Here are some of the answers that we give to people with questions about young wildlife:

Q *A baby bird has fallen out of its nest in a tree in my backyard. I am afraid something might happen to it if I leave it there on the ground. Should I bring it into the house and feed it until it is able to fly?*

A No. The best thing to do is put the bird carefully back into the nest. Don't worry about getting your scent on the bird; it should not affect the mother's care. Even if you find that the nest has blown out of the tree, put it back in the tree securely along with the nestling.

Q *A few minutes ago I was walking through the woods behind our house and saw several baby raccoons on the ground near a large hollow tree. I wonder if they fell out of the hole way up in the tree and the mother has abandoned them because she can't put them back in the nest. Should I bring them home and care for them?*

A No. Most likely the young raccoons are merely exploring, and their mother is nearby. They are probably old enough to be fully capable of climbing back up the tree to their den when they are ready to return. If they were too young to climb, the mother would carry them back. It should also be noted that with the current outbreak of rabies in Massachusetts, it is wise to avoid **any** contact with raccoons and other wild mammals.

Q *There is a young blue jay in my backyard and it seems to have difficulty flying. I am afraid that either my dog or cat will get it. Should I bring it inside and feed it until it is able to fly?*

A No. As a fledgling, it has enough feathers to leave the nest. This means it is old enough to learn to fly, which it will rapidly begin to do. Leave the bird alone, but you should keep your dog and cat in the house for a few days so that they will not disturb the bird.

Q *This morning I found an abandoned fawn near the edge of a field on my property. I brought the fawn into my house to save it, but I don't know how to care for it. What should I do?*

A Immediately, take the fawn back to the spot where you found it, and leave it there. The mother should come back again looking for the fawn. Even one or two days after removal from the wild, fawns have been successfully reunited with their mothers by returning them to the place where they were found. When you picked up the fawn, the mother was probably feeding not far away. Usually young fawns are quite safe when left alone because their color pattern and lack of scent help them to remain undetected until their mothers return.

Q *A moment ago, I accidently kicked open a nest of baby rabbits while walking in the thick grass at the far corner of my backyard. They seem so helpless. I waited, but saw no sign of their mother. Should I rescue them?*

A They do not need to be rescued. The mother will not return as long as you remain at the nest. Just replace the top of the nest that you uncovered and leave. The mother will return and care for the young. Cottontail rabbits leave their young for several hours while eating, but they do return to nurse the young. As with other young wildlife, it is best to *LEAVE THEM ALONE!*

University of Massachusetts, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Massachusetts counties cooperating. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife and the UMass Cooperative Extension System offer equal opportunity in programs and employment.

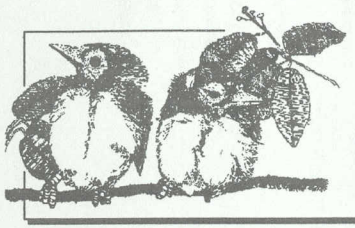
IF YOU CARE...

LEAVE THEM THERE !

YOUNG WILDLIFE BELONGS IN THE WILD

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

University of Massachusetts
Cooperative Extension System



THE PROBLEM

Every year, the lives of many young wildlife are upset by people who mean only to help. Those people take ***baby*** wildlife from the wild in a mistaken attempt to ***save*** them. Hopefully, a little understanding will prevent this problem.

WHY IT OCCURS

The arrival of spring and summer also means the arrival of newborn and just-hatched wildlife. These youngsters soon venture into the world on shaky legs or fragile wings. Most are learning survival from one or both parents. For them, the perils of survival are a natural part of ecology. Some will not survive. However, young wildlife that learn well and are the most fit usually live the longest.

Those early unsteady steps and flights are part of normal development, helping young animals learn to take care of themselves. Some develop that ability quickly, almost from birth. Varying hare, for example, are ready to venture into their world within hours. Other animals need more parental care. Cottontail rabbits are born with no fur and eyes closed, unable to leave their nest for several days.

It is at this time that most of the problems arise. Some people assume that young wildlife they have *found* are abandoned. They believe that the young animals are helpless and need to be *saved*. ***In nearly all cases, this is a mistake:*** the young animals are neither abandoned or orphaned.

THE RESULT

These well-meant acts of kindness tend to have the opposite result. Instead of being left to learn their place in the world, young wildlife are removed from the wild. They are denied important natural learning experiences. Worse, most people quickly find that they do not really know how to care for young wildlife, and many of the animals soon die in the hands of these well-meaning people. Of course, this can be prevented if young wildlife are not taken from the wild in the first place.

Young wildlife that *do* survive human care have missed the natural experiences that enable them to fend for themselves. When these animals are released back into the wild they have a reduced ability to survive. It is difficult for them to function as they should in the natural world. Their ability to find natural foods is impaired, thereby reducing survival chances. Further, they may be thrust as unwelcome intruders into the home range of another member of their species.

Often, the care given to young wildlife unavoidably results in some attachment to humans. Upon release to the wild, those animals generally have little fear of people. Some return to places where people live, only to be attacked by domestic animals or to be hit by cars. Some become nuisances, getting into stored food, trash cans or dwellings. People have also been injured by once-tamed wildlife.

WHAT TO DO

All of these problems can be avoided if we follow one simple rule when coming upon young wildlife: ***LEAVE THEM ALONE!*** It may be difficult to do, but this is the real act of kindness. We must not allow ourselves to be fooled into thinking that the situation is different - in nearly all cases, young wildlife do not need to be saved. *Resist the temptation to help them.* Only when they are found injured or with their dead mother is there reason to do something, and then the state wildlife laws are specific about what may be done legally.

Nearly all wild birds and mammals are protected under the law. They may not legally be taken from the wild or kept. Never consider them as possible pets; it is both illegal and unwise. ***They are wild animals that belong in the wild.*** However, a distressed/injured wild animal may be assisted, but a person must deliver the animal immediately to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator, to an office of the Division of Fisheries & Wildlife, or to an Environmental Police Officer.

The Division of Fisheries & Wildlife licenses wildlife rehabilitators who are qualified to care for injured or truly orphaned wildlife. In cases where the services of a wildlife rehabilitator are required, names may be obtained through one of the Division offices:

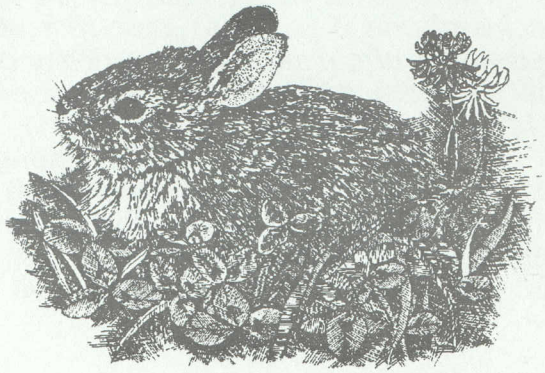
Central Wildlife District
211 Temple Street, West Boylston 01583
Phone: (508) 835-3607

Northeast Wildlife District
Harris Street, Box 2086, Acton 01720
Phone: (508) 262-4347

Southeast Wildlife District
195 Bournedale Road, Buzzards Bay 02532
Phone: (508) 759-3406

Field Headquarters
Rte. 135, Westboro 01581
Phone: (508) 792-7270

Western Wildlife District
400 Hubbard Avenue, Pittsfield 01201
Phone: (413) 447-9789

Connecticut Valley Wildlife District
East Street, Belchertown 01007
Phone: (413) 323-7632

Boston Office
Leverett Saltonstall Building
100 Cambridge Street, Boston 02202
Phone: (617) 727-3151