



Hints for Helping Orphaned Wildlife

By Guy R. Hodge

Each year HSUS receives hundreds of requests for assistance and information concerning the proper care and handling of orphaned wildlife. The following guidelines were developed by HSUS in counsel with the American Veterinary Medical Assn. to assist humanitarians in the rescue and treatment of orphaned animals.

1. Do not remove the animal from the area in which you find it unless it is injured or in immediate danger. Watch the animal periodically from a distance for several hours to ascertain if its parents return to care for it. Birds that have fallen from their nest should be returned to it as soon as possible. Contrary to popular belief, adult birds will not reject their young after they have been handled by humans.

2. If the animal requires medical care or protection, its most immediate need will be warmth and shelter. Place the animal in a cardboard box with a cloth-covered heating pad set at a low temperature. A hot water bottle or several glass jars filled with warm water may be used as a substitute. Orphaned birds will also require a nest. Place a small plastic food container filled with ruffled facial tissues in the box.

3. Feed and care for the animal's special needs. Consult a veterinarian, local zoo, nature center, animal shelter, or local wildlife organization for suggestions on the diet and special needs of the animal. Songbirds should be fed at approximately 2-hour intervals. Most mammals will eat less frequently. If necessary, force feed animals with a plastic medicine dropper by gently prying open their mouths with your thumb and index finger.

4. Avoid unnecessary handling of the animal. Remember it is a wild creature, and it is your responsibility to prepare it to return to the wild. Handling may cause injury, or may result in the animal becoming accustomed to humans and pets, resulting in lack of caution toward man and predators once it is returned to the wild.

5. If you are unable to keep or care for an orphaned animal, ask your local animal shelter, zoo, or nature center to accept it. If one of these facilities cannot help, they may be able to direct you to an individual who is experienced in caring for orphaned wildlife.

For further information, consult "Care of the Wild, Feathered & Furred: A Guide to Wildlife Handling and Care," by Mae Hickman and Maxine Guy (Unity Press).