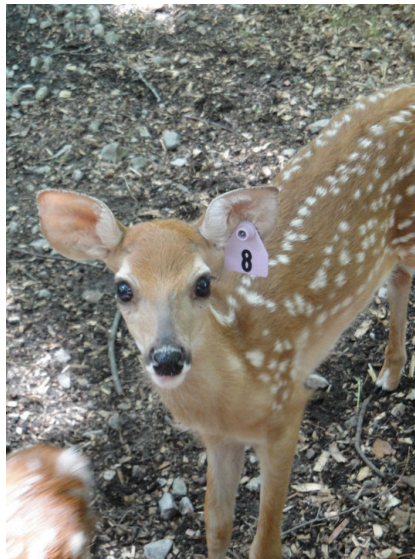


# Infant Wildlife Emergencies

## What You Can Do



Wildlife Center of Virginia

# Rescue Advice

**Staff at the Wildlife Center of Virginia are available seven days a week to help deal with wildlife health issues. Please call**

**540.942.9453 from 9 AM to 5 PM daily.**

**540.241.4045 from 5 PM to 9 AM daily. Center veterinarians are on call after hours to deal with wildlife emergencies.**

If you find a sick or injured wild animal, or a baby animal in need of intervention read on, then contact the Wildlife Center or another licensed wildlife rehabilitator in your area as soon as possible. Some specific suggestions for dealing with some of the most common baby animals - birds, rabbits, squirrels, opossums, and deer - are provided below. Special care should be taken in dealing with high-risk rabies species - raccoons, skunks, foxes, bats and groundhogs (e.g, using humane catch-alive or Have-A-Heart traps to catch the animal or wearing latex medical gloves inside of leather gloves to handle an infant.)

To provide temporary shelter for a sick, injured or orphaned animal: keep the patient warm and dry— a lidded box with a cloth or towel on the bottom works well— and keep the patient in a quiet, dark place away from children, pets and noise. A heating pad underneath the box on low setting or a rice or bird-seed bag may be used to help keep the patient warm. (Fill an old sock with rice or birdseed, tie a knot in the end and heat the bag in the microwave for 15-20 seconds to create a heated, disposable heat source for the animal.)

Unless specifically advised to do so by the Wildlife Center or a licensed wildlife rehabilitator, please DO NOT attempt to offer food or water to a patient. Such treatment is likely to cause more harm than good. Many wild animals have very sensitive stomachs and require very special diets. Injured animals are not in a state to process food.

MANY, MANY baby animals brought to the Wildlife Center each year are not really "orphans" in need of the kind of hospital care that the Center provides. In fact, many animals brought to the Center are in need of no "help" from humans at all. They are young animals still receiving care from their parents, or young animals that are ready to live, and thrive, on their own. The Wildlife Center encourages those who care about wildlife to ask questions FIRST about the most appropriate course of action (see below). Despite our natural inclinations, the BEST chance of survival for a young uninjured animal is often to leave it in its parents' care.

# Baby Birds

## I've found a baby bird! What should I do?

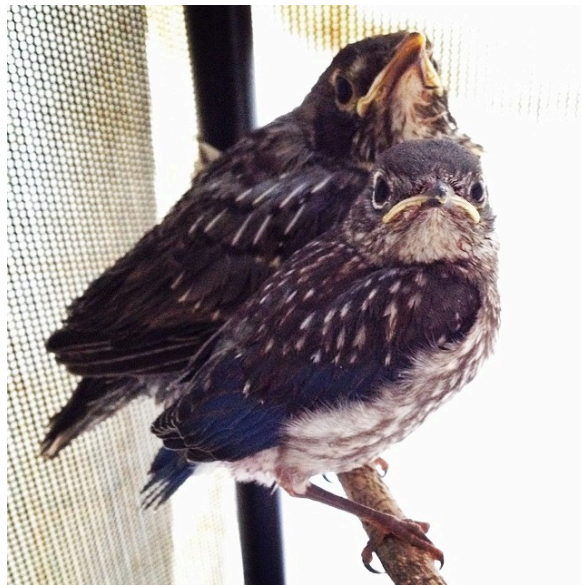
It's common for humans to encounter baby birds in the spring and summer. Depending on the species, baby birds can spend days to weeks in the nest, where they are cared for by their parents. As the babies develop, they grow in feathers and get ready for the next stage of development – fledging. As baby birds take their first flights, many species stay close to the original nest, where their parents continue to care for them.

