

Spring is Here...and That Means its Baby Season for Wildlife!

By Dr. Stephanie Lamb, DVM



Baby bunnies, squirrels and birds are very cute but encountering one outdoors can sometimes raise questions as to how to handle the situation. Many times people think that if they find a baby animal it is orphaned, but this may not be the case. A baby may have just been displaced from its nest but the parent is watching close by. They may be either waiting for a safe time to return the baby to its nest or feed it from its new spot. If you do encounter a baby it is important to know what to do.

The first step is to assess the surroundings. Where is the baby located? Is it in a safe location? Are there any potential predators around? Is the baby animal near a likely nesting site, such as a tree for a bird or squirrel? A bird or squirrel may have been knocked from its nest because of poor weather, a sibling accidentally pushing it out, or the nest not being constructed as sturdy as one would hope it to be. Next, examine the baby. If you can, leave the baby where it is and briefly look it over. Look for evidence of trauma such as cuts or

bleeding. Observe if it is holding its limbs in a normal position or if any appear to be limp or asymmetrical. Does the baby seem to be alert and aware of its surroundings? Or does it hold its eyes closed, seem quiet or unobservant of the world around it? Assessing this can be a little tricky as there are times in a baby's life where it will normally be quiet, nonobservant, or the eyes may not be at a stage where they can open yet. A good way to assess if the baby should have its eyes closed and be quiet or not is to look at its fur or feathers. Baby mammals that have really short, slick hair or baby birds that are featherless or have mostly pink skin exposed are very young and may not be at a stage where they would have their eyes open and be inquisitive. A fully feathered bird or a fluffy furred mammal is one that should have its eyes open and be observant.

If the baby appears to be healthy and in a safe spot the next step is to look for a nest. If you can safely reach the nest then placing the baby back into it would be the best thing to do. No one can take as good care of a baby animal as the parents can. If you can't safely reach the nest of a bird or squirrel, then place the baby in a box and put it near the tree base or hung to the side of the location where the baby fell from. The box should have an open top and be easily accessible for the parent. Squirrels may come and take their babies from this box, while birds may just use the box as their new nest.

If the safety of the baby cannot be assured or is known to be in danger, then human intervention may be necessary. Times when human intervention should be sought include if the parent is known to be dead, the baby is clearly injured, or the nest is in a location where danger will occur and the nest cannot be safely moved. What is a person to do in this situation then? Collect a safe device to place the animal in, such as a cardboard box or pet carrier and line it with newspaper or an old towel. Then, carefully and gently pick the animal up and place it in the carrier. You may want to wear gloves to protect yourself and the baby. Place the box in a warm, quiet location, then call someone who knows what to do with wildlife!

We are lucky to live in Southern California, where there are tons of wildlife rehabilitators and facilities ready to take in needy babies and care for them until they are able to survive on their own. Baby animals of all different species have unique dietary and husbandry needs. If cared for incorrectly it can be detrimental and life threatening.



If you would like to be more involved with baby wildlife, consider volunteering your time at one of the many facilities we have in the state. There you can learn how to properly care for baby wildlife and also assist lots of babies at once!

A quote to consider: *"Those who wish to pet and baby wild animals "love" them. But those who respect their natures and wish to let them live normal lives, love them more"* **Edwin Way Teale**

The following is a list of a few wildlife rehabilitation facilities here in Southern California:

California Wildlife Center- Malibu, CA- 818-222-2658

Ojai Raptor Center- Ojai, CA- 805-649-6884

Pasadena Humane Society- Pasadena, CA- 626-792-7151

Project Wildlife- San Diego, CA- 619-225-9453

All Wildlife Rescue and Education- Long Beach, CA-562-434-0141