

Wildlife Information

(From The Wildlife Center of Virginia)

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If You Find a Baby Mammal

Rabbits

Cottontail rabbits nest from March through September and may have as many as four litters per year. The average litter contains four to five babies. Young rabbits disperse from the nest at 15-20 days old. By three weeks of age, they are on their own in the wild and no longer require a mother's care. If you find a baby rabbit:

Is the rabbit **injured** (bleeding, broken bones, puncture wounds, been in a cat's mouth, open wounds, etc)?

If *YES*, take the rabbit to your nearest wildlife veterinarian.

If *NO*, see below.

Is the rabbit **fully furred** with its **eyes opened**?

If *YES*, if the rabbit is larger than a baseball and weighs more than 4 ounces or 100 grams, it is on its own and does not need human intervention.

If *NO*, attempt to locate the nest (a shallow depression on the ground possibly lined with rabbit fur and/or grass, cottontail rabbits do not burrow) and put the rabbit back. Nests that must be moved (due to construction) may be relocated up to 20 feet away from the original site (scoop up and rebuild the nest with the mother's fur and place the babies inside). Check back briefly once a day for two days. If the rabbits appear to be plump and healthy, leave them alone. Mother rabbits feed at dusk and dawn. You are not likely to ever see the mother. If the rabbits appear thin and wrinkled, baggy skin, and no visible milk lines on their bellies, contact a state licensed small mammal rehabilitator in your area immediately. Rabbits may be temporarily moved for mowing if they are returned to the nest before dusk. Do not attempt to mow within 10 feet of a rabbit's nest if there are babies present.

Squirrels

Gray squirrels nest twice a year, in early spring and in late summer. Gray squirrels commonly have litters of three or four. Babies eyes open at four weeks of age and the young are often out of the nest by six weeks. At 8-9 weeks of age they are on their own in the wild and no longer nurse from the mother. If you find a baby squirrel:

Is the squirrel **injured** (bleeding, broken bones, puncture wounds, been in a cat's mouth, has maggots, open wounds, etc)?

If *YES*, take the squirrel to the nearest wildlife veterinarian. (For juvenile squirrels, wear thick leather gloves when handling. Even young squirrels can have a vicious bite!)

If *NO*, squirrels whose tails are fully fluffed out like a bottle brush and weigh more than 6.5 ounces or 180 grams, are on their own in the wild and do not need human intervention. If the squirrel does not meet these criteria, see below.

Is the squirrel **fully furred** with its **eyes opened**?

If *YES*, and the squirrel weighs between 75 and 150 grams (2.6-5.3 ounces), his tail is flat or not quite full, and may seem "friendly", the squirrel still needs nursing and care from its mother. Mother squirrels may "rescue" stray babies by carrying them by the scruff back to the nest. For very small squirrels, attempt to locate the nest (big ball of dried leaves at the top of a tree) and try to get the baby to climb up the trunk. Check back several hours later to see if the baby is still there. If the baby has not been fed or attended to for an entire day, contact a state licensed small mammal rehabilitator immediately.

If the squirrel is old enough to run from you, it is old enough to be on its own and does not need human intervention.

If *NO*, and the baby is not retrieved by the mother for an entire day, contact a state licensed small mammal rehabilitator immediately. Keep predators (cats and dogs) away from the area if the baby is on the ground.

Opossums

Opossums breed two or three times each year, from February through September. The average litter contains six to nine babies. Opossums remain in the mother's pouch until they are 2 months old. Between two and four months of age, they may ride on the mother's back and are dependent on the mother for help in finding food and shelter. If you find a baby opossum:

Is the animal **injured** (bleeding, broken bones, maggots, puncture wounds, deformity, open wounds, etc.)?

If *YES*, contact your nearest wildlife veterinarian.

If *NO*, opossums that are at least 8" long from tip of nose to the base of the tail (do not include the tail) and weigh more than 7.25 ounces or 200 grams are old enough to survive on their own in the wild and do not need human intervention. If the opossum does not meet these criteria, see below.

Is the opossum **fully furred** with its **eyes opened**?

If *YES*, but does not meet the size for release, and is between two and three and a half months old and weighs 40-190 grams (1.5-7 ounces) contact a state licensed wildlife rehabilitator immediately. Opossum babies are often found crawling around next to their dead mother and will not survive at this age without human care.

If *NO*, the baby needs immediate assistance. Contact a state licensed wildlife rehabilitator or wildlife veterinarian immediately. Babies separated from their mother at this stage have a slimmer chance of survival.

Deer

White Tail Deer fawns are born April through July, with the majority of births in June. Most does will have one fawn each year, but occasionally twins are seen. From birth the fawns are left alone while their mothers go off to feed. The mothers will stay away from the fawns to avoid leading predators to their location. They will return at dusk and dawn to move and/or feed their young. If you find a deer fawn:

Is the fawn injured (bleeding, broken bones, open wounds, caught on a fence, etc.)?

If *YES*, contact your nearest wildlife veterinarian for treatment.

If *NO*, it is normal for fawns of any age to be left alone all day. Never expect to see the mother come back to the fawn while you are in the area. The mother will return to care for it if you leave it alone.

Exception: if the mother is known to be dead (you have seen the fawn near the body and know it to be the mother), contact a state licensed deer rehabilitator in your area. Orphaned fawns will need to be cared for until they are old enough to be released in early fall.

For further information about these or other animals, please contact The Wildlife Center of Virginia at (540) 942-9453.

NOTE: Raising a wild animal in captivity is illegal unless you have a state permit. For information on how you can become a licensed wildlife rehabilitator, contact The WCV or The VA Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.