

DNR offers advice when finding orphaned wildlife

By JOANNE MALISZEWSKI
STAFF WRITER

You never know when you will be the one to come across abandoned or orphaned baby wildlife. But you won't be alone. The state Department of Natural Resources is there to help.

Livonia is actually where the nearest DNR office is. And when you need help you can call Sgt. Jeff Pendergast at 953-0241. Farmington Hills rehabilitator Bev Cornell is still offering her help in the form of answers to questions but has changed her DNR license from accepting just about all wildlife allowed to only baby rabbits.

But she's not out of the picture. Because she has received so many phone calls from anxious residents who are confronted with orphaned or abandoned babies, she's offered a list of tips to let you know when you better keep your distance.

In general, if the animal shows the following signs in ascending order of irritation, you are in the "disturbance range" and should step back or slowly back away. Remember that binoculars can bridge the distance between the two of you without unnerving the animal.

- Birds: head raised, looking at you; skittishness; excessive preening; bill wiping or pecking at food; alarm calls; repeated chirping; distraction display like dragging a broken wing or spreading tail.

- Mammals: head raised; ears swiveled toward you; skittishness;

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moving away or lowering its head with ears back in preparation for a charge — hairs on its neck and shoulders may stand up; aggressive behavior by showing teeth, charging, snorting or slapping the ground with its paw.

- Reptiles: hissing or rattling; playing dead; snakes raise their upper body and open their mouths, striking.

Here's some more wildlife tips from Cornell:

- Tiptoe around nurseries: Nesting animals are especially sensitive to disturbance. As you are watching the nest, parents may be hanging back, while eggs chill or nestlings become dangerously hungry. Baby

birds, for example, are fed every half-hour by their parents. If disturbed often enough, parents may abandon the nest or young animals may leave before they are ready to fend for themselves.

- Turn rocks and logs back over: when uncovering reptiles and amphibians, be sure to replace the debris you turn over.

- Motorboats near shore: speeding boats near shore can frighten wildlife and cause serious erosion on shore. Boat wakes are tidal waves to breeding snakes, turtles, salamanders, frogs, emerging hibernators and wading shorebirds.

- Don't tempt wildlife with food: bears and other so-called dangerous animals are rarely interested in fighting with you, but they are interested in your food. Never bring food into your tent with you. Before going to bed, tie it up between two trees, well out of animals' reach. Making wildlife dependent on handouts does them no favors, and may lead to their untimely death. The next person they approach may have a gun instead of a piece of bread.

- Don't be a hero: at some time you may come between a mother and her young, or hungry animal and its dinner. Don't run and don't stare directly at the animal. This can be interpreted as aggression on your part. Instead, avert your eyes and back away slowly.



SHARON LEMLEY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Offering advice: Bev Cornell, a Farmington Hills wildlife rehabilitator who has now limited her work to caring for abandoned baby rabbits, suggests you call the state Department of Natural Resources in Livonia when you come across orphaned or abandoned wildlife.

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