Common Questions

Q. My dog found some baby bunnies. What should I do?

A. Put the bunnies back where you found them. If they are still in a nest, place a 2' X 2' or larger piece of flat wood over the nest, with the wood perched on bricks or other material so that the parent cottontail can get to the youngsters but dogs or cats can't.

Q. I found a baby squirrel. What should I do?

A. Put the squirrel in a small box at the base of the nearest tree. The adult squirrel will retrieve the baby if it is left alone.

Q. A baby bird has fallen from its nest in a tree in my backyard. Should I bring it into the house and feed it until it is able to fly?

A. No. The best thing to do is put the bird carefully back into the nest, or shepherd it into some thick shrubbery or other protected space in your yard. The parents will continue to feed and care for the fledgling. Also, keep your dogs and cats in the house to allow the young bird's parents to care for it. As a last resort, a nestling can be placed in a clear plastic butter dish with a napkin in the bottom. This artificial nest can then be put in a bush or tree near the place the nestling was found.

Q. I was walking through the woods and saw several baby raccoons on the ground near a large tree. Should I bring them home and care for them?

A. No. Most likely the young raccoons are merely exploring, and their mother is nearby. They are probably old enough to be fully capable of climbing back up the tree to their den when they are ready to return. If they were too young to climb, the mother would carry them back.

Q. I found an abandoned fawn near the edge of a field next to my property. I brought the fawn into my house to save it, but don't know how to care for it. What should I do?

A. Immediately take the fawn back to the spot where you found it, and leave it there. The mother should come back again looking for the fawn. Even one or two days after removal from the wild, fawns have been successfully reunited with their mothers by returning them to the place where they were found. The mother was probably feeding not far away when you found the fawn.

Q. A bird flew into my picture window and seems unable to fly. What should I do?

A. Often, birds are just stunned from impact with windows. Generally, they recover after a few minutes and fly off. Keep your dogs and cats in the house, and leave the bird alone so that it has a chance to recover on its own. If necessary, place the bird in a loosely closed paper bag until you hear it stirring, then release it.

Q. I saw a hawk that acts like it has a broken wing. What should I do?

A. Since there are federal laws against possession of migratory birds, including hawks and owls, contact the nearest office of the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks to get information on rehabilitators that have the correct permits.

Q. What if the parent doesn't come back or the animal dies?

A. Death is an integral part of the natural world. It may even represent life to another wildlife species which can use that animal as sustenance or to feed their young. Many animals die before reaching adulthood. For example, more than 75 percent of all rabbits die before they reach five months of age. While it may seem disheartening to see a young animal die, it represents only one individual in an entire population which could not thrive if all young born survived.

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KANSAS WILDLIFE & PARKS

Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs described herein is available to all individuals without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or handicap. Complaints of discrimination should be sent to Office of the Secretary, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, 900 Jackson St., Suite 502, Topeka, KS 66612. 03/02

Do them a favor.

Leave them alone!

It's common to encounter young wild animals, especially in spring and summer. Some people have an irresistible attraction to these wild youngsters, and want to take them home. Every year, the lives of young wild animals are needlessly jeopardized by well-intentioned people who take them from the wild in the mistaken belief that the animals are abandoned or orphaned and will die if not given care. In fact, rescuing wildlife from the wild often results in the death of the animal.

There are a variety of problems and health hazards, to humans and animals alike, when people try to "adopt" a baby cottontail, fawn, or other wild youngster. All of these problems and hazards can be avoided if people follow one simple rule when coming upon young wildlife: Leave them alone!

Five Good Reasons to Leave Them in the Wild

1. They're not abandoned.

Bird and animal mothers will often leave their young while they search for food during the day. This is the time when the young are most vulnerable to well meaning humans. Young fawns, for example, are quite safe when left alone because their color pattern and lack of scent help them to remain undetected until their mothers return. The adult animal is probably waiting for you to leave so it can return to care for its young.

2. It's illegal.

Picking up young animals is against the law. Both the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment have regulations against such activity. Fines can be up to $1,000. State permits are required to legally possess most species of wild animals. For some species, federal permits are required and fines are more severe.

3. They may carry disease.

Even though they may look cute and fuzzy, wild animals carry a number of potential health threats. Rabies can be transmitted from a bite or saliva contacting an open wound. Distemper and rabies are the most common illnesses that household pets acquire from wild animals. Ticks and fleas borne by some animals carry lyme and other diseases. Wild animals may also carry bacteria, roundworms, tapeworms, mites, and/or protozoans that can cause diseases in humans or their pets.

4. They're not pets.

Although young animals may be cute and cuddly, they are wild animals. Many well-meaning people have taken young animals home, then quickly learned that they're not equipped to handle the animal as it matures. "Adopting" young wild animals may be an irresistible urge for some people, but wild animals typically make poor pets as adults. Many people have been injured by animals that initially seemed easily-tamed.

5. Good intentions can be deadly.

Many animals taken into captivity soon die. Those that don't are denied the opportunity to learn how to survive in their natural environment, so they seldom develop the skills necessary for them to survive when they are eventually returned to the wild. Their ability to find natural foods is hindered, and the natural wariness that is learned in the wild is impaired. Young wildlife raised in captivity often develop an attachment to humans. Upon their release to the wild, they may have little fear of people and return to make nuisances of themselves, or put themselves in danger of traffic or attack from domestic animals. Further, when released to the wild they may be thrust as unwelcome intruders into the home range of another member of their species. And you might relocate an animal with disease into a population that did not have the disease.