

## Rescue or Abduction?

Most people genuinely want to help animals, especially orphaned wildlife, but removing infants from the wild often does more harm than good.

Wildlife parents rarely abandon their young. If you don't see a parent, that doesn't mean they aren't there—they may be off foraging for food or hiding from you.

Fortunately, animals who have fallen or been removed from their nests or dens can often be easily and safely returned. If you find one or more infants who appear to be orphaned, always contact a licensed wildlife rehabilitator or animal control agency before moving them. Mom and dad may be closer than you think!



## Checklist for Action

Animals in these situations typically should be brought to a wildlife rehabilitator:

- Animals with apparent injuries, such as bleeding, broken bones or injured wings
- Animals "brought home" or otherwise captured by another animal
- Animals who have been hit by a car, struck telephone wires or otherwise sustained injuries that may or may not be visible
- Animals with a dead parent nearby

Otherwise, here are some basic tips for dealing with displaced juvenile wildlife. Note: Use caution and always wear protective gloves when handling any type of wildlife.

## Thanks for Caring!

Wildlife rehabilitators are here to help! If you have any questions about these or any other issues relating to wildlife, contact South Florida Wildlife Center or another licensed wildlife rehabilitator near you. Remember, if an animal is not truly an orphan, being left with its parents is the best option. The animal has a better chance for survival, and wildlife rehabilitation centers can focus on the animals who truly need their expertise and care.



*Please enlist SFWC assistance in re-nesting when necessary to ensure personal safety.*

## Learn More

To learn more about South Florida Wildlife Center's patients, programs and events:

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# If You Care Leave Them There!

*Leaving young animals in the wild  
may save their lives!*



**South Florida  
WILDLIFE CENTER**

In partnership with The Humane Society of the United States



## Birds

Nestlings are young, not yet fully-feathered birds. If you find a nestling on the ground, look around for a nearby nest. If you can reach it safely, return the infant to its nest—mother birds are not deterred by “people smells.” If you can’t find the nest, you can put the bird in an old basket or small open box lined with dry grass or straw, with holes poked in the bottom for drainage. If the bird is cold, gently warm it up with your hands before placing it in the container, then hang or place the container in a tree or shrub as close as possible to where you found the bird. Make sure to avoid a place in direct sunlight. The parents should hear their infant’s calls and continue to feed him from the new nest.



If you find a fledgling, a young bird who is fully-feathered and learning to fly, as long as he is uninjured, leave him on the ground where he is—the parents will continue to feed him as he learns to fly. Some birds take days or even weeks to be fully-flighted.

## Squirrels

Unless the squirrel is injured, leave it alone—the mother is likely nearby and will pick up the juvenile and move it back into the nest. If the infant is at risk from predators, you can put him in a box or basket lined with soft material and securely place the container in a tree or shrub close to where you found him. Choose a spot out of direct sunlight, and if the weather is cold, add a cloth-covered warm water bottle or heated rice sock for warmth. Make sure to keep all pets leashed or inside and keep your distance so that the mother feels safe enough to retrieve her young. If the mother has not returned for her young in a few hours, contact a wildlife rehabilitator.



## Ducks

Ducklings in pools may be a cause for concern, even if the mother duck is present. Unless your pool has a ramp, the young birds may not be able to get out! But approaching a mom with her ducklings may scare her off, and she may not come back. Slowly approach the pool with a towel-covered brick or other item you can use as a weight.



Drape the weighted towel in the water over the steps or along the side of the pool, creating a surface the ducklings can grab onto and climb out. Then keep all humans and pets inside while the mother guides her brood to that area. If the mother instead flies out and circles overhead or otherwise hesitates nearby, gently scoop the ducklings out of the water and place them on the side of the pool, then immediately leave the area so that the mother may return. To prevent future issues, install an animal-friendly ramp or log. If the mother duck does not return to collect all of her ducklings, contact a wildlife rehabilitator.

## Opossums



If you find a dead female opossum in the spring or summer, she may have young in her pouch who can be rescued. First make sure the mother is dead, by nudging gently with your foot and watching for any response. If she appears dead, check to see if there are live infants

in her pouch. If there are, immediately transport the mother and her young to a wildlife rehabilitator. Important: Do not attempt to remove the young from inside the pouch.

If the mother opossum is alive, put on heavy protective gloves, then carefully wrap her in a thick blanket or contain her in a box with ventilation holes and contact a wildlife rehabilitator.

Young opossums are able to survive on their own if they are 7 inches long from nose tip to tail base. Unless sick or injured, they do not need to be brought to a wildlife rehabilitator if they are at least this size.



## Rabbits

Cottontail rabbits feed their young once or twice a day at dawn or dusk; otherwise, they do not stay with the nest so that they don’t attract predators. Rabbit nests are shallow and lightly covered with grass; use caution when mowing your lawn.



If you accidentally uncover a rabbit nest, re-cover it and leave it alone. If the nest must be relocated, move it to within 20 feet of the original site and place the original nest (including the mother’s fur and the grass bedding) in a small depression and lightly cover it with bedding. If the nest is in temporary danger from pets or predators, you can cover it with a laundry basket or place the rabbits in a box with ventilation holes

and move them to a warm, quiet place inside—make sure to return the rabbits to their nest before dusk and re-cover it.

Tip: Place twigs or yarn in a grid pattern over the top of the nest; if the pattern is disturbed in the morning, the mother has likely returned. If there are no signs that the mother has returned, contact a wildlife rehabilitator.

## Foxes, coyotes and bobcats

If you find a den, don’t approach or handle the young unless they appear to be injured or in distress. If you suspect they are orphaned, contact animal control or a wildlife rehabilitator for assistance. If you must handle them, always wear protective gloves and use caution.



If the den is in a location where it cannot remain, gently disturb the den opening by removing brush, twigs, and leaves so the opening is more exposed; additionally, spray vinegar or ammonia near, but not in, the opening. Most predator species have secondary den sites they will relocate their young to within two nights of a den opening being disturbed; the original den can be closed up once it has been vacated. If the young have not been removed after two nights and there is no evidence that a parent has returned, contact a wildlife rehabilitator.

## Raccoons

If infant raccoons are found alone outside and seem healthy, they should be left for an entire night in the place they were found so that the mother has a chance to return and retrieve them—she is motivated to do so!

To keep them safe, small raccoons may be placed in a cardboard box with holes cut into the top and a large flap cut into the side, which will keep them inside but allow the mother to push in, grab them, and take them to safety. Choose a spot out of direct sunlight, and if the weather is cold, add a cloth-covered warm water bottle or heated rice sock for warmth.



Larger young may be placed under an upside-down clothes basket with a medium-weight rock placed on top to keep them safely inside. The rock should be light enough to allow the mother to remove the rock and get them. Do not place the basket in direct sunlight.

Always wear sturdy, protective gloves when handling raccoons, and if the mother has not retrieved her young by the following morning, contact a wildlife rehabilitator.

For issues with raccoons nesting in your attic, contact a humane wildlife relocater or a wildlife rehabilitator for assistance. Check our website for raccoon re-nesting instructions.