



Lake Erie Nature & Science Center

I Found Baby Wildlife – Does It Need Help?

Some things to keep in mind:

- Baby wildlife is rarely abandoned in Nature. Wildlife mothers often leave their babies unattended for hours. Even if one parent has died, in many cases, the remaining parent can ably take care of the babies. Determining if a parent animal has died is very difficult. For common suburban animals, seeing a dead adult in the area is NO indication that it is a parent of the babies found.
- Baby wild animals DO NOT need to be protected from the natural dangers in their lives. Cats and dogs, cars, streets and parking lots are all a natural part of the life of an urban/suburban wild animal. They NEED to grow up among these things in order to learn how to successfully co-exist with them.
- Wild animals DO NOT abandon their babies due to the smell of humans. Birds, in fact, cannot even smell anything! While mammals can smell very well, the scent of humans is not nearly enough of a danger signal to cause a mother to “go against” all of her hormonal and instinctual maternal behaviors.
- Baby animals will never be able to receive the same quality of care from humans as they get from their natural parents. Human care, to some extent, is always damaging to the baby animal. For this reason, human intervention should always be the absolute last resort, and should occur only if the baby has NO chance of surviving in the wild.

Eastern Cottontail Rabbits

Baby bunnies are almost never abandoned, even when they are all alone. Females only come to their nest at dusk and dawn, and even then, are very difficult to see due to their secretive nature. A young rabbit, chipmunk-sized or bigger, is completely independent of its mother and should be left alone. Cottontails have a very low tolerance for stress and when kept in captivity, they very often die. Nests are often in the middle of the yard in what seems like a “bad” place but do not move the rabbits, as the mother probably won't be able to find them. Cottontails regularly survive growing up in a typical suburban yard even with dangers like cats, kids and even dogs.



Raccoons and Squirrels

These animals will almost always retrieve their babies when they end up out of the nest too early. Most raccoons and squirrels maintain more than one nest site and regularly carry their babies from nest to nest. If their first nest becomes damaged or unsafe, they will readily move their babies to one of their alternate nests. If a baby is found out of its nest and is not yet able to climb on its own, place it in a container up off the ground and give plenty of time to allow the mother to retrieve her baby.



Opossums

Opossums are North America's only marsupials, which means they keep their babies in a pouch exactly like a kangaroo does. Shortly after the babies leave the pouch, they are around 3 months old, 6-7 inches long and completely independent of their mother. Opossums like this should simply be left alone. Opossums smaller than this may need human assistance.



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White-tailed Deer

A fawn found lying quietly by itself with no mother in sight is perfectly normal. Deer do this to protect their young, as the presence of an adult would attract the attention of predators. Even if the fawn seems to be in a “dangerous” location, do not move it as the mother probably won’t be able to find it. If a fawn is walking around and making noise, this is a sign that it may be abandoned and in need of assistance.



Birds

A baby bird with skin still visible or only downy feathers covering it, should be placed back in the nest or in an artificial nest after you determine if it is a cavity-nesting bird or a cup-shaped-nesting bird. Birds WILL NOT abandon babies if touched by a human. If fully feathered but unable to fly, the bird is a fledgling and should be out of the nest and on the ground or on low branches. Fledglings still need to learn all their critical survival behaviors from their parents and siblings, so they must be left alone, even with the danger of cats and humans. A young bird out of the nest and learning to fly cannot be cared for by humans without ruining its chance at survival in the wild.

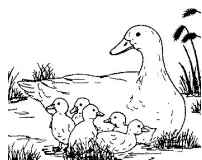


Birds of Prey

A baby bird of prey that cannot yet grasp with its feet needs to be placed back in its original nest or in an artificial nest in the exact area it was found. If the young bird can grip with its feet, it should be placed on a branch at the nest site. Its parents will continue to care for it.

Waterfowl

Young ducks and geese sometimes get separated from their families when following parents to water. Search nearby water locations and return the youngster to the family if possible. Ducks often nest miles from water, even in parking lots and suburban yards, and can successfully walk their babies to the nearest water on their own. Any attempt to assist them almost always results in separating mom from the babies or causing accidents as they frantically attempt to avoid capture.



**Remember, you can always call us if in doubt about whether an animal needs human assistance.
(440) 871-2900 ext. 204**

How You Can Help Wildlife In Need

Please call us before trying to help wildlife. Unfortunately, well-intentioned but uninformed individuals often harm or even kill animals with improper actions. For example, feeding a baby bird milk will almost always cause it to die. Out of respect for nature, human intervention should be the absolute last resort.

Transport injured animals to us or another licensed facility as soon as possible. It is dangerous, illegal, unethical and unfair to the animal, to try to “make it better” yourself. Injured wildlife needs very specific care to have any chance at returning to the wild.

If you need to keep an animal overnight until you can bring it to us, keep it in a small, dark, quiet place, in as small of a container as possible to avoid it thrashing around and hurting itself. Please do not offer it food or water or milk as even these actions can cause the animal harm in some situations.

Respect nature and do not try to interfere in natural predator/prey interactions. Hawks eat squirrels, snakes eat rodents, and opossums eat baby birds. These things are all a part of nature and are necessary in the “circle of life.”

Never put human safety at risk when trying to help an animal. Wild animals will defend themselves when approached regardless of your good intentions.

