

Natural Resource Preservation Brief #13

Wildlife Rescues

Once or twice each year the National Resources Management Staff receives a report of a wild animal which is injured or appears to be abandoned. In some cases the animal is actually brought to us with the expectation that we will be able to care for it.

NPS policies clearly encourage the maintenance of natural processes, even in historic sites. Frequently death of an animal is part of that natural course of events.

In most circumstances the animal should be left alone. If, however, you feel compelled to do something or if a visitor brings an animal in, please contact the Natural Resources Management Staff.

Please find attached, three press releases from the Maryland Forest, Park and Wildlife Service. These should be helpful to you individually.

The Natural Resources Management Staff has three choices in handling these cases:

1. Return the animal to the wild.
2. Attempt to locate a wildlife rehabilitator through the State District Wildlife Office.
3. Destroy the animal.

The last option will be chosen in cases involving rabid animals or in cases where large mammals have been injured beyond hope by motor vehicles.

Your cooperation by discouraging wildlife rescues will be appreciated.

The Natural Resources Management Staff



NEWS

from

THE MARYLAND FOREST, PARK & WILDLIFE SERVICE

April 7, 1986

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For More Information Contact:

Janet McKegg 269-3195

Keep the Wild in Wildlife! Don't be a Kidnapper.

Spring has sprung, and Mother Nature's new generation of wild animals are on their way. Most of us associate wildlife with forests and rural fields, but it's not unusual to find it right in your backyard. Watching animals carry on their activities is usually a rewarding and educational experience. When accident or happenstance confronts you with an apparently orphaned animal, enjoyment turns to dilemma. Learning about the ways of nature will help you make the right decisions if you find a wild baby.

First, a little about wild animal populations. Let's use squirrels as an example. To maintain a stable population, a mother squirrel must have two of her whole life's production of offspring make it to adulthood. An average squirrel lives two years and will produce about eight young. If six of those babies didn't die, we'd soon be waist-deep in squirrels. The condition of life in the wild is such that most young animals, even with their parent's initial expert care, do not survive for long. If they did, overcrowding and starvation could easily result. Ironically, the wheels of nature keep turning only because the death of one animal fuels the life of another. So, while finding a dead or dying animal is a sad thing, it's part of nature's process.

At some point in time, you may find a wild baby that looks perfectly healthy but no parent is in sight. Wild parents often leave their young unattended for some period of time. Adult birds must search for food to supply their demanding brood. Male rabbits have nothing to do with their young, and the mother visits the nest only two or three times in 24 hours. Her prolonged presence at the nest would attract attention to the well-hidden, scentless, baby bunnies. In a like manner, does often hide their fawns and lie down a good distance away.

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So how can you tell if a young bird or mammal needs help? Here are some general guidelines. The animal is not abandoned if:

1. It is healthy and its eyes are open (injured, sick or abandoned animals often have a matted coat, glazed eyes, and are weak);
2. It runs from you or tries to defend itself with bared teeth, raised fur or feathers, growling or chattering;
3. It is in a natural setting - not in a street or parking lot.

In general, a young bird with a short, feathered tail that can stand on a twig has probably left the nest and is learning to fly, and its parents are still feeding it. They find it by its calls. A rabbit is fully furred but only about 4 inches long when it leaves the nest. If it runs away from you, it doesn't need your help. Squirrels and raccoons will return for their wayward young for up to 48 hours after they are separated. Very young fawns often will not run from humans and they will not usually be with their mothers. ALWAYS leave them alone.

If you find a young animal, look to see if it's in its normal habitat, uninjured, and in a safe location. You can put a small bird or squirrel in a bush or tree to keep it safe. Leave it there overnight and check it in the morning. If it's still there and it's noticeably weaker, it probably needs help.

If you're sure that the animal is abandoned or if it's injured, cover it with a box or garbage can to keep it contained. If it is very small, put it in a covered box with some ventilation holes in it. Use heavy gloves because even young animals can give a nasty bite. Then contact your nearest Forest, Park and Wildlife Service Wildlife Office for recommendations on what to do next. During non-working hours, call the Forest, Park and Wildlife Service Communications Center at 301/255-0079. They will have someone contact you as soon as possible. Do not try to feed the animal. Even though your intentions are good, petting or trying to comfort a wild animal is more likely to send it into shock than to make it feel more secure.