### **Is the bird injured (bleeding, broken bones, puncture wounds, been in a cat's mouth, open wounds, etc.)?**

If **YES**, take the bird to your nearest wildlife veterinarian or permitted rehabilitator.

If **NO**, see below.

### **Is the bird fully feathered?**



If **YES**, any fully feathered baby bird found on the ground, seemingly unable to fly, is likely just fledging - a natural state of development in the bird's life. It is normal for fledgling birds to be on the ground! Birds need several days -- up to four weeks, depending on their species -- to learn how to fly and forage for food. One or more parent will continue to feed them during this period. Leave the area, and do your best to keep pets and children away from the bird. The parent(s) will not feed the youngster while people are around. Fledgling birds often have very short tails, and

the hop around and jump up on short things like bushes and practice their flutter-flying.

If **NO**, attempt to find the nest. An uninjured bird found on the ground with few or no feathers needs to be returned to the original nest. Look in nearby trees and bushes to see if you can locate the nest. Correct species identification of the nestling or of the parents will help locate the nest (i.e., bluebirds are box or cavity nesters, mourning doves build basket nests on horizontal branches or in a tree fork). Cornell's *All About Birds* website has excellent information on nest type and placement.

### **Can you find/reach the nest?**



- If **YES**, simply put the bird back. However, first make sure the bird is warm to the touch. If the baby is not, you can simply warm the bird in your hands before returning it to the nest. Returning a young, cold bird to the nest will sometimes encourage the parent to push the baby out of the nest, as the parent is trying to remove a cold object to protect other warm young and/or eggs.
- If **NO**, you can't locate the nest, are unable to reach it (even with a ladder), or if the original nest is destroyed: many young birds (depending on their age) can be placed in a substitute nest. As long as the bird is at least partially feathered, construct a substitute nest of a similar size and shape and securely attach it as close as possible to the original nest site, or where the nestling was found. Small wicker baskets make good substitute nests, as they have handles to firmly tie basket to tree and they will drain if it rains.



Contrary to popular belief, **the parents will not be frightened off by your scent** and will return to feed the baby if it calls for food. If you want to be sure the parent(s) will continue to feed the baby, watch the nest from a safe distance, preferably from indoors using binoculars. Many wild birds will not return to the nest if you are visible and/or in the area. If a parent does not visit the new nest for more than half a day, contact a permitted songbird rehabilitator for advice.

**Please give baby birds the best possible chance for survival and leave them in the wild where they belong!** Never attempt to treat or raise a baby bird on your own. Despite your best efforts, most hand-raised birds will die.

The best baby bird rehabilitation is prevention. Educate your friends, family, neighbors, and yourselves about the fledging process. Know where nesting sites are located, and keep cats and dogs indoors around the time you think the birds will fledge to avoid predation. Ask neighbors to take responsibility for their pets as well.

**NOTE:** Raising a wild animal in captivity is illegal unless you have both state and federal permits. For information on how you can become a permitted wildlife rehabilitator, visit our wildlife rehabilitation training page at our website, and contact the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries or your state's wildlife agency.



It's normal for fledgling birds to be on the ground as they are learning how to fly. Mom and dad are in the area watching over them and feeding them. If you find a healthy fledgling bird, leave it alone and keep dogs, cats, and kids out of the area.



# Baby Deer

## I've found a fawn! What should I do?

White-tailed Deer fawns are born April through July, with the majority of fawns born in June. Most first-year does will have one fawn each year, but twins or triplets are typically seen thereafter.

Until they are strong enough to keep up with their mothers, deer fawns are left alone while their mothers go off to feed. Mother deer will stay away from the fawns to avoid leading predators to their young. Does return at dawn and dusk to feed and/or move their young.

Fawns are typically left in an area with tall grass or bushes, but sometimes they are left in more open areas, including backyards. Older deer fawn may wander short distances.

Well-meaning humans often assume that because a fawn is alone it must be an orphan, leading to numerous fawn "kidnappings" each year.

A fawn has the BEST chance of survival when cared for by its mother. Typically, the best option is to leave the fawn alone!





