

## **Orphaned Animals**

*Below are three articles on what to do if you believe you have found an orphaned animal.*

### **Cottontail Rabbits**

If you have a yard then you are likely to have young cottontail rabbits in the spring and summer. This does not need to be a problem. If you find a nest of babies in your yard leave them alone. Keep your pets indoors, children away from the area, and mark the spot so that you don't mow over it. The babies will be gone in a couple of weeks.

If a nest of rabbits is disturbed carefully replace them and cover up the nest. Your scent will not cause the mother to abandon her young. She will return in the evening and again at dawn to nurse. She will spend the day foraging away from the nest because she does not want to draw attention to it.

If a young rabbit has its eyes open and is able to hop it **does not** need to be rescued unless it has an obvious injury. At 2½ weeks of age a cottontail is independent of its mother. Be patient and your family of rabbits will soon move out. Cottontails do not make good pets as they are difficult to feed and easily stressed. They are also protected by State law which makes keeping them as pets illegal.

### **White-tailed Deer**

Perhaps the most distressing calls we get are about young deer that have been taken from their mothers by well intentioned but misinformed people. A fawn's best protection is to lay motionless in the tall grass, camouflaged by its spots. The mother stays away so as not to betray its location to predators. She will not return to nurse the fawn if people are present.

For the first month, a fawn has no scent so a predator can't sniff it out. If you touch a fawn then you have marked it with your scent and made it easier for the predator to find. A fawn should not be rescued unless it is injured or you know for sure that its mother is dead. If startled, a young deer can bolt, breaking its legs or back. It has strong legs and a kick to your head or throat could cause serious injury. The wisest course of action is to leave the area and contact a wildlife rehabilitator for advice.

### **Baby Birds**

Many of the calls we receive are about the seemingly odd places birds decide to build their nests: BBQ grills, front entryways, porch light fixtures, bathroom vents, and any other place we'd rather they didn't. The best way to deal with this problem is to prevent it from happening in the first place. Cover up access or place nesting boxes or shelves with some nesting material near these areas as an attractive alternative. If a bird has already taken up residence and laid eggs then it is best to wait it out. After hatching, the birds will fledge the nest in a few weeks and then you can remove it.

If you find a baby bird(s) that has fallen from its nest try to locate the nest and return it. If the nest was destroyed in a storm or you can't reach it place the nesting materials or dried grass in a small plastic container with drainage holes in the bottom and place it as near the original nest as possible. The parents will hear the cries for food and return to feed the bird(s). If the bird is cool to the touch it is important that you warm it before placing it back in the nest. Put it in your shirt until it warms up and starts chirping then return it. You can also put a baby bird into the nest of another brood as long as it is of the same species and age. Birds can't count. They just put food into all the open beaks. Keep in mind that some birds nest on the ground and some of them are self-feeding within hours of hatching. These birds should be left alone and your pets should be kept out of the area.

Do not rescue completely feathered birds even if they are on the ground unless they are obviously injured. Often these birds are "branchers" just learning to fly. Their parents will continue to feed and protect them but you must keep pets and people away from this area. The only thing you can do with an unhatched egg is to put it back in the nest or leave it where you found it. Do not attempt to hatch the egg yourself! *Remember that most birds are protected under Federal law. It is illegal for anyone without a proper permit to possess wild birds, their feathers, nests or eggs.* If you are unsure of what to do please contact a wildlife rehabilitator for advice. Never feed bread or water to a baby bird.

### **Baby Squirrels**

If you find a baby squirrel fallen out of the tree or displaced because of tree cutting, put it in a box at the base of a tree where the mother has been seen and wait for the mother to come. (Mother squirrels keep two nests, she'll move the babies to the other nest.) Keep people and animals away! If the baby is cold, put a hot water bottle or jar full of warm water in the box with it.

If it is near night time, keep the baby inside until morning and then place the baby, in the box with hot water bottle or jar of warm water, if necessary, at the base of the tree again. Watch from your window or car for the mother. If she doesn't retrieve the baby in two or three hours, you have an orphan. Contact a wildlife rehabilitator for advice.

**It is illegal to possess animals and parts of animals such as nests, eggs and feathers unless taken legally by hunting or as authorized in a permit issued by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources or United States Fish and Wildlife Service.**

*Remember that cute little animals can turn into really big wild ones!*

Link to the University of Illinois Extension website on "Living with Wildlife."  
<http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/wildlife/>