Wild animals need their parent's care and training to survive. All animals have very specific dietary needs which are very hard to duplicate. They must learn from their parents what to eat and how to find it, what to fear, and how to find a mate. We disrupt this process by removing them from the wild, and even if they live through our fumbling attempts to be substitute parents, they are not going to be well-prepared for life in the wild. Nor will they be happy in captivity. They have not become accustomed to captivity over thousands of years like domestic animals. As they reach maturity, they become more and more unpredictable and dangerous. A pet deer can kill a person, a pet raccoon can send a child to the

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hospital. Wildlife can transmit parasites and diseases - including rabies - to humans. There is no vaccine to protect wild animals from contracting the disease as there is for dogs, cats, and other domestic animals.

Keeping wild animals in captivity without approval of the Forest, Park and Wildlife Service is against the law. The Service feels that it is inhumane to subject wild animals to the unnatural conditions of life in captivity, not to mention malnutrition, injury, and emotional stress that can occur at the hands of an unknowing captor. Remember, if you have to chase it, it doesn't need your help. If you have doubts, call us before you risk making a normal, healthy wildlife baby an orphan.

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NEWS

from

THE MARYLAND FOREST, PARK & WILDLIFE SERVICE

May 2, 1980
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For More Information Contact:
Janet McKegg 269-3195

THAT BABY BIRD - DOES IT REALLY NEED YOUR HELP?

It happens to almost everyone at some point in time. A child brings you a baby bird and wants to know how to help it. Or maybe you stumble on a newly-fallen nest. You don't have to feel helpless or hopeless. There are some things you can do.

The best way to help is to return the baby to its parents. The guidelines below will let you determine when that route can be taken. If the bird can't be returned, or if it's injured, put it in a small covered box with some ventilation holes in it. Make a "nest" in the box with some tissues or a soft cloth. Don't try to give the bird food or water. Put the box in a warm, quiet place and leave it alone. Then, call an expert - a wildlife rehabilitator.

A wildlife rehabilitator is a person who has requested and qualified for a permit from the Maryland Forest, Park and Wildlife Service to care for abandoned and injured wildlife. Those who care for birds must also receive a permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These volunteers have taken the time to educate themselves on the requirements of young and injured wildlife so that they can provide the best care possible. "Rehabers" are prepared to give the specialized and time-consuming care required by their tiny patients, and it is with them that abandoned birds have their best chance of survival. You can contact a wildlife rehabilitator through your local Forest, Park and Wildlife Service District Wildlife office. After working hours, or on weekends, call the Forest, Park and Wildlife Service Communications Center at 301/255-0079.

Nests and Nestlings

A fallen nest should be placed as close to its original site as possible. Tie it to a branch, or put it in a container the same size as the nest and fasten that to a branch. A nest with eggs may be abandoned - the parents will go somewhere else and start over. However, a nest with nestlings will rarely be abandoned.

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A nestling is a baby bird that has just begun to develop feathers and can neither fly nor walk. Every effort should be made to return a nestling to its nest. First check the baby for injuries. Then, if you find the nest, make sure the young in the nest look like the one you're replacing. Birds will not abandon nestlings that have been touched by humans. In most cases, they won't even know that you've touched it - birds have a very poor sense of smell.

A fledgling is almost fully feathered and is ready to practice flying. If you try to return him to a nest, he'll probably jump back out. In fact, he may have been running around on the ground in the first place. Put uninjured fledglings in a bush or tree close to where he was found. His parents will find him by his calls. Don't assume that a fledgling is orphaned because you can't see his parents - they're probably out looking for food to satisfy his insatiable appetite.

Hawks and Owls

Hawks and owls often spend a couple of weeks on the ground and on low tree branches before they learn to fly. Owls are especially prone to leave the nest while very young and still covered with down. Do not try to catch these birds. If you're concerned, leave them overnight and check them in the morning. If they haven't moved, call the District Wildlife office for advice.

Ducks and Geese

Waterfowl nest on the ground. Ducklings and goslings can walk and feed themselves a few hours after hatching. The mother leads them away from the nest, and they don't return. Downy young depend on their mother to protect them and keep them warm at night. If you find a downy baby all alone, scour the area and try to locate its family. Then watch the joyful reunion. Half-grown ducklings and goslings (they look ragged because they've started developing feathers) in their normal habitat (not in a parking lot, for example) should be left alone. Even if one can't find its original family, it will probably tag along after an adopted mother. It may not be totally accepted by this new mom, but it will be warned of danger and at this age it no longer needs to be kept warm at night. If you can find no family in sight for a downy baby or if the half-grown duck or goose is in a dangerous place, contact the local District Wildlife office for instructions.

