

Wild animals don't need rescuing, you need education

Posted by [Jacqui Atkielski](#) On 06/02/2016

HOLLYWOOD, MD -- While I have a soft spot for animals, I try to not intervene with wildlife because most animals are designed for survival soon after birth. They are better prepared to handle the outdoors than we are, otherwise their species would't have made it to today.

When the weather warms up, people are going to spend more time outside. You're not the only species of creature hanging around outside when the weather is warm. Birds, deer, foxes and other creatures are raising their next generation. It can be very enjoyable to watch, but nature lovers should do so from a distance. While young animals are very cute, it's often hard to resist the urge to help them.

There is a reason they're called wild animals, and should be left in the wild to tend to their own. Can you imagine if some big stinking creature came out and did the same thing to your children? Just leave the creature be, and mind your own business. You're not equipped to survive in the wild, or to take care of wild creatures.

By interfering with the natural process, more harm than good is done to the creature. Like the recent case when [Yellowstone National Park tourists tried to save a baby bison](#) and it had to be euthanized after being rejected by its herd.

Wild creatures' chances of survival are much better if left in their natural surroundings.. And if its parents are gone, nature will step in. It's up to the small creature to survive on its own.

Each year the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) receives numerous calls from citizens who, with the best of intentions, have 'rescued' a young wild animal and are seeking tips on how to properly care for it. However, many times people are endangering the lives of young wildlife by interfering with their natural adaptation and learning of basic survival skills.

You don't have to rescue them unless you see the following signs:

- Evidence of bleeding
- An apparent or obvious broken limb
- A featherless or nearly featherless bird on the ground
- A dead parent nearby
- Audible distress calls (fawn crying, etc) given over a prolonged period of time.

Here are some Species-specific signs young animals you might see in the area:

Baby Birds

Despite the popular myth, birds will not abandon their young if a person touches them.

If you can see that the original nest is destroyed, or is too high to reach, then you can affix a basket to the nearest limb or close to the destroyed nest. Don't put cotton balls or other foreign materials in the new nest as they can retain water and cause the bird to become cold and die. Watch to make sure the adults return to the new or old nest within an hour. If they do not return, you should contact a wildlife rehabilitator.

Baby birds that are fully feathered and have short tail feathers are likely fledglings, and are trying to learn how to fly. Often, fledglings are seen hopping around on the ground and crying to their parents. This stage takes several days, so it is best to keep pets away at this time.

You should try to rescue them when the baby bird is injured, if you cannot reach the nest and/or the parents are not returning to the nest, or the parent is dead nearby. Contact a wildlife rehabilitator for more information.

Baby Deer

A fawn, or baby deer, can be left on its own for 6 hours or more. After the doe, the female deer, gives birth and nurses the fawn, she will lead it into secluded area within her home range. If you can witness something like this, know that twin fawns can be separated by up to 200 feet during the journey. The doe will leave for extended periods of time because her scent can attract predators, and fawns have little to no scent of their own. The doe will return periodically to nurse her fawns and relocate them. This habit can span up to three weeks, so don't be alarmed if you spy little deer around your area unsupervised. Wild animals can usually handle what nature throws at them, and don't need your help.

You should only step in if a fawn is wandering, crying constantly, or laying on its side. If you have to step in, don't touch the fawn if you can help it. Does are sensitive to human smells. If you have already handled the fawn, rub it with a towel in the grass to remove your smell. Return the fawn where you found it. Make sure to call a wildlife rehabilitator authorized to possess fawns.

Baby Foxes

Kits, or baby foxes, often also unsupervised for hours while their parents forage for food. If they seem energetic and healthy, leave them alone. If the kits appear sickly, weak, or the parents are known to be dead, then contact that wildlife rehabilitator I keep mentioning.

Baby Rabbits

Young rabbits, like fawns and kits, have little smell and are left unsupervised for hours to prevent them from being targeted by predators. If you find a bunny nest, leave it alone. Keep your pets away from the nest if it's in your yard or nearby. If you have been watching the nest and it appears to be abandoned, or the bunnies have been orphaned or injured, contact that wildlife rehabilitator. Females will only visit nests 2-3 times per day, so you can mark the nest with a grassy 'X' to see if she visits. She will move the X but keep the nest covered. Call if she doesn't come back after a day.

Baby Squirrels

Young squirrels often fall from nests. If you find one, place it in a cat-proof tall box with a heating source like a hot water bottle and a blanket. Don't cover the squirrels as it will be harder for the female to find her young. Leave the box at the base of the tree where they fell from. If you see that the box is undisturbed after three hours, or the young are injured, you know the drill. Call the professional.

If you absolutely have to 'save' a wild animal, take these tips into consideration:

- You should never handle an adult animal without first consulting a wildlife professional and without surveying the situation.
- You should always wear thick gloves and other protective materials when handling wildlife. They could bite or scratch you in defense.
- Many songbirds can be placed in a paper bag while larger animals may need a cardboard box lined with something soft like a towel. Make sure to keep their container in a warm, quiet place away from nosy pets and children. Make sure when transporting that you minimize the noise.
- You should handle the animal as little as possible to reduce stress and transport as soon as possible, and don't feed them without consulting the professionals first. Google is not the professional, so don't try that either.
- Do not feed the animal without consulting a professional first.

I've had friends try to save baby birds or squirrels, only to have to bury them hours later. On a recent evening walk with my Great Pyrenees, I attempted to save a fledgling robin. He squealed and chirped in distress as I encouraged him to crawl onto my fleece jacket. I removed him from the sidewalk crack he had gotten stuck in, and he crawled into the jacket pocket. I dropped him off near a holly bush in the direction he seemed to come from. My dog was very interested in the bird, so there was nothing more I wanted or could do. I don't know if the birdie survived or not, but he was gone when I went looking for him the next day. I like to assume the best when it comes to wild animals.

For more information, contact the Wildlife & Heritage Service in Annapolis at customerservice.dnr@maryland.gov, 410-260-8540 or 1-877-620-8DNR, Ext. 8540

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