

The Problem

Every year, the lives of many young wild animals are jeopardized by well-intentioned people who take them from the wild in the mistaken belief that the animals are abandoned, and will die if not given care.

Why it Occurs

Each spring and summer, new generations of wild animals are born in our backyards and woodlands. As part of the growing process, the young animals often begin venturing from their nest or burrow before they are capable of feeding or fending for themselves. Awkward, incautious, and slow to react, many of these young animals are conspicuous and easily caught by humans (and other predators). Because no parent animal is in sight, many well-meaning people assume that the youngster has been abandoned and needs to be "rescued." Most of the time, however, the parents are nearby gathering food, or cautiously remaining hidden until the human moves away. Even if the young are touched, the parents will almost always make an effort to return to them.

The Result

Though well-intentioned, rescuing wildlife from the wild tends to have the opposite result. To begin, most people quickly find that they don't know how to care for young wildlife, and as a result, many animals taken into captivity soon die. Those that don't are denied the opportunity to learn from experiences in their natural environment and so seldom develop the skills that allow them to survive when they are eventually returned to the wild. In some cases, young wildlife raised in captivity develop an attachment to humans.



Upon their release to the wild, they may have little fear of people and return to make a nuisance of themselves, or put themselves in danger of traffic and attack from domestic animals. Although young wild animals are often cute, they typically make poor pets as adults. Many people have also been injured by once-tamed wildlife.

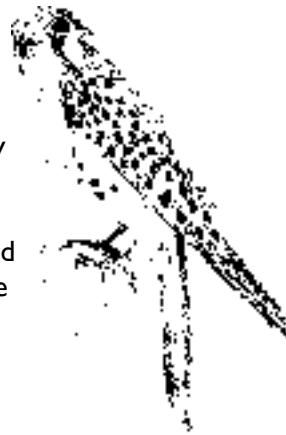
What to Do



All of these problems can be avoided if people follow one simple rule when coming upon young wildlife—leave them alone. In nearly all cases, young wild animals do not need to be saved. It may be difficult to do, but resisting the urge to "help" is the real act of kindness. And stay clear of any wild creature that is behaving oddly, acting tame, walking unsteadily, or having convulsions. The problem could be epilepsy, distemper, rabies, or a recent accident.

The Law

There are a number of laws that are intended to protect wildlife and people. State permits are required to legally possess most species of wild animals. Federal permits are required to possess any bird - alive or dead - other than house sparrows or starlings. Technically, it is illegal to even pick up an animal or bird without the appropriate permits. When an animal is found injured, with their dead mother, or apparently orphaned, contact a game warden, animal damage control officer, or a licensed wildlife rehabilitator. These people have been trained in wild animal care and handling, and can provide the necessary treatment.



COMMON QUESTIONS



Q. I just found a baby bird that has fallen out of the nest in my backyard. Should I bring it into the house and feed it until it can fly?

A. If you can put a baby bird back into its nest, do so. Human handling typically will not discourage the parents' return. However, it is normal for some birds to leave the nest before they can fly. The parents keep track of them and feed them during the day. Keep your pets out of the area until the fledgling can fly.

Q. We just cut down a large dead tree, and a nest of squirrels was in it. Should I take care of and feed them?

A. Try to place the young in that portion of the tree where the nest was located, or in an undisturbed location as close to the original site as possible. The mother squirrel will come back and relocate her young.



Q. I saw a mother fox hit by a car. Her two kits were huddling by the body. What do I do?

A. Report their location to a local game warden or animal control officer. They are qualified to handle the young foxes and can transport them to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator.





Q. There is a young bird having difficulty flying in my back yard. I am afraid my dog or cat will get it.

A. Put your pets inside for a few hours. Shepherd the young bird into some thick shrubbery or other protected natural place. The parents will continue to feed and care for the fledgling until it can fly on its own, usually within a day or two.

Q. I found a fawn while walking in the woods. I picked it up and carried it back with me. Now what do I do?

A. Immediately take the fawn back to the place you found it. Mother deer leave their fawns in safe hiding places for hours, usually feeding nearby, and was likely in the vicinity when you intruded! The mother will come back to the same place she left her fawn, in some cases 1 or 2 days after it was disturbed.



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

A. Often, birds are just stunned from impact with the window. Generally, they recover after a few hours and fly off. If, however, the bird is in danger in its disabled state, you should move it to a protected location, or put it in a large paper grocery bag in a warm, quiet place. When you start to hear it fluttering inside the bag, take it outside and release it. The first and best option for treating any injured wildlife is to place them in a dark, secluded place and leave them alone.

Q. I saw several baby raccoons at the base of a big tree looking 'lost and hungry'. Did the mother abandon them?

A. The young 'coons are probably just exploring! The mother raccoon has to go off to find food for herself and her young. They will stay close to their den until she returns. Keep your pets inside while 'coons are around.



WHO TO CALL:

Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Regional Offices

Region A - Sebago

RR 1, 358 Shaker Rd., Gray, ME 04039
207-657-2345

Maine Wildlife Park

56 Game Farm Rd., Gray ME 04039
207-657-4977

Region B - Sidney

270 Lyons Rd., Sidney, ME 04330
207-547-5300

Region C - Jonesboro

PO Box 220, Jonesboro, ME 04648
207-434-5927

Region D - Strong

689 Farmington Rd., Strong, ME 04983
207-778-3324

Region E - Greenville

PO Box 551, Greenville, ME 04441
207-695-3756

Region F - Enfield

HCR 67, Box 1066, Enfield, ME 04493
207-732-4132

Region G - Ashland

PO Box 447, Ashland, ME 04732-0447
207-435-3231

or

Maine Audubon Society

20 Gilsland Farm Rd., PO Box 6009
Falmouth, ME 04105-6009
207-781-2330

**IF
YOU
CARE...**



**LEAVE
THEM
THERE!**



Caring for Maine's
Outdoor Future

Maine Department of
Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
284 State Street
41 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333-0041
207-287-8000