



News Release
Rockford Extension Center
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4/8/2009

Handling Young Wildlife

Each spring, some newborn wildlife, such as rabbits or birds, find their way outside of the nest and may appear abandoned. "The Wildlife Medical Clinic (WMC) at the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine indicates that people should remember a few basic pointers before considering the animals orphaned and removing or destroying them", says John Church, U. of I. Extension Educator, Natural Resources, Rockford. The clinic makes the following suggestions:

Unless absolutely certain that the animal's parents are dead, assume it is not an orphan and unless it is obviously injured, the animal is best left alone. If necessary, young wildlife can be returned to their nests even after being handled by a human. Wildlife mothers have "invested" a great deal of energy into raising these babies and will usually accept them back. Remember, it is illegal to keep any wild animal without the proper state or federal permits. "It is also illegal to trap, kill, or transport many species of wildlife without proper permits," says Church.

It may be necessary to try to "rescue" the animal when the animal is injured, weak, thin, very cold or sick, or if the animal is in unavoidable, unnatural danger.

Use caution if it is necessary to handle wildlife. Even young ones can try to defend themselves and injure a person. All wild animals are potentially dangerous. Call for help if the animal is big or dangerous. Don't let yourself be scratched, bitten, or injured. It is not only bad for you but may cause the animal to be destroyed for rabies testing. All bites must be reported to local rabies control authorities. Always have a barrier between you and the animal.



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High pitched sounds mean danger to most animals so lower your voice when trying to calm an animal. Never tower over an animal. Never stare them in the eye. Never put your face up to an animal or reach your hand in as a test to see if the animal will bite.

Always wash your hands after handling wildlife, which can carry parasites and diseases.

Although the general rule of thumb is to leave the animals alone, there are also some other pointers on when not to attempt a rescue according to the WMC. Don't rescue when the parent is nearby; if the animal is fat, bright eyed, healthy and not in immediate danger; if baby bunnies' eyes are open unless they are hurt or in danger as they have a better chance on their own than with humans; if baby birds are completely feathered and are just learning to fly, unless they are in danger from pets, people, or machinery.

Stress from handling and noises can be killers of wildlife. Being captured is a terrifying experience. Place them in a warm, dark, quiet place to relieve their stress. Handle the animal as little as possible.

Persons with questions can call the WMC at 217-244-1195. "The clinic has a very informative website at <http://www.cvm.uiuc.edu/wmc>," concludes Church.