

Leave young wildlife alone

Summer is the time of year when people find young animals that have been “orphaned.” Young songbirds and deer appear helpless and some folks think they are doing these animals a favor by picking them up and “saving” them. The best way to help them is to leave them alone. In the vast majority of cases, these animals have not been orphaned, but are waiting on a parent to return. Usually, the parent is simply out of sight to the well-meaning onlooker.

Fawns typically lay in areas with tall forbs and grasses hiding and waiting on the doe to return and allow it to nurse. Although the doe may give birth to two (and in some cases three) fawns, they are kept separate (hidden in separate locations) until approximately 1 month of age when they join the doe in her daily travels. This strategy aids in the fawns’ survival. Fawns produce little scent early in life and by keeping still and hidden, the probability of surviving predation is greater than by trying to run with under-developed legs.

Young songbirds go through a tough period upon leaving the nest. Initially, the chicks appear to have fallen out of the nest, and, in reality, that is exactly what they did—but they did so on purpose! They have “outgrown” the nest and are ready to learn to fly. During the first few days out of the nest, young birds are vulnerable to a host of predators. However, food is generally not a problem because one or both parents remain nearby and continues to feed them. Once they become fairly proficient flyers (3 – 4 days), their survival rate increases dramatically. However, you do not help anything by picking up the birds, trying to place them back in the nest, or by taking them inside or to a rehabilitator to take care of the nestling.

Survival of all young wildlife is relatively low—most die before reaching one month of age. That is nature. Exposure and predation are primary causes of mortality during this period. It is important to keep in mind that young foxes, bobcats, hawks, and owls have to eat as well. In addition, it is a violation of Tennessee state law to take animals from the wild and keep them in captivity while trying to “raise” them. Although it may seem cruel, it is best to let nature take its course and leave young wildlife alone.

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