



Baby Bunnies

If you have found a wildlife baby of ANY kind, first assess the baby's well being with the following questions:

- Does Baby feel cold and lethargic?
- Is Baby covered with parasites (fleas, fly strike or ticks)?
- Has Baby been in a dog or cat's mouth? Are there punctures or wounds?
- Does Baby have a broken limb or other obvious injury?
- Does Baby have abrasions?
- Is Baby having difficulty breathing (gasping, gurgling)?
- Is Baby's coat matted and/or patchy?
- Does Baby have a head tilt and cannot hold its head straight?
- Is Baby exhibiting odd behavior (circling, falling over, etc.)?
- Is Baby bleeding?
- Did you find what you believe to be Mom dead?

If you answered YES to any of the above questions, reuniting babies with Mom is no longer an option and baby needs to get to a rehabber immediately. Please call the Wildlife Rehab Center for assistance. Regardless of species or time of year, ALWAYS make sure that babies are WARM to the touch. A water bottle with hot water with a sock over it will work to warm babies, or a heating pad will do as well. You can make your own heat source for babies by taking a clean tube sock, filling it with uncooked rice, tie the end of the sock so it won't spill and microwave for 1-2 minutes. Place the warm sock in with the babies and let them decide if they want to be on it or away from it. If you decide to use a water bottle, make absolutely sure that you do not let that bottle get cold! Once the bottle is cold it will suck heat away from babies instead of warming them. NEVER feed or give water without instruction from a rehabber! *If you think baby needs food or water, call us first PLEASE!*

After you have assessed that the bunny or bunnies are uninjured follow the steps below to best assist baby bunnies.



Step 1. Determine age of rabbits

The simplest way to determine age is to answer the following questions:

- Are baby's ear standing up, or attached to the back of the baby?
- Is baby bigger than a golf ball when cupped in your hand?
- Is baby bigger than an extra large egg when cupped in your hand?
- Is baby 4-5 inches or more in length?

Size alone will not tell you if this baby is okay on its own. Healthy, releasable bunnies should be sitting up, making it easy for you to compare their size to a golf ball or egg. If you are not **holding** the bunny, this comparison won't work.

Signs that bunny is NOT old enough or large enough to be on its own:

- Is bunny BLACK in color or dark grey?
- Is bunny screaming?
- Can bunnies be flipped over and so you can SEE through the abdomen's skin? Look for a 'milk line' where you can see the milk inside the baby's belly.
- Are the bunnies lying down with feet out behind them, not tucked under? Bunny should 'ball' up easily, especially when picked up.

Step 2. Find the den site.

The ONLY way to reunite baby bunnies with Mom is to get the bunnies back in the ORIGINAL den. You CANNOT move the den to a more 'suitable' area. Mother rabbits have been known to not return to babies when the den is moved even 2 inches from the original location! Yes, we know that Mom sometimes picks really awful places to put her kids.

Examples of Some of the Places a You Might Find a Cottontail Nest:

- Shallow depression in the middle of a yard
- Patch of grass or even plain dirt
- Potted plants
- Flower boxes
- Parking lots that have been broken up by grass growth – in tiny patch of grass
- Doghouses with dirt bottoms
- Under a piece of wood (long forgotten in the yard) or door, piece of siding, etc.
- Pile of leaves or grass clippings
- Manure piles
- Basically anywhere that Mom could have squatted for ten seconds to have her kids!

Regardless of where the den site is, PLEASE put the bunnies back in the den. It's okay if the nesting material is now all over the yard. Place as much of the den materials (leaves, grass, some of Mom's chest hair) back in the nest over the top of the babies. If you have pets that are trying to get into the nest, you can partially cover the hole with a laundry basket, wheelbarrow upside down, or even a lawnmower rolled over the hole. Mom can still slink under there, and the dogs should leave it alone. If you have dogs that will not stay away from the den site no matter what you do, please walk them on a leash for a couple weeks. It's only a matter of two to three weeks before the bunnies will be gone!

**Note: It is OKAY that you have touched these rabbits with your bare hands. Mom does NOT care. We don't abandon our kids when they smell funny, and neither do Momma Rabbits!*

Step 3. Determine whether or not these babies truly are orphaned.

- It's always possible that Mom fell prey to a predator or car and is truly not coming back to feed her babies. The simplest way to check to see if babies have been fed lately is to check for dehydration. Pinch the baby's neck skin to see how quickly it springs back into place. Bunnies dehydrate quickly, so if it springs back or you can't tell, chances are that baby is fine. You can also take a piece of napkin, paper towel, or a cotton ball with some warm water and run the cloth over the baby's genitals. If the urine is clear or yellow, baby is fine. If the urine is dark brown, baby needs help.
- You can use two pieces of string, yarn, sticks, or thread of some sort to make an "X" over the top of the baby's den. If the X is disturbed, Mom came back when you were not watching. Mother Cottontails feed babies for as little as FIVE minutes per day. Mom lies on the top of the hole, placing her abdomen right above the babies. The babies lay on their backs, open their mouths and nurse upside down. This process can take as little as two minutes! Mom will nurse at dawn and at dusk, twice per day.
- If you can see through the baby's belly (on very small baby bunnies), look for a milk line. In very young rabbits, the skin on their belly will be translucent and you will be able to see the pink belly skin turn to white toward the bottom of the abdomen. This is actual milk inside the baby's belly. If you can see this, Mom has been by to feed the babies very recently and will surely return again to feed them that night.

If Mom does not return, or you are not sure if she has, please call the Wildlife Rehab Center at 616-361-6109 for further instructions.