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DNR Reminds Public to Leave Wildlife in the Wild

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As wildlife birthing season proceeds in the spring, it is not unusual for people to come across seemingly abandoned fawns or other baby critters. The first instinct many people have is to try and help. Department of Natural Resources wildlife personnel offer a word of advice: DON'T. The truth is, the animal doesn't need help.

"When people see a fawn they think is abandoned, the mom is almost always nearby, maybe even watching them," said DNR wildlife biologist John Niewoonder. "Our advice is look, enjoy the experience, and move on."

It is not uncommon for does to leave their young unattended for up to 8 hours at a time. This is an anti-predator mechanism because it minimizes scent left around the newborn animals.

The same is true for rabbits, ground-dwelling birds and other wildlife. In most cases, the animal is better off left alone than removed from the wild. Even avian parents will continue to care for hatchlings that have fallen from a nest.

"We know that people want to help," Niewoonder said, "and we admire them for their good intentions. But those animals really are better off if you leave them alone."

Many baby animals will die if removed from their natural environment. Also, some animals have diseases or parasites that can be passed to humans or pets. And some "rescued" animals that do survive become habituated to people. These animals are unable to revert back to being wild. Eventually they pose additional problems as they mature and develop adult animal behaviors. Habituated deer have been known to become aggressive as they mature, especially bucks. Raccoons also are well-known for becoming aggressive as they mature.

It is illegal to possess a wild deer in Michigan and every day it spends with humans makes it that much less likely to be able to survive in the wild.

In the event that you know a deer or other animal has been orphaned, early in the year, for example, if the doe is dead nearby, call the

local DNR office, which can refer you to a licensed rehabilitator. Licensed rehabilitators are trained to handle wild animals and know how to release them so that they can live in the wild.

The DNR is committed to the conservation, protection, management, use and enjoyment of the state's natural resources for current and future generations.