

If You Care, Leave It There

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It's common to see baby wild animals outside during spring. Baby wild animals might seem like they need our help, but unless the animal is truly orphaned or injured, there is no need to rescue them.

These tips from SD Game, Fish & Parks and our Humane Officers can help you decide whether to take action.

Signs that a wild animal needs your help

- Presented by a cat or dog
- Evidence of bleeding
- An apparent or obvious broken limb
- Featherless or nearly featherless and on the ground
- Shivering
- A dead parent nearby
- Crying and wandering all day long

If necessary, safely capture and transport them to the appropriate place for treatment.

Tips for birds, rabbits, squirrels and other species

Determining whether an animal is orphaned and needs your help depends on age, species and behavior. Babies of some species are left alone all day and rely on camouflage for protection, while others are tightly supervised by their parent(s).

Baby birds

If featherless or nearly featherless baby birds have fallen from their nest but appear unharmed, put them back in the nest if you can do so without danger to yourself. (It's a myth that birds will abandon their young if a person touches them.)

If the original nest was destroyed or is too high to reach, hang a small, shallow wicker basket close to where the original nest was. Woven stick baskets from garden stores or supermarket floral departments work well; they resemble natural nests and allow rain to pass through so the birds won't drown. Adult birds won't jump into anything they cannot see out of, so make sure the basket is not too deep. Put the fallen babies into the new nest and keep watch from a distance for an hour to make sure the parent birds return to the new nest to feed their chicks. Watch closely, because parent birds can be quite secretive.

Baby Raccoons

If a baby raccoon has been seen alone for more than a few hours, they are probably an orphan. Mother raccoons don't let their young out of their sight for long. Call animal control if you observe this.

Baby Rabbits

A rabbit who is 4 inches long, hops well and has open eyes and erect ears is independent from their mother and should be allowed to fend for themselves. **Uninjured baby rabbits in an intact nest should also be left alone.** Although they might look abandoned because mom isn't around, mother rabbits visit their dependent young only a few times a day to avoid attracting predators. If you see any younger rabbits in a nest, do not touch them or move them. They cannot survive without their mother and she is probably watching them from a safe distance where you cannot see her.

Baby Squirrels

A squirrel who is nearly full-sized has a full and fluffy tail and can run, jump and climb is independent. However, if a juvenile squirrel continuously approaches and follows people, their mom is probably gone. In this case, you should contact animal control because the baby is very hungry and needs care. If the baby and/or their nest fell from the tree today, give the mother squirrel a chance to reclaim their young and relocate them to a new nest. If the baby is uninjured, leave them where they are, leave the area, keep people and pets away and monitor them from a safe distance.

For more information visit South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks website

<https://gfp.sd.gov/outdoor-learning/outdoor-campus/east/wild-animal-babies.aspx>