Before trying to care for a baby bird, consider these facts. Often, the birds you find are nature's failures - the weak, the incautious, the offspring of careless nest builders. In the wild, failure means death. In addition, many types of animals make sure that their species will continue by over-producing young animals. A large portion of the new generation doesn't make it through the first year. If they all did, overcrowding and starvation could easily result. If you still feel that you must help a young bird, and you can't give it back to its parents, place it with a wildlife rehabber. That's its best bet for survival.



NEWS

from

THE MARYLAND FOREST, PARK & WILDLIFE SERVICE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For More Information Contact:

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BEFORE RESCUING THAT FAWN...THINK TWICE!

A white-tailed deer fawn is one of the most beautiful and appealing sights in the world. With the increase in Maryland's deer population, they're becoming easier to find. You can sometimes see them trailing along after their mother, or playing tag in a grassy field. If you find one in late May or June, however, it may be curled up in the woods or a field all by itself, no mother in sight. Is it an orphan? Almost certainly not.

A doe's method of rearing her offspring is nothing like a human's, especially for the first few weeks. She eats the afterbirth when the fawns are born and then eats their droppings so predators aren't attracted to them. Within hours of its birth, the fawn is led to a secluded spot and the doe lets it nurse. With a full tummy, the fawn is content to lie down and rest. If she has twins, she'll hide the second fawn up to two hundred feet away. Then the doe leaves to feed and rest, out of sight but within earshot. In four or five hours, she'll return to feed the little ones, and take them to a new hiding place. They follow this pattern for about three weeks, and only then, when the fawns are strong enough to outrun predators, do the young travel with their mother.

Deer have evolved a number of special adaptations which make this approach to fawn-rearing successful. Fawns have almost no odor, so predators can't scent them. Their white-spotted coats provide excellent camouflage when they're lying on the forest floor. For the first week of life, frightened fawns instinctively freeze, making full use of their protective coloration. Older fawns will lie until they think they've been discovered, and then jump up and bound away. A deer's primary protection from predators is its great speed. Newborn fawns aren't fast enough to outdistance predators, so they must depend on their ability to hide for protection.

Although these adaptations work well against predators, they don't work so well with people. The fawn's hiding instinct makes them easy to catch, at least for the first week. For the next few weeks, the fawn's curiosity may intice it to

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approach a person should someone stumble upon it. And, of course, the doe's absence leads one to believe that the fawn has been abandoned.

So what's the right way to handle an encounter with a fawn? Never try to catch it. If it's "hiding", admire it for a moment and then quietly walk away. Enjoy the memory but don't describe the location to others. If the fawn tries to follow you, gently push on its shoulders until it lies down, and then walk away. That's what its mother does when she doesn't want it to follow. If someone you know has found a fawn and taken it home, ask them to take it back where they found it, even if they've had it for a few days. Research has shown that a doe rarely abandons its fawn because of human scent. She stays in a summer home territory and travels through every part of it regularly. She can locate a misplaced fawn by calling, and likewise, a lost fawn will call for her.

If you think you've found an orphaned or injured fawn, or have found one in an unsafe location, remember, do not pick it up. Call your local Maryland Forest, Park and Wildlife Service District Wildlife office and ask for assistance. On evenings, weekends, and holidays, call the Forest, Park and Wildlife Service Communications Center at 301/255-0079.

Fawns need their mother's care and training to learn to survive in the wild. Those raised in captivity have a very poor chance of making it in their natural habitat. Nor do they adapt well to life in a pen. As they reach maturity, they can become unpredictable and dangerous. Captive deer have killed people. Deer are susceptible to rabies, and two cases have been confirmed in Maryland during the current outbreak. No vaccine is available to protect deer from contracting the disease.

Raising and keeping deer and other native wild animals in captivity without the approval of the Forest, Park and Wildlife Service is against the law. The Service feels that it is inhumane to subject wild animals to the unnatural conditions of life in captivity, not to mention the malnutrition, injury, and emotional stress that can occur at the hands of an unknowing captor. Remember, if you have a question about a fawn, don't pick it up. Call your local District Wildlife office before you make the fawn an orphan.