# DON'T BE A FAWN-NAPPER!

Each year, the Wildlife Center of Virginia fields hundreds of calls about White-tailed Deer fawns. Often, an individual finds a fawn and thinks it needs to be rescued. In most cases, the fawn does not need help.

White-tailed Deer fawns are born in April through July, with most fawns born in June. A doe will leave her fawn(s) alone all day and only come back to feed her young around dawn and dusk. Well-meaning humans often assume that because a fawn is alone it must be an orphan, leading to numerous fawn "kidnappings" each year.

A fawn has the BEST chance of survival when cared for by its mother.

If you find a fawn alone that you think might need help, use the following chart to guide your choice of intervention.



For more information about what to do when you encounter a fawn, visit [www.wildlifecenter.org/baby-deer](http://www.wildlifecenter.org/baby-deer)



## Do any of the following apply to the fawn?

- It is bleeding, has an open wound, or has a broken bone.
- It's covered in fly eggs (look like small grains of rice), or has tick-encrusted eyes.
- It's cold, wet, dehydrated (has sticky gums or skin stays pinched up in "pinch test")
- It's crying nonstop for hours on end, or overnight.
- It appears weak AND is lying on its side.
  - If **YES**, the deer is likely injured or orphaned. Contact your nearest permitted wildlife rehabilitator or wildlife veterinarian for treatment.
  - If **NO**, then continue on to the next question.

## Is the fawn in a dangerous location (e.g., by a busy road, in a backyard with dogs, etc.)

- If **YES**, the fawn can be moved a short distance to a safer location.

When moving a fawn, it's not unusual for the fawn to follow you as you leave. To prevent the fawn from following you, place the fawn facing away from the direction in which you plan to leave so it cannot watch you.

Tap the fawn once or twice firmly between the shoulder blades (this mimics how the mother taps the fawn with her nose to communicate "stay here and wait until I come back.")

Quickly leave the area. Do not linger. The fawn may stand up and take a few steps to follow. Keep going and the fawn should lie back down. If possible, you can monitor from afar with binoculars.

- If **NO**, then the fawn is healthy and simply waiting for mom to return.

Leave the fawn alone! Keep children and pets away. Monitor from a distance and reassess the situation in 24 hours.

## Remember ...

- Never chase a fawn to capture it. The stress of being chased can be dangerous to a fawn. Fawns are prone to a condition called capture myopathy, which is caused by chase and stress. Capture myopathy can lead to damage to internal organs, and even death.
- Never give food or water to injured or orphaned wildlife. Inappropriate food or feeding technique can lead to sickness or death. Fawns in particular have very sensitive stomachs and require a special diet. Cow's milk will make them sick.

**NOTE:** Each animal's nutritional, housing, and handling requirements are very specific and must be met if they have any chance of survival. Raising a wild animal in captivity is illegal unless you have a state permit. For information on how you can become a permitted wildlife rehabilitator, contact the Wildlife Center of Virginia, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, or your state's wildlife agency.

# Baby Rabbits

## I've found a bunny! What should I do?

Eastern Cottontail rabbits reproduce throughout the spring and summer, typically starting in mid-March and nesting through mid-September. Nests are found in shallow depressions on the ground (cottontails do not burrow); nests are covered with soft grasses or at the edge of low growing groundcovers and are lined with tufts of the mother rabbit's fur. The average litter size for rabbits is five, though mothers may give birth to as few as one and as many as 12! Since young rabbits grow up quite quickly, "doe" rabbits may have three or four litters in a season. Mother rabbits are very secretive, so they don't draw attention to their nest; it is very rare that you will see a mother rabbit coming and going. The doe feeds her young only twice a day -- at dusk and dawn.

Young rabbits disperse from the nest at 15-20 days old. By three weeks of age, they are on their own in the wild, though are still very small -- they're only about the size of a an adult fist! Rabbits have the best chance of survival when they are cared for by their mothers.



### Check before you mow.

Eastern Cottontails make their nests in shallow depressions on the ground. Before you mow your lawn, check your yard to ensure you don't disturb nesting rabbits.

[www.wildlifecenter.org](http://www.wildlifecenter.org)



**Is the rabbit injured (bleeding, broken bones, puncture wounds, been in a cat or dog's mouth, open wounds, etc.)?**

If **YES**, take the rabbit to your nearest wildlife veterinarian or rehabilitator.

If **NO**, see below.

