

Wilmette Pet Center

"the place for people who love pets"

I've found a baby animal, what do I do?

We find a nest of wild rabbits, a bird that has fallen out of a tree, or lost baby squirrels, and, being the loving and caring people we are, we want to help. It's spring time, and one of the most frequent calls we get at this time of year is from people asking what to do with them.

Rabbits: It often appears that the mother has abandoned her babies, but that's not usually the case. Mother rabbits will ignore their nest and babies all day, only going back to the nest to feed her kits once a night. Her milk is really high in fat and protein, to help her babies get through the day. Only going to her nest once helps prevent predators from finding the babies.

When you have found a nest of abandoned babies, check their temperature: if they are warm, mom has not abandoned them. This is why it's best to leave them alone: mom will be back to care for them. You can place a few strands of grass or string over the nest and check back the next day to ensure that mom is returning.

As the weather warms, we all start spending more time outside, in the backyards and on longer walks. Cats and dogs can be a threat to rabbits, so keep an eye on your dog when playing and keep your cats indoors (it's healthier for the cats, too.) Injured rabbits need to be taken to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator. More information can be found



These baby rabbits are old enough to be on their own.

Specific links for baby rabbits:

- [House Rabbit Connection](#)
- [2nd Chance](#)

Squirrels: Baby squirrels will fall out of the nest for several reasons, from simple slips to nest damage from bad weather to fights with males. Most mother squirrels will have a backup nest that she can retreat to if necessary, so reuniting the baby with mom is the most important thing. Place the young squirrel at the base of the closest tree; mom will find them and return them to the nest.



Mother squirrels will not take a baby back that has gotten cold. You can warm them with your hands or body heat, then attempt to unite them with their mother. If it's a little cold out, you can place them in a box with a towel and a hot water bottle.

It's a smart idea to pick them up wearing gloves, especially if the squirrel is a little older, as they can bite if they are frightened. If your pets are around, take them back inside so that the mother will feel comfortable coming back to get them. Watch for an hour or two to ensure that the mom gets them. If they seem to be abandoned, you must then get in contact with a licensed wildlife rehabilitator.

Important squirrel links:

- [Squirrel Rehab](#)
- [Squirrel Tales](#)

Birds: Contrary to popular belief, if you touch a baby bird, their parents will not abandon it. Birds actually don't have much of a sense of smell, and, with their strong parenting instincts, they'll always seek them out to care for them. This notion may have come about because the babies and fledglings would often be found on the ground again after returning them to their nest. This can happen for many reasons (such as a parasitic bird like cuckoos or cowbirds, or when fledglings try to fly) but is not the result of people touching them.



Baby birds belong in the nest when: their eyes are not open, they don't have any feathers or show some spots of bare skin, and do not stand or hop well. Try to place them back in their nest, or, if you can't reach it or it has fallen, create a substitute nest - use a small bowl or bucket, layer leaves and twigs in the bottom, and secure it as close to the old nest as possible.

Fledglings are young birds that have feathers but are still unable to fly. They're often seen on the ground after failed attempts at flight. If it's in a safe place, away from cats and dogs, leave it alone.

You can move it to a safer location in a nearby bush, ground cover, or tree branch. Their parents will find them and occasionally feed them. Spending some time on the ground is a natural, and dangerous, stage in the life of a bird.

Important links for birds:

- [Marathon Wild Bird center](#)
- [Chicago Bird Collision Monitors](#)

We hope that the most important message you'll take from here is: The BEST thing to do when you find a baby animal is to *leave it alone*. There are several reasons for this, and they're not the ones you think. Contrary to common myth, animals will not stop caring for a baby after a person has touched it.

Caring for a baby wild animal is a huge responsibility, requiring a lot more time and energy than most people can spare. They require specific diets to thrive, something that can be hard for people to meet; their mothers can do a better job at raising their young than you can. These animals will also never be comfortable in your home, and by bringing wild animals in can also bring in pest like fleas and mites. And most importantly, federal law also states that to care for a baby wild animal you must be a licensed wildlife rehabilitator.



This baby rabbit would need help to survive.

In that rare case where you must do something or the animal is going to die, see the links for that animal and check out the additional links below. We carry everything you need, from syringes to bottles, kitten milk for rabbits to canned cat food for baby birds; It can give you time to get the animal to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator.

General care and information links

- Whether you've found a bird with a broken wing, an orphaned baby squirrel, or have a wild animal taking up residence in your attic, visit the [Wildlife Hotline](#) website for help.
- Call or visit [Flint Creek Wildlife Rehabilitation](#) at 847-842-8000 and [Willowbrook Wildlife Center](#) at 630-942-6200 for help with baby birds, squirrels, rabbits, and other animals.
- Check out this list of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources list of [licensed wildlife rehabilitators](#).