

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Taking Care Around Young Wildlife

The young birds sat on the ground seeming quite helpless, as if waiting for someone to take them home and nurse them to health. However, they weren't helpless. They were merely taking their first trips out of the nest.

Young wildlife may be cute — and it may be tempting to bring a fawn, cub, or chick home — but tiny animals are not pets. Human encounters with young animals often increase in the spring, when many wildlife species bear young, but touching or feeding them can hurt wildlife and jeopardize human health.

It's illegal to keep native wildlife as a pet in North Carolina, and for good reason. From the animal's point of view, capturing and handling a young animal can stress it, sometimes fatally. Young animals that look abandoned often are not. Many species do not stay with their young constantly and only return to feed them. The parent may return and become aggressive in an attempt to defend its young. And, as a young animal grows, it, too, can become aggressive. Feeding animals can cause the animal to lose its natural fear of humans and seek more human food.

On the human side, animals habituated to humans and human food can become aggressive or cause property damage in its search for more human food. Additionally, wildlife can transmit diseases, including rabies and roundworm, to humans.

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