

I'VE FOUND A BABY ANIMAL

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Stumbling upon a baby animal that needs help usually brings out the maternal instincts in all of us. However, it's important to keep in mind that taking the wrong action under such circumstances can cause the baby's death.

Q: How can I assess the situation to determine whether or not this baby is truly orphaned?

A: The general rule of thumb to follow is, if the animal is consistently out on its own with never any signs of a mother, and following you around this usually is a good indication that it is orphaned and looking to you for help. When mom is caring for her young she is very dedicated and will not allow the babies to wander far from the den or her watchful eye! On the other hand some species take a different approach in trying to keep their babies safe from harm. For example, homeowners will often come across a nest of baby rabbits when doing lawn work and because they don't see an adult rabbit ever around the nest it is assumed that these babies have been abandoned. When in reality a mother rabbit stays away from her nest of babies on purpose in order to avoid drawing attention to them. If she fails at this and lures a predator to the nest she has no way of defending them. Therefore her best defence is to steer away, only coming either early morning or late at night to feed them. Deer take a similar approach. A doe will leave her baby stashed in long grass and stay away most of the time only returning to feed or move on together. So in the case of deer and rabbits it's best to leave alone, unless the animal is moving around and making vocalizations or you see a dead adult in the immediate vicinity.

Q: Can I feed the animal?

A: No, feeding the animal can cause its death. At such a young age their systems are very sensitive and can't handle most foods people have on hand such as, cow's milk, human baby formula or home brew recipes suggested by well intentioned but inexperienced sources. Any of these can be very detrimental to the health of the baby. Besides creating digestive problems, feeding any baby animal any liquid, including water, without the proper gauge feeding syringe or knowing the animal's internal body temperature can cause it to aspirate, meaning it now has fluid on its lungs. If this happens the baby will likely develop pneumonia, leading to its death. See below for care information.

Q: What can I do?

A: The best way to help this baby out is to bring it inside and keep it warm. If you have a pet carrier you can keep it in that, otherwise be creative, if it is a baby squirrel often a large box or a cardboard animal carrier from a veterinary clinic will do the trick. Put some towels or flannels in with it and if you have a hot water bottle fill it with hot water and wrap it up really well in a towel and place the baby on top of it and then cover it over with another little blanket. Don't worry you won't smother it, the warmth is a must, just make sure the hot water bottle is well wrapped so it doesn't burn. Don't leave the hot water bottle in overnight as it will get cold becoming more of a liability than an asset. Just keep it inside in a warm, draft free and safe location away from pets with lots of towels to burrow in.

Q: Finding Help?

A: In some jurisdictions it is illegal to care for wildlife and you should consult you government wildlife agency where you may be referred to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator. Unfortunately, there is no longer any program to care for orphaned wildlife in Ottawa or Eastern Ontario because of changes in regulations made by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. To learn more about the issues involved, you can visit <http://www.wildlifeontario.ca/>.

INTERNET SITES: There is some good information on the Internet like the sites listed below but other sites give advice that will kill animals you are trying to help - please be very careful.

www.orphanedwildlifecare.com

www.tc.umn.edu/~devo0028/w/rehab.htm
www.squirrelrehab.org/rehabinfo/orphaned.htm
www.squirreisanctuary.org/
www.geocities.com/rainforest/vines/4892/raccoonrehab.htm

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