

# Animal Orphans ? No!



Wildlife in Ohio is plentiful. In the past 25 years popular and easily recognized wildlife species including the white-tailed deer, wild turkey, beaver, and bald eagle have increased in number, offering numerous opportunities for enjoyment by hunters, wildlife photographers and artists, students of nature, and casual observers. Awareness and concern for wildlife resources have never been greater. This awareness is often translated into efforts to assist injured and abandoned or "Orphaned" wildlife. This goodwill gesture comes with many responsibilities and problems that the average person is unaware of and unable to manage properly.

To help you make the right decisions regarding injured or abandoned wildlife, the Division of Wildlife has prepared these guidelines:

## Think Before You Act.

Carefully evaluate the situation before you step in. In the spring and early summer, when wildlife reproduction is at its peak, you may have the good fortune to observe a nest of birds or a litter of young mammals with no adult in sight. Enjoy the scene, but unless there appears to be something amiss (a nest out of the tree, broken limbs or wings, or wounds and bleeding) LEAVE IT ALONE! Many species of animals are raised by one adult that is at the moment away from its offspring in search of the next meal. Wildlife parents are very devoted to the care of their

young and rarely abandon them (abandonment usually occurs as a result of injury to or the death of the parent). However, they cannot be in two places at once and so it isn't unusual for the young to be alone at their nest site several times a day.

## Act on Positive Information.

If you have found an obviously injured animal or **know for a fact** that a brood has lost its parent(s), intervention is an acceptable course of action. But don't plan on raising the babies on your own. Young wildlife require special care and feeding that is beyond what the average household is prepared and able to manage. Contact your local wildlife district office, county wildlife officer or veterinarian for assistance. They will be able to direct you to a local wildlife rehabilitator or organization in your area with which to place the young.

In the meantime, keep the animals in a warm, dark area until they are placed. Avoid handling the animals -- this is for your benefit as well as theirs. The animal may carry parasites or diseases that could harm you. Handling by humans stresses animals which are already in a high stress situation. Excessive handling under these circumstances not only makes the animal defensive, resulting in a kick, bite or scratch for you. It may also cause a mental and physical overload for the animal contributing to its death.



## Wild Animals Are Not Domestic Pets.

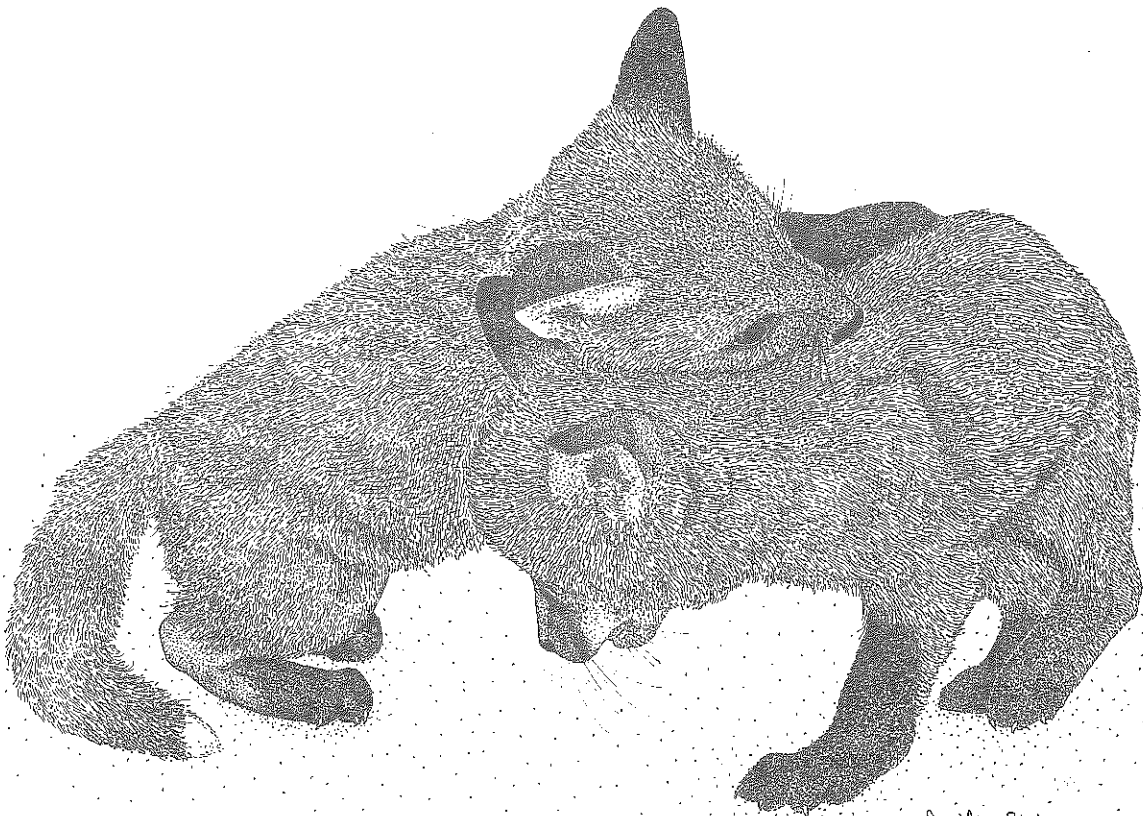
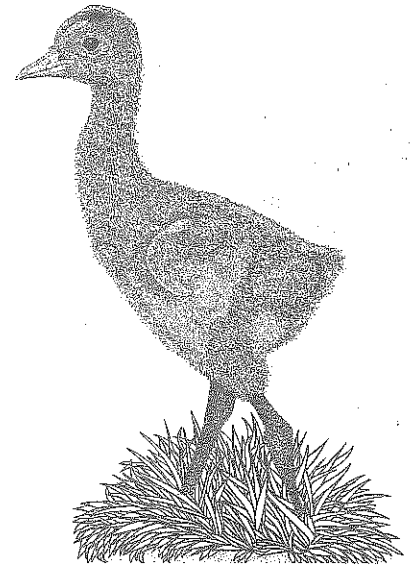
Don't attempt to make abandoned wildlife household or backyard pets. Wildlife, no matter how young they are when exposed to humans or for how long, **do not become domesticated and are unpredictable.** The cute and fuzzy raccoon or rabbit becomes an adult, complete with adult wildlife instincts, urges and behaviors, none of which are conducive to homelife.

Additionally, it is illegal to possess any species of wild animal outside of legalized hunting seasons without special permission of the chief of the Division of Wildlife. A person found holding wildlife (regardless of their good intentions) can be subject to fines, imprisonment and/or restitution.

## Do Your Part to Prevent Wildlife Injury or Abandonment.

You may unknowingly be contributing to the making of wildlife "orphans" by allowing your cat or dog to run at large. Although your pet is getting its meals at home, when it is running at large instinct takes over. Domestic dogs and cats are still quite capable hunters and if successful, can easily disrupt a nest or litter completely. Help prevent an unnecessary loss to the wildlife population by keeping your family's pet(s) under your control, particularly in the spring and summer months.

The Ohio Wildlife Rehabilitators Association (OWRA) will assist injured or abandoned wildlife. OWRA works with the Division of Wildlife to place wildlife with certified rehabilitators. For more information on OWRA and the location of a rehabilitator in your area, please write: Ohio Division of Wildlife, Wildlife Management and Research, 1840 Belcher Drive, Columbus, Ohio 43224-1329.



*Cynthia Bishop*