

# Leave Baby Wildlife Alone

**By Diane Tilton, AZGFD Information and Education manager**

There's something about seeing a small, young animal alone that makes us want to save it. But the thing is... most of these animals aren't in need of rescue. Usually when a young animal is found alone, the mother is close by and just out feeding and will return to care for her young. When humans "help" or "rescue" wildlife, there are often unintended consequences for the animal, including death. Unless there is an extreme circumstance, the best thing you can do for the animal is to leave it alone.

## **Mammals**

Baby rabbits are usually found under cover, like bushes or debris piles. Mother rabbits usually feed their young a few times a day, most likely at dawn and dusk. If you find baby rabbits, please leave them alone and recover them if needed. If your pet finds the baby rabbit, return it to the nest if it's not injured. If it is injured, contact the nearest Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) office for guidance.

Elk and deer mothers will often leave their young hidden in vegetation for several hours while they are out feeding. If a fawn or calf attempts to follow you, gently push on its shoulders until it lies down. Don't attempt to capture the fawn or calf, even if it appears to be sick or injured. Please record the animal's location and contact the nearest AGFD office. Once removed from the wild, elk calves and deer fawns are seldom able to be returned to the wild. There are limited facilities to care for these animals and disease concerns make it very difficult to find homes for hand-raised deer and elk orphans.

## **Birds**

Fledglings (baby birds without fully developed flight feathers) are at that awkward stage when they are out of the nest but can't quite fly yet. They are often seen hopping in a tree or on the ground. The young birds often leave the nest to practice flying. Putting it back in the nest usually doesn't work because the young bird will leave again. Please leave fledglings alone unless they are at risk of injury or death. Place the young bird nearby out of danger. The parents will usually continue to feed and care for the baby, if people and pets keep their distance.

If you find a nestling (a baby bird that is not fully feathered or its eyes are closed), the best thing to do is to return it to the nest. If you can't reach or find the nest, place the nestling in an artificial nest at a lower location as close as possible to the original nest location. If the nest is damaged in a fall, you can fix it up or provide an artificial one, like a small basket or box lined with dry

grass or a soft cloth. The parents might be a bit cautious of the new location or nest, but give it a few hours for them to return. If the parents don't seem to be caring for the young after a few hours, contact the nearest AGFD office for direction.

Some birds nest directly on the ground, like quail, ducks and geese. If you or your pet discovers a ground nest with eggs, please leave it alone and avoid the area. If you frighten a family of quail and the young scatter in different directions, leave the area and wait for the parents to call the young back to them. If the parents do not collect the babies after an hour, contact the nearest AGFD office.

### **Injured Animals**

It can be difficult to know if a wild animal is injured and in need of human help. Signs of an injured wild animal include protruding bones or bleeding, inability to move away from threats (moving cars, people or pets), lethargy or lack of fear when threatened and the inability to fly or stand upright. A wild animal should only be removed from its habitat when it is absolutely necessary. Remember, it may seem more humane to rescue an animal, but wildlife that are removed from the wild have a greatly reduced chance of survival when, and if, they are ever released back into the wild.

Injured birds and animals are potentially dangerous. Contact the nearest AGFD office for guidance on capturing and transporting injured wildlife. For more information about urban wildlife or to find a licensed wildlife rehabilitator, please see AGFD's website at [www.azgfd.gov/urbanwildlife](http://www.azgfd.gov/urbanwildlife) or call the regional department office nearest you. The AGFD office in Pinetop can be reached at 928-532-3680.