

Rescuing Wild Mammals: Part 2

By Sharon St. Joan

Before attempting to rescue any wild animal, please see the resource “Rescuing Wild Mammals: Part 1.” It’s important to read that resource first because every year many young wild animals are “rescued” by well-meaning people who assume that the young animals are orphans. Often, the parents are nearby and the young animals do not need to be rescued at all.



If you have determined that a wild mammal does indeed need to be rescued, read on.

What safety measures should I use?

When rescuing small mammals, it’s a good idea to wear gloves. Be aware, however, that gloves provide only a small amount of protection, and that most mammals can easily bite through them. Raccoons, skunks, bats, and some foxes are more likely than other mammals to carry rabies, but any wild animal may carry the disease. There are a number of other serious or fatal diseases that can be transmitted to humans, so you must take care that the animal doesn’t bite you.

If, in spite of your precautions, you are bitten by the animal, or if you come into contact with the animal’s bodily fluids (blood, saliva, etc.), report the incident to a medical professional. Reporting the incident will most likely require the euthanization of the animal so that he can be tested for rabies. This is another reason to exercise caution in the first place while handling the animal. The medical professional will need to know the name and contact information of any other person who has been in contact with the animal.

How do I pick up and transport an injured animal?

If you come across an injured small mammal (a squirrel or a cottontail, for example), you may pick up the injured animal either while wearing gloves or by sliding a cloth, piece of cardboard or towel under the animal.

Some people keep a small pet carrier and a couple of towels or small blankets in their car, in case they encounter injured wildlife. If you keep a pet carrier on hand for this purpose, put the animal inside the pet carrier on a towel or blanket and transport him to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator. Covering the pet carrier with a sheet or towel to make the inside dark will help the animal to be quieter and less stressed.

Very small mammals, such as baby animals and chipmunks, are usually much thinner than they appear, because of the thickness of their fur, and they may be able to slip through the openings in the door of the carrier. To prevent this, you can adapt the pet carrier ahead of time by attaching pegboard, shade cloth, or another material that allows ventilation to the door.

Plastic pet carriers made for rodents can also be used for any appropriately sized small mammals. Be careful not to cover the top of a plastic carrier in such a way that all the air holes are covered.

A cardboard box or another container will also work. Poke air holes (about the width of a pencil) in the container to provide an air supply and ventilation. Mammals who are conscious and active can chew or claw their way through cardboard, so use common sense related to the distance you need to travel and the level of activity of the animal. If you're using a cardboard box, you should tape it closed after the animal is put in the box.

If the animal is very small (for example, a baby chipmunk whose eyes are not open yet), a bucket or pail can be used with a cloth or towel in the bottom. A cloth over the top will keep the inside dark, which will keep the animal calm. Do not use a bucket or pail if there is any possibility that the animal could jump out.

Every situation is different, so you may need to be inventive, and you'll need to use common sense in transporting the injured or orphaned animal.

What things should I *not* do?

- Do not give the animal any food or water, either in her mouth or in the container with her. It is very easy to drown a wild animal. Water placed in the container will simply spill, causing the animal to be cold and wet. Instead, take the animal to a rehabilitator quickly.
- Do not attempt to treat the animal for his injury in any way. Don't ever try to rehabilitate a wild animal yourself. Leave all decisions about the animal's treatment entirely to the rehabilitator, who has the required knowledge and training.
- Do not allow children or pets near the animal – for both their protection and for the wild animal's protection. Another reason to keep children and pets away is that the animal will need quiet.
- Do not put the animal in direct sunlight or in direct air conditioning. An injured mammal will generally do best in a temperature that a human will find comfortable. Baby mammals and animals who are going into shock need more warmth, but there is also a danger of overheating. A moderate temperature is usually best.

When should I call the wildlife rehabilitator?

Contact a rehabilitator immediately and transport the animal as quickly as possible – within an hour is best. To locate a licensed wildlife rehabilitator, please see the resource called "How to Find a Wildlife Rehabilitator." You should tell the rehabilitator the exact location where the animal was found so that, if it is appropriate, the animal may be released at the site where he was found.

If, for any reason, it is impossible for you to arrange for the rescued animal to be driven to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator within a short time, then telephone a rehabilitator for advice on temporary emergency care. A rehabilitator you contact by telephone does not necessarily need to be in your area in order to give you advice.

Keeping the rescued animal in your possession for longer than an hour or two should be done only in emergencies, such as very severe weather where it would be dangerous to drive. Taking the animal to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator quickly will give the animal the best chance of recovery and release.

How can I be prepared ahead of time?

If you're reading this before you find a wild animal who needs help, there are several things you can do to be better prepared for such an emergency:

- Have the name and number of a wildlife rehabilitator handy by your phone. If you don't have that information already, see "How to Find a Wildlife Rehabilitator."
- Find a suitable container for transporting animals and have it ready (see instructions above).
- Be familiar with your state wildlife laws. In some states, it is illegal to rescue (and also illegal to possess or to release) some mammal species.
- Read the other resources in this section of the website.

Sharon St. Joan established Feathered Friends at Best Friends Animal Sanctuary and has cared for birds and wildlife for over 15 years. She now devotes her time to writing about birds and wildlife-related issues.

See also: [Rescuing Wild Mammals: Part 1](#)
[How to Find a Wildlife Rehabilitator](#)