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State wildlife biologists share why to 'Keep Wildlife Wild'

EDITOR'S ADVISORY: A 30-second audio public service announcement featuring DNR Secretary Cathy Stepp on Keeping Wildlife Wild is available by clicking on the audio link below.

MADISON -- Mother Nature's wildlife nursery will be swinging into high gear over the next two months, and state wildlife officials are reminding people that this nursery operates much differently than a human nursery.

"Wild animal mothers care for their young differently than human mothers, said Tami Ryan, wildlife health section supervisor with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. "It is common for wild animal parents to leave their babies unattended for periods of time while they gather food. For some species, leaving babies hidden and unattended is an adaptation to protect them from predators."

- [Keep Wildlife in the Wild](#) [MP3: 467kb]

Ryan says spring and early summer is the peak period when people discover baby wild animals.

"The most common situations we see involve deer, rabbits, raccoons and bird nestlings, and we want to offer advice on how to we can all help keep Wisconsin's wildlife wild," she said.

Ryan advises that sometimes it can be hard to know if the wild animal someone finds is truly in need of help. If someone thinks a wild animal is in need of assistance, Ryan cautions that they should not touch the animal. The first thing they should do is call a licensed wildlife rehabilitator or contact the DNR's Call Center at 1-888-936-7463.

Mandy Kamps, DNR wildlife biologist and a member of the multi-agency Keep Wildlife Wild initiative, agrees, saying, "If you find a baby wild animal on its own don't assume it's orphaned."

Kamps cites these examples for common wildlife species:

- **Baby rabbits** are left alone in their nest, concealed by grass or vegetation, during the day. The mother returns a few times to feed her babies. She leaves quickly to keep away predators.
- **Baby raccoons** become more mobile as they grow and open their eyes. They are often seen playing in trees or yards during the day without their mother. However,

mom is nearby and will maintain her mostly nocturnal behavior and will only be seen toward nightfall.

- **Fledgling songbirds** also leave nests without parental supervision and before they can fly. They hop around on the ground learning how to forage. This hopping makes people wonder if the bird is injured and cannot fly. They cannot fly because their wings are not fully developed. Young birds out of the nest at this age are also still fed by their parents, who are usually close by finding food.
- **Fawns** are born with spots and very little scent to help them stay hidden. They move very little in first weeks and often left alone for much of this time. The mother doe returns to feed. A fawn lying still, quiet and by itself should be left alone.

"While our first human instinct may be to rush in and try to assist, the best thing for these youngsters is to leave them alone," Kamps said.

In addition, Ryan recommends visiting DNR's [Keep Wildlife Wild](#) webpage. The webpage provides a lot of helpful information on how to tell if a baby animal is truly orphaned, as well as, how to contact one of Wisconsin's licensed wildlife rehabilitators and how to help injured or sick wildlife.

The Keep Wildlife Wild campaign offers the following tips:

1. Control family pets when outdoors.
2. Stay alert for wildlife on roads.
3. Place covers on window wells so small animals do not get trapped. Seal off spaces under decks or buildings, and spaces in attics, garages, or buildings so wild animals cannot make nests.
4. Make potential food items inaccessible to wild animals, including pet food and garbage.
5. Be careful if trapping and relocating adult wild animals during warmer months. You may unknowingly separate wild animal adults and babies.

More information is available by searching the DNR website for "[orphan](#)."

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