

Hairless baby **squirrels** that are out of their nest need immediate help and should be reported to NWRI. A baby squirrel that is following people or pets around the yard is orphaned and needs help. Any **ground squirrel** which is above ground or that cannot move fast enough to get away from you needs immediate help. Sometimes nests of baby ground squirrels or burrows of hibernating ground squirrels are unearthed. These animals need immediate help.

Occasionally there is an adult **bat** on the ground with babies hanging from her or a baby bat with no adult present. Never touch a bat with your bare hands. Please call NWRI for specific instructions regarding all bats.

If you find a dead mother **opossum** with babies in her pouch, use gloves and an old sweatshirt and place her, with her babies, into a box and call NWRI. Baby opossums that are 7" from nose to rump do not need to be rescued. If you find one baby opossum (or a dead mother) be sure to look around for more babies that may be hiding. The presence of an opossum in your yard is not cause for alarm - they are not aggressive animals, their diet is insects, bird food on the ground, and road kill. This makes them especially welcome in many urban backyards.

Expectant mother **raccoons** search for safe, cozy dens in which to deliver their kits. If a chimney isn't capped or eaves have holes in them, your chimney or attic might become a raccoon nursery. If that happens, NWRI can recommend humane methods to encourage them to go elsewhere. If you see baby raccoons during the day, unaccompanied by an adult, chances are they are orphans and need to be rescued. NWRI will advise you on what you should/should not do.

For all **carnivores** (foxes, bobcats, coyotes, etc.), please call NWRI's hotline for specific instructions regarding handling.

For **nuisance problems**, live-trapping and relocating is NOT the humane solution. During spring and summer you will likely be separating a mother from her babies, leaving them to starve. This is a very cruel consequence of trapping wildlife. It's a tough life for wildlife, please remember that, and have a little compassion when they may cause you some inconvenience in their simple efforts to survive.

**NWRI ... Nebraska Wildlife Rehab, Inc. ... is a 25+ year old, not-for-profit (501c3) organization whose mission is to *rehabilitate and release orphaned and injured wildlife, and through education, preserve and protect the natural habitat and species indigenous to Nebraska and the Great Plains. The means to accomplish this mission is to educate the public to an understanding of our Great Plains ecosystem and its component parts.***

P.O. Box 24122  
Omaha, Nebraska  
68124



Living with...

## Orphaned Wildlife



Urban Wildlife Series

PO Box 24122  
Omaha, NE 68124-0122  
Hotline (402) 341-8619  
[www.nebraskawildliferehab.org](http://www.nebraskawildliferehab.org)

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



# Orphans . . . Is

*mom really gone? What can you do?  
A defenseless baby animal ... all alone  
in the cold cruel world. My conscience  
tells me I must do something! I can't  
just leave it there!*

What you do next will directly affect the animal (s) in question. Many people unwittingly create an orphan by intervening at this point.

All species differ greatly in how they care for their young (humans included). What you perceive as an abandoned baby may be typical behavior for any number of mother animals that cope with humans or predators on a daily basis.

**Fact:** Mother cottontail rabbits only visit their nests twice a day, usually at dawn and dusk. Their young are buried a few inches below ground under dead grass and leaves. Camouflage and minimal activity are their weapons against detection. Cottontail mothers cannot move their young from place to place, and are not able to find a relocated nest.

**Fact:** Baby squirrels, eyes opened and crawling up and down tree trunks, are old enough to be doing just that. Mother squirrels watch very closely, and will retrieve fallen babies if left where they can see and hear them.

**Fact:** Instinct is stronger than scent. Wild mothers will not abandon their babies because they have been touched or have "human scent" on them. For example, birds have a very poor sense of smell. You are not encouraged to handle nests, babies or eggs, but parents will not fly away forever if you do.

**Fact:** Woodducks hatch adorable, irresistible babies. They are incredibly cute and tiny. People find it very hard to resist picking them up and cuddling them. Many want to show the kids and share their "find" with friends. These babies are so highly strung that even being held and spoken to can stress them to the point of death. They will seem perfectly fine for a few hours before

they literally "drop dead". DO NOT handle them!

Remember, we represent predators to wild animals, even babies. Even if they are in dire need, they will not welcome a rescue. Make sure they need to be rescued before you act.

## TIPS on Determining and Helping a Baby in Need

A baby exposed in a wide open area with no cover is in trouble. Look for a tree they might have fallen from. Listen for the agitated calls of its mother. Is there a predator in the area? Has an area recently been affected by construction, tree trimming, a fire, or a flood? You can usually determine where the baby may have come from.

If at all possible, try to let mom take care of the youngster. Put the bird back in the nest if possible. Leave the baby squirrel (if eyes are open) at the base of the tree, put bunnies back in their nest and cover them. Mother raccoon will come for her youngster in time. Call a rehabilitator if you have questions about the specifics of that species.

Pink, hairless babies with their eyes closed are in grave danger if separated from mom for even short time. If you need to remove them from a dangerous situation, follow these steps:

- Gently warm the baby by placing it in a shoebox or container that can be set half on/half off a heating pad set on a low setting or wrap a hot water bottle (filled with very warm but not hot water) in a towel and place it in the container with the baby.
- Line the container with an old T-shirt or towel.
- DO NOT feed the baby anything. Dehydration must be handled by a trained rehabilitator. Only cows and humans can digest cow's milk. **Feeding a wild animal baby cow's milk or baby formula will surely kill it.**
- Immediately call a wildlife rehabilitator for further instructions. The quicker you act, the greater chances this baby has to survive, and to be returned to the wild.

## IMPORTANT INFORMATION

**All birds, mammals, and reptiles** will continue to care for their babies even if the babies have been touched by humans. They always need help if they are cold, injured, bleeding, or if there are flies around. An adult that can be easily approached needs immediate help. An orphaned/injured animal needs to be kept warm and quiet to prevent further damage. Never give the animal anything to eat or drink. Doing so can cause permanent damage and even death.

All **mammals** can be transported in a box that is just large enough for the animal to fit comfortably. Do not use terry cloth towels or material with holes. **Birds** can be transported in a paper sack or small box lined with paper towels. Research shows that 4 million wild birds, and at least as many mammals, are killed by cats every day. The bacteria in cat saliva is deadly to our native wildlife.

**Baby birds** that fall from the nest can be warmed in your hands and put back into the nest or an artificial nest can be made of a margarine tub or sturdy basket lined with torn paper towels. Once young birds have developed enough feathers to be able to learn to fly, the parents kick them out of the nest for flying lessons. These babies are called fledglings and can be recognized by the downy feathers on their heads. They try to flap their wings in imitation of their parents, and their mouths open frequently hoping that they will be fed. The parents are always nearby. Please do not interfere with this relationship between the parent birds and their young.

**Woodducks** nest in holes in trees, often in urban neighborhoods. Newly hatched chicks and their mom jump out of the tree and, because the babies can't get wet yet, they all start walking to water. If you see baby ducks following their mom across lawns and parks, quietly step aside until they have left the area. These fragile baby wood ducks die very quickly when people attempt to touch them or care for them. Just because you don't see the mother woodduck, doesn't mean she is gone. She will fly away to distract you from her young.

The female **cottontail rabbit** can make her nest anywhere. She spends all day and night grazing nearby and feeds her young for only about 5 minutes twice a day. Bunnies are on their own in 3 weeks. Yard activity can continue normally after that time. Leave bunnies alone if they have fur and are out of the nest. Rabbits "freeze" in one position in the presence of danger. Moving a bunny nest means certain death, the mother will not be able to find it, even if it's not far from her original nest.