



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

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Iowans reminded not to “rescue” wildlife babies

Springtime means baby season for Iowa wildlife, beginning with the first hatched great horned owls in March on to June when most of the pheasant chicks arrive and nothing looks more innocent and cute than baby animals. Just check the internet.

And on occasion, these cute fluffy and feathery, clumsy and gangly babies are discovered all alone and “rescued” from their mother into a cardboard box and whisked to the nearest office of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

While the “rescuer” may have had the best intentions, they likely have doomed the very animal they aimed to save.

Many wildlife babies die soon after “rescue” from the stress of being handled, talked to, and placed into the unfamiliar surroundings. Should it survive this trauma, they often succumb more slowly to starvation from improper nourishment, pneumonia or other human caused sicknesses.

“All species of wildlife have highly specific needs for survival,” said Karen Kinkead, Wildlife Diversity Program coordinator for the Iowa DNR.

Rescuing a baby from its mother not only shows bad judgement, it’s illegal.

“Most mammals are nocturnal. Mother will hide her young during the day so she can sleep or look for food so it’s perfectly normal for the young to be alone or unattended during the day,” she said. “Don’t assume a fawn or a nest full of baby cottontails or raccoons are orphaned.”

The transition to independence varies by species from as little as four or five days to weeks or even months. Most wildlife babies leave before they can care for themselves. They may become widely scattered during this fledgling period, but remain under the direct care and feeding of their parents.

Young birds appear clumsy and vulnerable because they really are clumsy and vulnerable. As the fledging process continues, survivors smarten up fast, while slow learners quickly fade. Most birds have less than a 20 percent chance of surviving their first year.

Fawns

As the morel mushroom season hits full stride, so does the number of calls to the Iowa DNR about finding “abandoned” fawns.

A fawn’s self-defense is to remain motionless and blend in with the background vegetation, but that is often mistaken for abandonment. What callers don’t realize is that mother is likely hiding nearby waiting for them to leave so she can resume taking care of her fawn.

“The Iowa DNR does not rehabilitate or raise wild animals to the point of self-sufficiency, and, because of the expanding presence of chronic wasting disease in the Iowa deer herd, we do not allow deer to be taken to a private rehabilitator to be raised and released,” said Tyler Harms, biometrician with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Research Section.

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a fatal neurological disease that affects deer, elk, moose, and caribou. In some locations where the disease has been the longest, it is causing population declines. The disease can be spread through saliva, urine, feces and blood of an infected deer. Once shed into the environment, the infectious agent, a deformed prion protein, can remain viable and infect healthy deer for years.

Infected does can pass along the disease to their fawns, if not before birth, afterward through grooming and close contact.

Infected deer may not show symptoms for about two years, making the disease difficult to find. There is currently no practical way to test live deer; the only way is to collect tissues (lymph nodes) from a dead deer and submit them to a lab for testing.

“We appreciate the passion people have to protect the fawns. We have it too. But, all it takes is one infected deer to be taken to a pen or other area where it can infect other deer and the environment, then the likelihood of any healthy deer getting sick at the facility increases dramatically,” he said.

Harms said the best chance for fawns or baby ducks, raccoons, skunks and birds to survive is for them to be left alone, in the wild.

MEDIA CONTACT: Questions relating to fawns, contact Tyler Harms, Iowa Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Research Section, 515-577-5378. Questions relating to other wildlife babies, contact Karen Kinkead, Iowa Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Diversity Program Coordinator, 712-330-8461.

