

Rabies ... it IS a problem!

Rabies is a virus that attacks the nerves and brains of animals and when they are sick with rabies, they can pass it to other animals and to humans through their saliva. This usually happens through a bite. Most rabies is found in wildlife such as skunks and raccoons and they can pass it to your dogs or cats. Your pets then pose a greater threat to you because you are more likely to have close contact with your pets.

Even though rabies is not found everywhere, it is a serious risk so the Ministry of Natural Resources and health departments are very careful to ensure that only trained Wildlife Rehabilitators should be handling wild animals. If a wild animal bites you, it is imperative that you visit your doctor or health unit immediately.

Can you raise a wild animal yourself?

No. Wildlife is protected and it is illegal for anyone to possess a native wild animal unless given special permission by the Ministry of Natural Resources. Wildlife Rehabilitators are volunteers who have licenses granted by the Ministry to allow them to care for injured or orphaned animals but even they have to release the animals back to the wild as soon as it is safe to do so.

Preventing orphaned wildlife

- Before cutting down trees, always check for nests. This task is always done best in the autumn when nesting season has passed.
- Place caps on all chimneys, vents, and window wells.
- Keep your pets away from wild animals.
- Educate your kids to respect and keep their distance from wild animals and not to try to catch or harass them.
- Take care when driving and watch roadsides for wild animals, especially at dawn and dusk.
- Ensure dumpsters and garbage cans have tight fitting lids and always keep them closed
- Avoid feeding your pets outdoors; if you do, ensure that you clean up any leftovers

Remember: Wildlife Rehabilitators are licensed by the Ministry of Natural Resources and have special skills that allow them to care for wild animals. They are volunteers and while they will never ask you for money to assist animals, they are always grateful for donations as they receive no financial assistance for this work.

Contacting a Wildlife Rehabilitator

You can be connected with the help closest to your location through the Ministry of Natural Resources or your local veterinarian

Injured and orphaned wildlife need special care

Sure they're cute! But wild baby animals have special needs and you could do much more harm than good. Here is some information you need to know to help baby animals grow up.



Learning about Wildlife

Is it really an orphan?

In the spring and early summer, you might come across a nest of birds or see a baby animal with no adult in sight. But unless something is obviously wrong (a nest out of the tree, broken bones or wings, bleeding, or a dead adult nearby), LEAVE IT ALONE! For many animals, only one parent raises the young and the adult may be away getting groceries for the kids. Wildlife parents are very devoted to their young and rarely abandon them.

What if you have to rescue an orphan?

Your first step should be to contact a Wildlife Rehabilitator through the Ministry of Natural Resources, or local veterinarians. Avoid handling the animals as much as possible but keep them in a warm dark and quiet place until they can be placed with a Rehabilitator. This is for your protection as well as theirs; animals can carry many parasites which may not harm them but could be bad for you, including illnesses that could cause death. Humans handling baby animals causes them stress that may make them bite or cause an emotional overload for the animal serious enough to kill it.

Acting on positive information

If you have found an obviously injured wild animal or know for sure that a baby animal has lost its parent(s), it is okay to intervene. But quickly contact a trained Wildlife Rehabilitator. They can provide you with proper guidance and will arrange for the safe handling of the animal --- safe for the animal and for you. Wild animals have special care and feeding needs that is beyond what most people will know or are able to provide. They are not like your household pets and your local pet store is unlikely to have good information about the care of wild animals.

Some tips about young animals

Birds

Nestling birds usually lack feathers or are covered with down. They should be placed back in their nests or their nest should be placed back in a tree.

When young birds leave the nest, they are called fledglings and have fully developed feathers. They are out of the nest to learn how to fly and they may often fall off branches. Usually, mama is nearby to help them out so don't interfere unless the baby has been on the ground a long time with no sign of an adult.

Duck and Goose babies sometimes get separated from the rest of their brood as they are waddling to food or water. If left alone, a parent will usually come looking for the straggler.

Rabbits

These feed their young only at night so you will not find mama at her nest during the day. This is not a problem. A small rabbit with its eyes open and able to stand up (usually about three weeks old) is self-sufficient and does not need your help.

Squirrels

If a baby wanders or falls out from a nest, mama will retrieve it. They also usually have alternate nest sites if one nest is destroyed. Make sure you give the mother plenty of time to find her youngsters.

Deer

A small fawn alone is not necessarily an orphan! Mother deer will protect their young from predators by leaving them alone in a secluded spot and leading the predator away. NEVER attempt to rescue a baby fawn without speaking with a Wildlife Rehabilitator or the Ministry of Natural Resources first.

Opossums

These are marsupials (like kangaroos) and their young stay in their mother's pouch for several months. After emerging, the family unit will usually stay together for another six weeks or so. Although they are newcomers to Ontario, they are becoming much more common.

Foxes and Coyotes

These makes dens in hollow logs or trees, or under rock piles. Less commonly, they will nest in ground burrows. Pups are usually born from February to May and will often be left unattended while the adults gather food.

Raccoons

Birth occurs between February and June and they will primarily come out at night to feed. Babies will stay in the nest until about two months old and then will scavenge with mama, usually starting in early spring.

Skunks

Cute but smelly, they are usually not out of their burrows alone until about 16 weeks of age by which time they are self-sufficient. A single baby skunk will usually have siblings nearby. They have very specific dietary needs and are easily killed by giving the sorts of food you might give to a pet.



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