



Does This Wild Baby Need Rescue?

Situation: You've found a wild animal baby with no parent in sight.

Why This Happens

Unlike humans, most wild animals do not have baby sitters or daycare services for their offspring. So in some species, busy wild animal parents must leave their baby or babies unattended for periods of time. After all, like human parents, these animal parents have lots of work to do: they have to find food for themselves and their young – often traveling long distances to do so, protect themselves and their young from predators, defend their territory from others of their own kind, and keep their lifesaving fur or feathers clean and groomed. Some animals, like deer and rabbits, may also deliberately stay away from their young for periods of time in order to avoid attracting attention to their offspring.

FAQs and Humane Solutions:

"I found a nest of baby bunnies and there's no mother rabbit around. What should I do?"

To keep from attracting the attention of predators to her babies, a mom Cottontail stays away from her well-hidden nest and only comes back for a few minutes at a time a couple of times each night to feed her babies.

For more information about how to tell if a nest of baby Cottontails is orphaned or not, please see [this pdf](#) on our website.

"I found a baby squirrel on the ground and there's no adult squirrel in sight. What should I do?"

Once they are fully-furred and their eyes are open, it is not unusual for juvenile squirrels to come out to play near their nest and practice climbing up and down a tree when their mother is away looking for food. But squirrels whose eyes have not yet opened or whose bodies are not yet fully covered in fur should NOT be out of the nest. For more information about what to do when you find a baby squirrel, please see [this pdf](#) on our website.



A nestling Gray Squirrel: too young to be out of its nest



*This Mallard duckling is highly dependent on its mother for protection. **A downy duckling or gosling, if found alone, almost certainly needs help.***

"I found a fawn curled up on the ground and I don't see a mom deer. Is it orphaned?"

What should I do?"

For the first two or three weeks of life fawns are too weak to follow their mother or to run away from predators. At this age their best defense is to lie completely still and let their spotted coat camouflage them from predator's eyes. To keep from attracting attention to her hiding baby, the fawn's mother leaves the area to feed or bed-down. She'll return periodically to nurse the fawn when she thinks it is safe to do so. To learn more about how to determine if a fawn is orphaned or not, please go to [this pdf](#) on our website.

"I found a baby songbird that has feathers, but it can't fly. What should I do?"

Many birds go through a "fledgling" stage where they are big enough to leave the nest but their flight feathers haven't completely grown in and they are not strong enough for sustained flight. Oftentimes these young birds end up on the ground after their first attempts at flight and they'll essentially have to learn to fly from the ground up. They are vulnerable to predation and other hazards at this stage, but for them it is a natural part of growing up and it's usually best to leave them in their parent's care. And speaking of parental care, **it is not at all unusual for these birds to be seen alone**, and for people who find them to assume they are orphaned. In fact, the parent birds are usually hard at work finding food for their offspring and can't possibly stay right there with their young one at all times. They'll return with a mouthful of food, stuff it in the youngster's mouth and take off again to find more food. Learn more about when you should and shouldn't intervene with baby birds by visiting [this pdf](#) on our web site: <http://www.wihumane.org/wildlife/documents/OrphanedBirds.pdf>

"I found a baby animal that is injured [or cold, dehydrated, or sick]. What should I do?"

If the animal is bleeding, bruised, has a leg or wing that is broken, has punctures or lacerations, feels cold to the touch, or it has flies, fly eggs (they look like tiny whitish or yellowish rice grains), maggots or ants on it, it will need the care of a licensed wildlife rehabilitator if it is to have any chance for survival. Call your local licensed wildlife rehabilitator for advice. If you are in Milwaukee County, you are welcome to call us at 414-431-6204.

"I found a baby mammal [or bird] with hardly any fur [or feathers] on it. What should I do?"

Hairless (or featherless) baby animals, or those with only a sparse growth of fur or with downy feathers, should not be out of their nest. These little ones will usually need human intervention if they are to survive. In some cases they can be successfully returned to their nest and the care of their parent(s). However, an injured or sick baby should not be returned to the nest. And any baby that is cold to the touch should not be placed back into the nest **without warming it first**.

See below for information about how you can safely and effectively warm a baby animal.



This fawn was brought to us by someone who found it alone and assumed it was orphaned. We returned the fawn to the location it was found to reunite with its mother



We stabilized this juvenile American Robin's fractured wing so it would heal properly

"Red Foxes have a den near my house. I can see the baby foxes playing at the den opening, but I don't see any parent foxes. Might the babies be orphaned?"

It is not unusual for fully-furred fox kits or the young of other species of mammals to play outside their den. The parent(s) are probably either off hunting for food or are resting inside the burrow. Sometimes, especially in hot weather and when their babies are juveniles, one or both of the parents will leave their young for a couple of hours and go rest elsewhere during the heat of the day. They do this because it is too hot and/or crowded in the den.

However, if a baby animal is has been crying for some time, or it looks weak, sick, or has flies on it, it might be orphaned. Please call your local licensed wildlife rehabilitator for advice.

"A Raccoon nested in my home's fireplace chimney. Tonight, the babies have been crying for over an hour. Could that mean they're orphaned?"

Raccoons are nocturnal animals, and since you are hearing the babies cry at night but you haven't heard them cry during the day, they are probably crying because their mom has left them to go out foraging for food. Crying that goes on for a few hours, especially if it happens during the day when the mother Raccoon should be "home" with her young, can be an indicator that something is wrong. But **before concluding that the babies are orphaned and removing them from the nest**, please talk with a licensed wildlife rehabilitator in your area that is experienced with Raccoons.

"My children found a baby bird [or mammal] on the ground. They touched it, so that means that we can't put it back where they found it because the mother will reject it, right?"

Generally, **not true**. If a mother wild animal rejects one of its young it is usually because the youngster is **injured, sick, cold, or has a birth defect**. That being said, you shouldn't touch a baby wild animal at all if it is not in need of help.



We put these owlets that had fallen from their nest back up in the nest-tree in a nest box we made for them. Their parents resumed caring for them.



This American Robin is a fledgling: too big and active to remain in the nest, but not strong enough or with enough feather growth yet to fly very well. Photo by Kristi Schumacher

How to warm a baby wild animal

Most young wild animals are dependent on body warmth from one or both of their parents as well as the protection of their nest or den. A baby that has fallen from its nest or otherwise become separated from its parents is very likely to suffer from hypothermia (sub-normal body temperature). Prior to either attempting to return a baby to the care of its parents, or while you are transporting the animal to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator for help, warming the animal to normal body temperature can mean the difference between life or death.



Fill a zip-top plastic bag with very warm tap water. The water should feel quite warm, but not so hot that you can't comfortably keep your hand in it indefinitely. Expel as much air as possible from the bag



Cover the water-filled bag with a single layer of ravel-free (no loose strings) cloth.



Place the cloth-covered water bag inside of a cardboard box that has had several pencil-sized air-holes punched through it



Place the baby on the cloth-covered water bag and place another layer of ravel-free cloth over the baby animal. Feel the water bag every 20-30 minutes or so to check its warmth. Replace the water in the bag with warmer water as needed to warm the baby

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*The Wisconsin Humane Society is a charitable organization that depends entirely on donations to fulfill its mission to create a community that values animals and treats them with respect and kindness. Your support for the WHS Wildlife Rehabilitation center makes possible the distribution of information like this to thousands of people who request it each year, and makes possible the humane care of over 5,000 injured, sick, and orphaned wild animals from our community each year. You may **donate** online at www.wihumane.org or by mailing a check to the following address: WHS Wildlife Center, 4500 W. Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53208*