself to its mother so it can learn how to survive. This is called *imprinting*. Let's learn more about imprinting.

A duckling **hatches** from its egg into a new **world**.

10 It needs to learn what kind of animal it is. It needs to learn  
24 life skills—what to eat, where to make its home, and how to  
37 stay safe. How will the duckling learn all it needs to survive?

49 This is what happens. The very first thing the duckling  
59 sees after **hatching** is its mother. It sees its mother, smells  
70 her, and takes in the loud sounds she makes. The duckling  
81 imprints on its mother.

85 Imprinting is a way of learning for some birds.  
94 For ducklings, it happens within a few days of birth.  
104 The duckling forms a close feeling, or attachment, to  
113 its mother. The duckling will follow its mother all  
122 the time. It has a lot to learn from its mother.



## Part 2

**Teacher Reads** Keep reading to discover why imprinting is an essential, or necessary, way of learning for some baby birds.

133 Many birds imprint, such as ducks, chickens, and geese.  
142 Ducklings and other **baby** birds can walk soon after birth.  
152 That means they may roam away from **their** mothers on the  
163 ground, which is unsafe. The baby birds could be harmed by  
174 other animals. Baby birds need to imprint on their mothers  
184 to stay safe. This attachment helps baby birds learn life skills.  
195 They will learn who they are and what they need to do  
207 to survive.

## Part 3

**Teacher Reads** Let's learn what happens if a baby bird imprints on the wrong thing.

209 If a baby bird first sees its mother after hatching,  
219 imprinting works the way it should. But if the baby bird  
230 sees a person first, it will imprint on that person! That is a  
243 problem. A person can't teach the baby bird how to survive  
254 on its own.

257 Some kinds of birds are at risk of extinction. Condors are  
268 at risk because they have been hunted and their habitats have  
279 been destroyed. One way to help is to raise condor chicks.  
290 People are trained to do this job. They have as little contact  
302 with the chicks as needed. When trainers feed and care for  
313 the chicks, they use a hand puppet that looks like a condor  
325 mother. The goal is to keep the chicks from imprinting on  
336 people. If the chicks imprint on people, they will start to  
347 depend on people. They will not learn the skills they need to  
359 survive on their own.

363 When the condor chicks get older, they see and deal with  
374 adult condors. What the chicks learn from the adult condors  
384 will help them survive when they are let go.

393 Imprinting is an action that works to keep baby birds safe.  
404 They need to learn how to survive alone out in the world. [Learn More](#)  
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