

WILD ORPHANS: TO RESCUE OR NOT?

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“Mommy, look what I found!”

Whether it is a baby bird, squirrel, bunny, or other wild animal, children have a knack for finding wild orphans. Across the United States and in other countries during the spring months, thousands of wild animal babies will be picked up; some need to be rescued, some do not.

“At the National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association (NWRA), we have members who care for hundreds of thousands of wild animals each year,” said Elaine Thrune, President. “Most of the wild babies are brought to our members by well-intentioned individuals, but many of these babies did not need to be rescued,” she added.

Baby bunnies are one of the wild animals rescued most often, but usually do not need human help. Mother rabbits are only at the nest to feed their babies twice a day for about five minutes—at dawn and dusk. And, yes, they really did put the nest in the middle of your backyard! One reason for this is so mama rabbit can see any predators that may be approaching while she is nursing her young. Baby rabbits are in their nest for only two to three weeks; a pretty short time before they are independent. Leave the nest alone unless you find cold, limp babies, or obviously injured ones. Your local wildlife rehabilitator has more advice for you on how to keep the young safe in the nest until they are ready to live on their own.

There is a myth that once a baby bird is touched by a human, it will not be cared for by the parent birds. Not true! First of all, birds, except for those in the vulture family, have poor to no sense of smell. They cannot tell you touched the baby to return it to the nest. However, if you put a cold baby bird back in the nest and it is unable to beg for food when the parent arrives, it is in trouble. It is always best to call your local wildlife rehabilitator for advice.

Did you know that mother deer forage for food, leaving their camouflaged, spotted fawns alone for several hours at a time? People who come across these vulnerable-looking fawns in the woods always

assume they need help. Unless the fawn is obviously injured—broken leg, open wound, flies buzzing around it—it is most likely perfectly fine. Its mom intends to come back soon and expects to find the youngster right where she left it after the last feeding.

“It is illegal as well as unwise to keep wildlife as pets or even to try to raise orphans unless you are trained and have the proper permits from state and federal wildlife agencies,” said Thrune.

Licensed wildlife rehabilitators have the knowledge and experience to care for wild orphans that need help. They know how to raise orphans to be healthy and wild. When you find a wild animal you think needs help, it is best to call for advice so both you and the wild animal remain safe.

If you need assistance with an injured or orphaned wild animal, call your nearest wildlife rehabilitator, check the website of your state’s wildlife or natural resources agency, or call the NWRA Office at (320) 230-9920 during business hours for referral to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator in your area. Please make certain the wild animal in question needs to be rescued. Even with the best efforts of thousands of professional rehabilitators in the United States, there is no substitute for Mother Nature.

The NWRA is dedicated to improving and promoting the profession of wildlife rehabilitation and its contributions to preserving natural ecosystems. Donations to help further our mission to train more wildlife rehabilitators are always appreciated. The NWRA is a 501c3 charitable organization and, as such, your donation is tax deductible as permitted by IRS guidelines.