

## ***KEEP WILDLIFE WILD, LEAVE YOUNG WILDLIFE ALONE***

The arrival of spring means the arrival of newborn and just-hatched wildlife. These youngsters soon venture into the world on shaky legs or fragile wings and are discovered by people living, playing, or working nearby. Every year, the lives of many young wild creatures are disturbed by people who take young wildlife from the wild in a well-intentioned attempt to "save" them.

These well-meant acts of kindness tend to have the opposite result. Instead of being left to learn their place in the world, young wildlife removed from the wild are denied important natural learning experiences which help them survive on their own. Most people quickly find that they can't really care for young wildlife, and many of the animals soon die in the hands of well-meaning people. Young wildlife that does survive human "assistance" miss experiences that teach them to fend for themselves. If these animals are released back into the wild, their chances of survival are reduced. Often, the care given to young wildlife results in some attachment to humans and the animals may return to places where people live, only to be attacked by domestic animals, or hit by cars. Some animals become nuisances and people have been injured by once-"tamed" wildlife.

Avoid these problems by following one simple rule when coming upon young wildlife: If You Care, Leave Them There! It may be difficult to do, but this is a real act of compassion. Generally young mammals are visited by the adults only a few times a day to avoid leaving traces that attract predators. For instance, a nest of bunnies will only be visited by the adult female twice per day to nurse the young. The young wildlife are quite safe when left alone because their color patterns and lack of scent help them remain undetected. Avoid nest and den areas of young wildlife and restrain all pets. What if you find a young bird that has fallen from a nest? Baby birds found on the ground may be safely picked up and placed in a nearby bush or tree. Adult birds (and other kinds of wildlife) are not disturbed by human scent and will not abandon their young if handled by people.

Leave fawns (young deer) where they are found. Fawns are safest when left alone because their camouflaging color helps them remain undetected until the doe returns. If sympathetic people repeatedly visit a fawn, it can prolong the separation from the doe and delay needed feeding. Unlike deer, newborn moose calves remain in close proximity to their mothers who, in contrast to a white-tailed doe, will actively defend calves against danger. An adult cow moose weighing over 600 pounds will chase, kick or stomp potential predators, people included.

Only when young wildlife are found injured or with their dead mother may the young be assisted, but must then be delivered immediately to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator. Due to the difficulty in properly caring for them there are no rehabilitators licensed to care for fawns. It is illegal to possess most wildlife in Massachusetts without a permit. Information on young wildlife and a list of wildlife rehabilitators is posted on the [MassWildlife website](#).