**Is the rabbit fully furred with its eyes opened?**

If **YES**, if the rabbit is larger than a softball (about the size of an adult fist) and weighs more than 4 ounces or 100 grams, it is on its own and does not need human intervention.

If **NO**, attempt to locate the nest (a shallow depression on the ground possibly lined with rabbit fur and/or grass) and put the rabbit back.

You will not see a lot of activity at the nest; mother rabbits stay away to avoid leading predators to the nest. If you do suspect the nest is abandoned, lay four 1-foot pieces of string in a tic-tac-toe pattern over the nest as straight as you possibly can. Leave the area and check back in 12 hours.

If the mother rabbit has returned to the nest to nurse her young, the string will be out of place. If the string is undisturbed, and the bunnies appear thin and weak, with wrinkled, baggy skin, the babies may be orphaned. The babies should be taken immediately to a state permitted small mammal rehabilitator in your area. Do not try to feed the bunnies and handle them as little as possible—they stress out easily with human handling.



BEFORE MOM VISITS



AFTER MOM VISITS

**A Word About Mowing**

It's a good idea to check your yard before you mow; because rabbits are in shallow nests, it's easy to mow the "top" off of their nest, possibly injuring babies. Do not attempt to mow within 10 feet of a rabbit's nest if there are babies present. You can protect a nest during mowing by placing a plastic lattice laundry basket upside down over the nest. It's

best to remove the basket after mowing. Leave the nest area as undisturbed as possible while the young rabbits grow.

If the nest **must** continue to be protected, cut a hole in the laundry basket very close to ground level about 3-4 inches in diameter so that the mother rabbit can enter/exit from either side. If you have a dog who has access to the nest/basket, place a very heavy rock or object on the overturned laundry basket (not so heavy as to crush the basket). Once the babies are gone, the basket can be removed and the nest destroyed if you are trying to prevent the nest from being reused.

### Remember ...

Never chase a rabbit to capture it. The stress of being chased can be dangerous to a baby rabbit. Rabbits are a high-stress species prone to a condition called capture myopathy, which is caused by chase and stress. Capture myopathy can lead to damage to internal organs, and even death.

Never give food or water to injured or orphaned wildlife. Inappropriate food or feeding techniques can lead to sickness or death. Baby rabbits have particularly sensitive stomachs and require a special diet. Cow's milk will make them sick.

**NOTE:** Each animal's nutritional, housing, and handling requirements are very specific and must be met if they have any chance of survival. Raising a wild animal in captivity is illegal unless you have a state permit. For information on how you can become a permitted wildlife rehabilitator, contact the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, visit our wildlife rehabilitation training page, or contact your state's wildlife agency.

# I Found a Baby Rabbit ...



Do any of the following apply to the rabbit?

- It is bleeding, has an open wound, or has a broken bone.
- It's been in a cat's or dog's mouth.
- It's covered in fly eggs [these look like small grains of rice].
- It's cold, wet, or crying nonstop.

YES

Take the rabbit to a wildlife rehabilitator or veterinarian.

NO

Is the rabbit fully furred with its eyes opened?

NO

Rabbits are a sensitive and high-stress species. Never chase a rabbit to capture it, and handle it as little as possible.

Do not give food or water to injured or orphaned rabbits; they have very sensitive stomachs.

Locate the nest and put the rabbit back. You will not see a lot of activity at the nest; mother rabbits stay away to avoid leading predators to their young.

To check for nest activity, lay four pieces of string in a tic-tac-toe pattern over the nest. Leave the area and check back in 12 hours. If the mother rabbit has returned, the strings will be out of place. If the strings are undisturbed, and the young rabbits have missed more than two feedings [early morning and dusk], the rabbits should be taken to a permitted rehabilitator.

YES

If the rabbit is larger than a softball and weighs more than 4 ounces or 100 grams, leave it alone! It is on its own and does not need human intervention.



## Cottontail Facts:

- Nest March - September
- Average Litter: 4-5 babies
- Litters per season: 3-4
- Disperse at 15-20 days old

Nests are found in shallow depressions on the ground [cottontails do not burrow], covered with soft grasses and lined with tufts of the mother rabbit's fur.

Mother rabbits are very secretive so they don't draw attention to their nests; it is very rare that you will see a mother rabbit coming and going.

Mom feeds her young only two times a day: at dusk and dawn.

