

Look for the right resources to help wildlife in need

Do you feel tight heartstrings when you see an adorable baby bunny hiding in an area of long grasses? How about how you feel during your walk in the woods when you happen upon a cute and tiny baby bird that must have fallen out of its nest? These animals most certainly are going to be killed and eaten by some big bad creature. They look so frightened and in need of comfort. Right?

Before you try to protect this innocent little cutie, look in the mirror. The big, bad creature could be you. Especially in spring, many wild animals are killed by well-intentioned animal lovers. Instead of intervening with a wild animal's fate, first consider asking yourself, "Do I know for sure that this animal needs my help?" If you are destined to intervene as some people truly are, then seek credible education so you can answer that question confidently.

Two of the best resources for seeking accurate information about how, when and under what circumstances you should intervene to help wildlife are the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and the licensed rehabilitators nearest your home. ODNR is the entity which grants the licenses to rehabilitators necessary to legally house and to provide care for wildlife species.

Permits for working with birds are granted by the United States Division of Fish and Wildlife.

Individual veterinarians and individual animal hospital teams have varying amounts of experience with wildlife species. Be aware that the laws of Ohio regulate care and intervention with wildlife species regardless of whether you are a veterinarian or a non-veterinarian citizen.

Some veterinarians may have an agreement with a licensed rehabilitator such that the veterinarian can provide care and housing to the wild animal under the license of the rehabilitator. This arrangement often works best to help an animal to receive the initial examination and help that it needs before moving to the rehabilitator's facility.

Most people are aware that the fingertip simplicity of the Internet opens the door to both valuable and dangerously inaccurate information. The best use of the Internet for the benefit of wildlife is for finding a licensed rehabilitator in your area. Visit the ODNR website for a list of licensed rehabilitators per county. The website also has activity suggestions for children and animal-specific advice worth knowing.

Close to home, Wildlife Haven in Crestline is operated by Wild Jane Schnelker. She has been providing excellent care for wild animals in need for the last 26 years. Wildlife Haven has grown from a few rooms inside Schnelker's house in town to a progressive 5-acre farm with full medical care capacity, protected flight areas, fawn recovery ward, pens for different species, including a waterfowl pen with a 500-gallon pool, a wetland habitat and a grazing and browsing habitat with berry bushes and pines.

Wildlife Haven records indicate contact with more than 6,000 animals with nearly 75 percent of them being released to live their lives as intended by nature. Schnelker puts as much effort into educating the surrounding community as she does rehabilitating the wild species she respects. She often plays host to learning opportunities and tours at her facility.

Next time you are in a position to "help" a wild animal, think of those phenomenal success numbers and call Schnelker or one of her licensed colleagues for valuable advice.