

Finding Baby Animals **Dave Parent, DVM**

Nesting and birthing season is near and a word about care of our wild animals is in order.

Many wild animals do not need to be "rescued" and there is almost NEVER a time when you should remove a baby wild animal from its natural environment, even if it appears abandoned. In the vast majority of cases, just leaving a young animal alone affords it the best chance for survival.

Every year, hundreds of young wild animals such as fawns, baby seals and baby birds are needlessly "rescued" and referred to wildlife rehabilitators. This is extremely detrimental and harmful to the young animal, as well as disruptive and costly to wildlife rehabilitators when they most need to concentrate limited resources on truly orphaned or injured wildlife. Unless the animal is showing obvious signs of illness or injury such as bleeding, vomiting, panting, lethargy, ruffled feathers or fur or attack by cat/dog, leave them there! You can help by ALWAYS consulting a licensed wildlife rehabilitator prior to touching the animal.

Why don't these babies need to be rescued? Young animals are often left alone for hours while their parents gather food. They are being tended by the parents in ways best suited to their survival and appropriate for that species, ensuring that they retain wild behaviors. It is normal and typical behavior for a deer fawn to be left alone for many hours, sometimes they even walk around vocalizing. This does not mean that they are orphans! Seal pups are often left by their mothers on beaches that are frequented by humans. It may be several hours before the mothers come back. It is important to leave them alone and stay well away! If the mother comes back and sees people or dogs surrounding her pup, she will leave FOREVER, abandoning the pup. This almost always means a death sentence for the seal pup. There is a common and almost sacred myth that young birds leave the nest when they are ready to fly, returning at night. What REALLY happens is that they almost always leave the nest before they are fully feathered or flight-ready. They will be fed by the parents on branches or even on the ground for a few days until they are ready to fly. Rest assured the parents are still taking care of them.

One final word about human smell. Wild parents almost never reject a young animal because they have human scent on them. With few exceptions, birds have a poor sense of smell. I have seen cases where fawns were bathed in human shampoo and the mother still readily accepted it!

The bottom line - It is always best to call first before handling any wild animal. Fortunately, there are resources for you to use.

Here are some useful phone numbers:

PAWS Wildlife Center: [425-412-4040 x917](tel:425-412-4040)
Lynnwood, birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians

Orcanet: [1-866-ORCANET](tel:1-866-ORCANET)
All marine mammals, dead or alive

Sarvey Wildlife Care Center: [360-435-4817](tel:360-435-4817)
Arlington, birds and mammals

Wolf Hollow Wildlife Rehabilitation Center: [360-378-5000](tel:360-378-5000)
Friday Harbor, San Juan Island, birds and small to medium sized mammals