## A Word about Mowing:

Do not attempt to mow within 10 feet of a rabbit's nest if there are babies present. Protect a nest during mowing by placing a plastic lattice laundry basket upside down over the nest. Remove after mowing.

For more information about what to do if you find a baby rabbit, visit [www.wildlifecenter.org/baby-rabbit](http://www.wildlifecenter.org/baby-rabbit)

Raising a wild animal in captivity is **illegal** unless you have a state permit.



# Baby Squirrels

I've found a baby squirrel! What should I do?

Gray squirrels nest twice a year, in late winter and summer. They commonly have litters of three or four pups. Babies' eyes open at four weeks of age and the young are often starting to explore outside the nest at six weeks of age. They are typically weaned and ready to be on their own at 10 weeks of age.

A baby squirrel has the best chance of survival when it is cared for by its mother.

Sometimes healthy young squirrels found on the ground are not orphans -- they simply need help being reunited with their mothers. Often, mother squirrels will "rescue" their fallen or displaced healthy babies by carrying them by the scruff back to the nest.





# I found a baby squirrel ...



Every year, the Wildlife Center of Virginia fields hundreds of calls from the public about baby squirrels. Gray squirrels nest twice a year – in late winter and summer. They commonly have litters of three or four pups. Babies' eyes open at four weeks. Babies may begin exploring outside the nest by six weeks and are weaned by ten weeks.

A baby squirrel has the best chance of survival when it's cared for by its mother. If you find a baby squirrel, use the following chart to guide your choice of intervention.

Remember to wear sturdy gloves any time you handle wildlife. Do not give food or water to injured or orphaned wildlife.

## START HERE

Do any of the following apply to the squirrel?

- It is bleeding, has an open wound, or has a broken bone.
- It's been in a cat's or dog's mouth.
- It's covered in fly eggs [look like small grains of rice].
- It's cold, wet, or crying nonstop.

YES

The squirrel is likely injured or orphaned. Take it to the nearest permitted wildlife rehabilitator.

NO

NO

If the squirrel is uninjured, the next step is to identify its age to determine if intervention is needed.

Does the squirrel ...

- have a fluffed-out tail?
- have a body longer than 6" (not including tail)?
- approach humans or pets?

YES

This is a **JUVENILE** squirrel. You do not need to intervene. Even at the young age of 10 to 12 weeks, the squirrel is independent.

If the squirrel is approaching humans or pets, try to scare it by making loud noises when it comes near.

NO

This is an **INFANT** squirrel. You will need to guide the baby back to its mother.

Congratulations! You helped to reunite a baby with its mother.

Thanks for your help!

YES

Has the mother returned to care for her baby?

Observe the baby for the next six to eight hours of daylight. Reheat the rice every two hours.

ONE.

Place uncooked rice or bird seed in a sock and warm in the microwave for 20-30 seconds. Wrap the sock in a soft towel and place it with the baby in an open container (e.g. a box).

Do NOT give the baby food or water.

TWO.

Return the squirrel to its nesting tree – this should be a tree in the immediate area where the squirrel was found. If you don't know which tree the squirrel's nest is in, or if the nest was destroyed, then choose a tree closest to where the squirrel was found.

THREE.

If the baby's eyes are OPEN, place the baby on the tree trunk to encourage it to climb. If it does not climb, attach the open container to the tree.

If the baby's eyes are CLOSED, attach the open container to the tree.\*

\* For ideas and more detailed information, visit: <http://wildlifecenter.org/re-nesting-baby-squirrels>

## Do any of the following apply to the squirrel?

It is bleeding, has an open wound, or has a broken bone.

It's been in a cat's or dog's mouth.

It's covered in fly eggs (these look like small grains of rice).

It's cold, wet, or crying nonstop.

If **YES**, the squirrel is likely injured or orphaned. Take it to the nearest wildlife veterinarian or rehabilitator.

If **NO**, the next step is to identify its age to determine if intervention is needed.

## Does the squirrel ...

Have a fluffed-out tail (like a bottle brush)?

Have a body longer than 6" (not including the tail)?

Approach humans or pets?

If **YES**, this is likely a juvenile squirrel. You do not need to intervene. Even at the young age of 10 to 12 weeks, the squirrel is independent. If the squirrel is approaching humans or pets, try to scare it by making loud noises when it comes near.

