

If you care . . . Leave them there!
NJ Dept. of Environmental Protection Division of Fish & Wildlife
Help keep them wild!

Every year during the spring and early summer, the lives of many young animals are disrupted.

People encountering young wild animals attempt to "save" them. Chances are the mother was close by, helplessly watching as her young were taken. Although well meaning, efforts to "save" these babies often do more harm than good.

If not properly handled or raised these "saved" animals may be sentenced to a lifetime of captivity or reduced chances of survival in the wild. It's a normal human instinct to want to care for a helpless-looking young animal that is found.

These newborn or newly hatched youngsters venturing into the world on shaky legs and untried wings are often learning survival skills from their parents. The perils of survival are part of the natural world around us. Some young wildlife will not survive. However, the ones that do survive are usually the most fit for their environment and to perpetuate the species.

Instinctively, some animals quickly develop the skills they need to survive. Ducklings are walking and feeding moments after they're born. Robins, on the other hand, spend weeks in the nest being fed by their parents before they'll go out on their own. Other animals develop survival skills over a longer period of time. Young raccoons must remain with their mother in a family group throughout summer and into the winter learning how to survive. It is during this important developmental stage when many baby animals are found and thought to be orphaned. Many people assume that young wildlife seen without a parent have been abandoned. They believe the young animals are helpless and need to be saved. These acts of kindness often decrease the animal's chances of survival and leading a natural life in the wild.

When young animals are removed from the wild they are denied the most important natural learning experiences. Worse, most people quickly find they do not really know how to care for young animals. If the young animals do survive in captivity and are released back into the wild, they have missed the experiences that help them to fend for themselves and are more likely to perish. Their ability to find natural foods is limited. Their defenses against predators are lacking.

And they may find themselves an unwelcome intruder in the territory of another member of their species. Often, care given to young wildlife by untrained individuals unavoidably results in some attachment to people. Upon release into the wild, those animals generally have little fear of humans. Some return to places where people live, only to be attacked by domestic animals or to be hit by cars. Some become nuisances getting into stored food, trash cans or dwellings.

People have also been injured by once-tamed wildlife.