

Wild Creatures Need To Stay In The Wild

AGRI-VIEWS

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WARNING: Harsh reality ahead!

This is the time of year that humans will be encountering “baby” wild animals. When the two paths cross, it is seldom good for the animals. These wild animals are not human. So trying to relate to them as if they were is not going to be a wise or effective course of action. Because of well meaning cartoons and horrible misunderstandings, which are then often perpetuated onto children, people think that animals react to their “families” like humans do.

Most wild animals do not have “families”. The notion that momma critter and papa critter raising the little ones and teaching them the ways of the world until they are full grown makes for a good story, but short on reality. Often the mother keeps the young ‘uns around just until they are big enough to fend for themselves. While these youngsters may be in close proximity to their parent(s), they are no longer dependent on the adult. In rabbits this occurs at about 4 to 5 weeks of age. If you see a small rabbit that’s the size of your fist or bigger, it’s on its own.

Animal parents are not around their young 24/7. They may place their youngsters somewhere and “tell them” to stay there while they go off and forage. As young birds get close to fledging (being able to fly) they can become adventurous and wind up leaving the nest a day or two before they can really fly. The parent(s) will be in the area and often bring food to the young bird for a day or two until they can fly. Young birds grow and develop feathers very quickly so a bird that you may think isn’t very old, is actually just a few days away from independence!

If you encounter what you think is an “orphaned” animal, you need to just leave it alone and keep household pets and children away from it. It is illegal for you to take a wild animal into your home and try to care for it. Human compassion is a powerful force, but unfortunately we only know how to relate to humans. We aren’t equipped to be animal parents so we shouldn’t even try. Wildlife rehab facilities are literally over run with well meaning drop offs this time of year. Most of these “orphans” are just turned right around and released because they are perfectly capable of caring for themselves.

It is very hard for humans to walk away from what appears to be a wildlife baby on its own. But there’s a very important statistic that we need to keep in mind. Less than one half of the young produced this year will survive until next year. In birds it is less than 80%. That’s the natural way. Yes, you may walk away from animal that may not survive, but the natural cycle depends on this high mortality rate. We can’t keep every one of those young animals alive and we shouldn’t. But quite often, the animal’s best chance for survival comes from you leaving it alone!

Is there anything that you can do to reduce risk to wildlife? Of course there is. Walk through your lawn before you mow and look for small animals that appear to be hiding. Mow around them if that occurs. Possibly the biggest threat to small animals and especially birds, is cats. The house cat is not native to the North American ecosystem and raises havoc with wildlife. Numerous very sound studies have shown that cats, both feral and kept cats, kill between one and three billion animals a year, many of them birds. Keep your cats indoors, especially at this time of year to protect all those animal babies.