If **NO**, this is an **infant** squirrel. You will need to guide the healthy baby back to its mother:

Place uncooked rice or bird seed in a sock, tie a knot in the end and warm in the microwave for 20-30 seconds. Wrap the sock in a soft towel and place it with the baby in an open container (e.g., a box, basket). Remember, do not give the baby food or water!

Return the squirrel to its nesting tree -- this should be a tree in the immediate area where the squirrel was found. If you don't know which tree the squirrel's nest is in, or if the nest was destroyed, then choose a tree closest to where the squirrel was found. Squirrel nests can either be in tree cavities, or in "dreys" -- the big balls of dried leaves at the tops of trees.

If the baby's eyes are **open**, place the baby on the tree trunk to encourage it to climb. If it does not climb or if the baby's eyes are **closed**, place the



squirrel in the container and attach the open container to the tree trunk so mom will see it when coming and going. Keep children, dogs, and cats out of the area.

**Observe the baby squirrel for the next six to eight hours of daylight. Reheat the rice/birdseed bag every two hours. Has the mother returned to retrieve her baby?**

If **YES** ... congratulations! You helped reunite a baby with its mother. This is best for the squirrel!

If **NO**, take the squirrel to the nearest permitted small mammal rehabilitator.

**NOTE:** Each animal's nutritional, housing, and handling requirements are very specific and must be met if the animal has any chance of survival. Cow's milk and human milk replacers will make wild animals sick. Raising a wild animal in captivity is illegal in Virginia unless you have a state permit. For information on how you can become a permitted wildlife rehabilitator, contact the Wildlife Center of Virginia, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, or your state's wildlife agency.

# Baby Opossums

## I've found a baby opossum! What should I do?

Opossums breed two or three times each year, from February through September. The average litter contains six to nine babies, but can be as many as 13! Opossums remain in the mother's pouch until they are two months old. Between two and four months of age, they may ride on their mother's back and are dependent on the mother for help in finding food and shelter. If you find a baby opossum:

### **Is the animal injured (bleeding, broken bones, wounds, deformity, etc.)?**

If **YES**, contact your nearest wildlife veterinarian or rehabilitator.

If **NO**, opossums that are at least 8 inches long from tip of nose to the base of the tail (do not include the tail) and weigh more than 7.25 ounces or 200 grams are old enough to survive on their own in the wild and do not need human intervention.

If the opossum does not meet these size and weight criteria, contact a state licensed wildlife rehabilitator immediately. Opossum babies are often found crawling around next to their dead mother (often after the mother has been killed by a car) and will not survive at this age without human care. Any opossum you find that where there is no mother in sight and the infant is under 8 inches long from tip of nose to the base of the tail (do not include the tail) is considered an orphan and should go to a rehabilitator.

To handle the infant, wear latex medical gloves inside leather gloves. Do not have any contact with saliva from the infant.

**NOTE:** Raising a wild animal in captivity is illegal unless you have a state permit. For information on how you can become a licensed wildlife rehabilitator, contact the Wildlife Center of Virginia, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries or your state's wildlife agency.

# IF YOU FIND A BABY OPOSSUM...

Opossums breed two or three times each year, from February to September, with the average litter containing six to nine babies. Opossum babies remain in their mother's pouch until they are about two months old. Between two and four months of age, they ride on their mother's back and are dependent on her for care.

## IS THE OPOSSUM INJURED?

*(bleeding, broken bones, wounds, deformity, etc.)*

### NO

Opossums that are at least 8 inches long from tip of nose to the base of the tail and weigh more than 7.25 ounces or 200 grams are old enough to survive on their own in the wild and do not need human intervention. If the opossum does not meet these size and weight criteria, contact a state permitted wildlife rehabilitator immediately.

### YES

Contact your nearest wildlife veterinarian or rehabilitator.



Opossum babies are often found with or near their dead mothers after the mother opossum has been killed by a car. Remove babies from the dead mother's pouch as soon as possible and keep them warm until they are taken to a permitted rehabilitator.

Raising a wild animal in captivity is illegal unless you have a state permit. For information on how you can become a permitted wildlife rehabilitator, contact your state's wildlife agency.

[WWW.WILDLIFECENTER.ORG/BABY-OPOSSUM](http://WWW.WILDLIFECENTER.ORG/BABY-OPOSSUM)

