

Natural Resource Bulletin

Wild Parenting

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Wild parenting is often very different than human parenting.

The sight of a young bird hopping on the ground or a quiet fawn curled in the shade triggers a very human want to intervene or help in many of us. While this urge is well intentioned, intervention in wild parenting techniques often causes more harm than good.

Flightless hopping on the ground is a natural rite of passage for most young birds.

Most birds leave the nest before they have mastered flight. This often means vulnerable time on the ground, hopping and attempting short bursts of flight without apparent success. Even if you don't see them immediately, the parents are usually nearby, ready to feed and protect the fledgling as needed. Human intervention at this time puts unnecessary stress on both the young and parents. The most important thing humans can do at this time is give the birds space and time to succeed, and keep cats and dogs away from fledglings.

Wild babies are often left alone while parents take care of important business.

Many young animals are adapted to spending time alone while parents hunt or forage for food. It is safer and more energy efficient for parents and young if the young stay behind during these potentially dangerous activities. If you see a fawn quietly curled up and all alone, it is actually quite safe. Its camouflage, stillness and lack of scent can render it invisible to predators. Human intervention at this time can tip a predator off or cause unnecessary stress on parents and young.

Don't mess with a wild mom...

It is never safe for a human to come between a wild mother and her babies. Respect wild families by maintaining a safe distance when observing. Never allow pets to play with or chase wild babies or parents. Never harass wildlife by disturbing known den or nest sites. Wild parents are more likely to show aggression toward humans or pets if they sense a threat to their young.

Leaving wildlife alone is safer for humans and animals.

There is always the chance that a wild animal is carrying a pathogen, tick or flea that can be passed on to humans or pets. Direct handling of wild babies can lead to human illness or serious injuries from scratches and bites from sharp teeth and claws.

Quick Facts:

When it comes to helping wild babies, here are the best things a human can do:

Protect wild babies from curious cats, dogs and children.

The presence of a cat, dog or human can prevent parents from making essential food deliveries to a wild baby.

Curious pets may attempt to chase or capture fledgling birds on the ground. It is best to keep pets indoors during this vulnerable time.

Resist the urge to intervene.

There is no substitute for wild parenting and wild foods. Animals that have been fed human foods by humans will lack appropriate nutrition to grow into a healthy adult. Animals that have been cared for by humans won't learn essential skills such as foraging, hunting and avoiding predators.