

Deer Orphans – How To Help

The following article was submitted by Annette Webb of Wild Heart Ranch in Claremore, Oklahoma. Chihuahuan Desert Wildlife Rescue stresses that the following steps are only temporary measures a person may take until an orphaned fawn can be turned over to an experienced, licensed *wildlife rehabilitator*. Any attempt for an inexperienced person to raise a fawn to adulthood is doomed to failure.

As I sit here at my desk, I can hear the tramping of tiny hooves trotting playfully across the floor. Occasionally, one of the tiny fawns visits me for kisses, which I know is their way of begging for yet *another* bottle of milk.

This time of year orphaned deer are found nearly everywhere. I have five in my care right now. From dog attacks to auto accidents - they wind up here. One was even found on a back porch, hungry and covered in ticks. Unfortunately our facility is still in the growing process and we haven't the funds to put in the proper fencing and barn needed to raise white tailed deer to become wild again. For the time being they roam the house and yard. Someday they will be released into a sanctuary where they won't walk up and ask a deer hunter for a snack.

There are many things to consider when helping a fawn. If you happen across a healthy baby hiding in the grass you need to remember that the doe only visits her babies for feedings. Otherwise a fawn will literally eat itself to death. The doe wanders away to graze and keeps watch on her young until it is old enough to follow her and keep up if they have to flee a predator. If you find a lone baby, check its reaction to you. Is it hiding and holding still? Did you see a doe anywhere in the area? Does it look sunken and bony? If you aren't sure, check back the next day or hide a distance away and watch. Fawns will wait patiently about three days before asking you for food if they are orphaned. Better yet, contact a **wildlife rehabilitator** and ask them to check the fawn before anyone handles it. This fawn will cost hundreds of dollars and many hours to raise properly before it is weaned. Most wildlife rehabilitators are funded from their own pockets so make sure this baby *really* needs help. When in doubt, call for a second opinion.

Let's say you find an orphan and there is no wildlife rehabilitator available, the game warden won't answer his phone and your vet is on vacation, or like most, isn't licensed for wildlife. Remember, in most states it is illegal to possess wildlife of many species. The laws are meant to protect these animals from exploitation. Many of us cannot leave a starving baby to die, no matter the consequences.

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First things first...

A bed sheet or blanket is all you need to contain your little package. Though they may be small, those legs are powerful and *will* hurt you. If the fawn has an ounce of strength, it will kick when lifted. Cover the animal with the sheet or blanket and fold those legs immediately under the animal. If possible, have someone help you to transport the fawn. It is going to struggle. If all you have are the clothes on your back, pull off a sock and put it over the fawn's head to calm it. Wrap it in a jacket, a shirt, or whatever is immediately available. Sometimes all you can do is just hold on tight.

Deer are flight animals and any kind of capture is stressful. If the animal appears sick or injured, alleviate as much stress as possible so you aren't adding to the problem. Get the fawn home, to a vet clinic or licensed wildlife rehabilitator as soon as possible. Your game warden will know what is available and the local sheriff's department will be able to reach him on the radio. That's your best bet.

Let's say you live in the middle of nowhere, your car is broken down, your phone shut off and you are reading this information with your computer plugged into a battery using satellite access (*it could happen!*). Get this baby warm. The rectal temperature should be between 100-103 degrees. If it is low, put the animal into a box, a tub or hold the fawn wrapped up or on a heating pad. Be careful not to overheat the animal.

If the fawn's eyes look sunken and ribs are showing, it is probably dehydrated. Pedialyte, sugar water or whatever you have should be given as soon as possible. Human baby bottles work the best, but use whatever is available. Cup feed if you have to but be careful not to drown the fawn. Remember: ***rehydrate first, feed later***. Protein can cause serious health problems or kill a dehydrated animal.

Fresh goat's milk is highly recommended for fawns and I swear by it. Someday, I need to get my own goats to milk, but until then, I purchase it for \$3 a gallon and feed nothing else until the animals are ready to start weaning. Again, I urge you to get your fawn to a professional as deer are difficult to bottle raise and can have many problems with their gut that requires immediate attention.

If you are ever caught off guard and find an orphaned fawn, yes, they are the most precious infants you have seen. Everything within you wants to take it home and love it forever. Please know that the best chance the animal has might be with someone else.

I recommend visitation. People that find these orphans often check up on them. I enjoy sharing their progress with the original rescuer. It lets them see what they have truly done to help a wild heart. Their experience may save another life someday.

Above all, use caution in the springtime and early summer. Drive carefully on back roads

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where deer may be present. If you happen across an animal that has been hit by a car on the side of the road, block the traffic with your car. Put anything you have over the animal's head to help calm it and ask someone to call the sheriff's department. If you find a dead doe, check her for milk bags. Her fawn won't be far away but will be hiding in the brush. Get a search party together and flush the animal out. Keep in mind that many does have twins. Do the best you can and know it is enough, no matter the outcome. We don't always win, but we should always try.

Nature's offspring are here for us all to enjoy from a distance, but sometimes a life is lost or changed by human intrusion. We have to assist where we can. Just because you have no experience doesn't mean that you are helpless. Get in there and get bloody but use caution and common sense.

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