

I FOUND A WILD BABY. CAN I RAISE IT? CAN I KEEP IT AS A PET?

If you find a baby bird or squirrel or an adorable fawn, you may think about taking it home and raising it yourself. A Google search instantly delivers advice about what to feed it from more than one million 'experts.' Of course, you'll let it go when it can take care of itself. So why shouldn't you take it home?

For starters, there are state and federal laws that make it illegal to possess wild birds and most other wildlife.

Our highly skilled, licensed wildlife rehabilitators have years of experience and are able to assess injuries, diagnose a variety of illnesses and provide every wild animal with a high level of care, based on science and sound practice, with the goal of returning each to its natural habitat.

There are many other reasons why raising wildlife on your own is not a good idea:

- A baby bird raised without others of its own species and/or able to see and hear its human caregiver will imprint on the human, which makes it unreleasable and destined to a lifetime in a cage. It is illegal to imprint a native wild bird.
- A baby squirrel or other wild mammal raised without others of its own species will focus on its human caregiver and not learn how to properly interact with its own kind.
- Wild animals can carry diseases transmissible to people and their pets. External parasites, internal parasites and infectious diseases can be passed to humans from wild animals.
- If you try to raise a raccoon or a fox or any other rabies vector species, you could be exposing yourself and your family to rabies. If the baby nips or scratches you, the animal will have to be euthanized in order to be tested for rabies, even if it didn't show any symptoms of disease. Some wild animals can have rabies without showing symptoms for a long time.



This photo shows two groups of orphaned cottontail kits that are the same age but have very different growth rates. The cottontails on the left were kept by a concerned citizen with the best of intentions. The cottontails on the right were brought to us right away and started on our special milk replacer. Please do not try to raise wild babies yourself, no matter what you read on the internet.

Wild animals do not make good pets.

Wild babies may seem 'tame' now, but they can grow into aggressive and unpredictable adults that could injure you or damage your home. A squirrel can bite a finger to the bone. A raccoon's bite can equal that of a much larger dog. And unless it has been captive-bred for multiple generations, a wild animal will never lose all of its 'wildness.'

But, just like your beloved dog or cat, every wild animal deserves the best chance possible to grow strong and healthy. And no matter what you may read on the Internet, you will not be able to help it as well as a professional wildlife rehabilitator and enable it to live the life nature intended.