

“ABANDONED” WILDLIFE: Facts and Resources for Texans

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Every year, thousands of young animals appear “abandoned.” One may think that they have been left to die, alone and unprotected.

In fact, many animals that appear to be abandoned are perfectly safe. Well-meaning people often remove these animals from their habitat and parents to spare them what appears to be certain death. This is actually harmful to wildlife, and it is illegal. The following information will help you to identify wildlife that has truly been abandoned, to find certified professionals who can rehabilitate that wildlife, and to know what to do if you accidentally remove an animal that may not really have been abandoned.

In some cases, animals that show no fear of humans or are active when they normally would not be (daytime vs. nighttime), may be sick rather than abandoned. For example, a raccoon or skunk walking around in a neighborhood or near a home in broad daylight is not normal. Never attempt to handle wildlife that appears to be sick. Contact your local animal control office, game warden, or a veterinarian that works with wildlife, for further instructions.

What is abandoned wildlife?

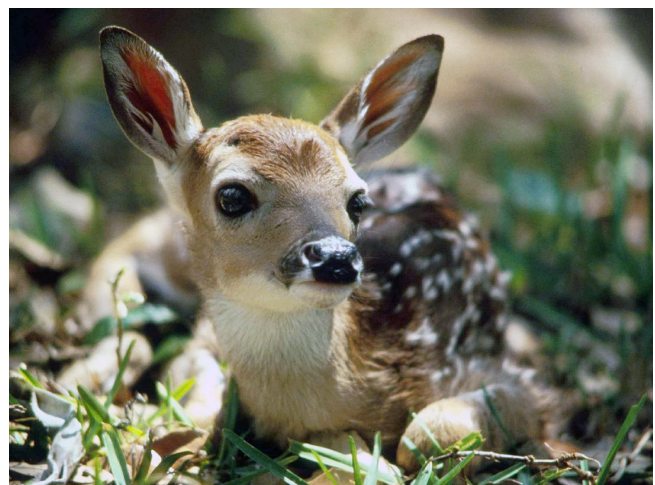
Wild animals, sometimes leave their young for a variety of reasons. Perhaps a predator, vehicle, human, or other factor killed them. Maybe the young animal wandered too far, and the parent could not find them. Maybe something frightened the parent away. Whatever the reason, truly abandoned animals are unlikely to survive on their own. In these cases, it is acceptable to remove the animal to an approved rehabilitator.

For their own safety, untrained individuals should not handle abandoned wildlife. Furthermore, removing abandoned wildlife constitutes unlawful possession under the Texas Parks and Wildlife Code.

Common myths

There are a number of common misunderstandings about wildlife species that can appear abandoned or in danger.

For example, many see a deer fawn and think its mother has abandoned it or been killed. In reality, fawns typically bed down in tall grasses, such as those seen on Texas roadsides, during the summertime while their mother is away foraging. This is a defense from predators, and the mother is likely nearby. Wait and observe the fawn for several hours before removing it, to ensure that it is actually abandoned.



Many think that any baby bird outside the nest is lost, but will be abandoned by the mother if handled by a human. In fact, a bird with only down or no feathers likely has fallen from the nest. Since birds typically have a very poor sense of smell, if you can safely put it back in the nest the mother will accept it. If the bird has feathers, it is probably just learning to fly. Leave it alone. The mother or father is likely nearby.

Some believe that turkey eggs laid on leaf litter will not hatch without help, and they remove the eggs in an effort to save them. However, turkeys often nest in structures that are little better than bare ground surrounded by dead leaves. Do not disturb the nest, and try to avoid being near it. Turkeys very easily abandon nests, so you may actually create abandoned wildlife by trying to help.

If you find an animal that is of special concern, declining in population, or federally protected, do not intervene unless it is absolutely necessary. You may unintentionally harm an animal that needs protection, or you might even violate federal law if the species is listed as threatened or endangered.

What should I do?

If you encounter an animal that you believe is abandoned, contact your local game warden. They are among the few who are legally authorized to remove and transport wildlife to approved wildlife rehabilitators. They also can determine if the animal is truly abandoned.

You should:

1. Observe the animal for a few hours, or longer, to ensure it is actually abandoned and to see if the animal has any signs of disease or injury.
2. If the animal is abandoned or injured, call your local game warden.

3. If the animal appears diseased, contact a local veterinarian or the Texas Veterinary Medicine Diagnostic Laboratory.
4. If directed to by the game warden, take the animal to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator.
5. If a game warden, biologist, or other wildlife professional is on the way to remove the animal, remain on site as long as possible to ensure others do not remove the animal.

You should not:

1. Remove wildlife that you have not confirmed to be abandoned.
2. Take the animal home to keep as a pet.
3. Allow others to remove the wildlife without proof that they are authorized to do so.
4. Touch animals that appear diseased, disoriented, or aggressive. These may be infected with diseases that are a danger to you or your domestic animals.

Resources for Texans

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Wildlife Biologists

<https://tpwd.texas.gov/biologist>

Game Wardens

<https://tpwd.texas.gov/warden>

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

County Agents

<http://counties.agrilife.org/>

Wildlife Specialists

<http://wildlife.tamu.edu/people/>

Texas Veterinary Medicine Diagnostic Laboratory

<http://tvmdl.tamu.edu/>

Licensed Texas Wildlife Rehabilitators

<https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/rehab/list/>

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

AgriLifeExtension.tamu.edu

More Extension publications can be found at AgriLifeBookstore.org

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