

Deer 101

These pages are meant to be supplemental information to help with deer inquiries.

Please refer to PWC's Deer and Fawn Policy for specific information on abandoned fawns and on handling deer and fawn calls.

Fawns wean at about 3-4 months of age, and their spots begin to disappear. They may have spots until they are about 5-6 months old

Most fawns are born in May, April and June births are less common

Fawns less than 10 weeks old need mother's milk, after 10 weeks of age they may be OK grazing by themselves

Advice for rescuers (Transporters):

Fawns can be quite difficult to capture. They often try to go under things and may even try to go through things, often hurting themselves in the process. Cornering the fawn, using a large cargo net, ideally with fine mesh and a deep pocket, and large crate may be the best option. It is best to capture a fawn late in the day or when it is cool out, so as not to overheat the animal or the rescuer. You can wait until the fawn is weak, but that may impact their ability to recover.

Severely injured deer (nonrecoverable injuries):

Fish and Wildlife does not have the manpower to capture or dispatch (euthanize) every reported deer. Highway patrol may be contacted if the deer is posing a danger on a highway. Local law enforcement may also be contacted for deer in municipal or county areas. Jurisdiction changes, but often the most readily available agency will handle the call.

Unfortunately at times it may be necessary to tell the caller that nature will take its course, as an injured, ill, or impossible to capture deer will become part of the food chain (refer to PWC Deer Policy). The stress of being chased in an attempt to euthanize may actually be worse than leaving the deer alone.

Commonly (or Previously) Asked Questions:

I saw a fawn that has been 'abandoned' by its mother. Should I bring it in to PWC?

No. During fawn season many young deer are taken from their mothers by well meaning people. Mother deer often leave their fawns alone for many hours as they browse for food. Newborn fawns do not have a scent, and the mother will not approach the fawn if they believe danger is near, such as humans or predators, fearing they will place the fawn in danger. If you see a fawn 'nested', leave it alone. If you see a fawn up and wandering around, check again after several hours, and see if the mother has returned. Remember, a mother deer will never 'abandon' her fawn. The only time she will not return is if she can't, if she is dead or someone is around the fawn. If you know the mother deer is dead or seriously injured (ie, the caller saw the animal struck by a car) we may have to rescue the fawn. PWC may attempt capture only of young spotted fawns.

There is a deer with a badly injured leg in my neighborhood. Can a three-legged deer survive?

They can. Their likelihood of survival is better if it is a front leg missing, since the back legs are used for bounding away.

I just saw a young fawn. I think its leg(s) may be injured, since it was unable to walk. What should I do?

Although it is possible the fawn is injured, it is more likely that the fawn is a newborn and its hooves are still soft. Fawns are born with soft hooves (for which their mother is grateful), which firm up after birth. Until their hooves harden the fawns are unsteady on their feet. Unless you observe an obvious injury (ie, a bloody wound or a bone sticking out), check back on the fawn later. It is likely it will have moved or will be walking.

I saw a sick deer in our neighborhood. I heard you could feed it antibiotics on apples or bread to help it recover. Can PWC do this?

Feeding antibiotics to wild deer is not effective, since PWC is unable to properly assess the condition, determine the appropriate medication and dosage, and to monitor the healing of an animal in the wild.

I saw a deer with a large bulge on its neck, what is wrong and how can we help?

We don't know for sure without examining the deer, but it is not uncommon for deer to get abscesses around their face/neck/shoulders which can become quite large before breaking open & draining. They look pretty bad, but deer are resilient and usually heal on their own.

I have deer that wander through my property, and sometimes I see young orphaned fawns in my neighborhood. They are too old to capture, but I would like to help them survive. What type of feed can I put out for them?

First a disclaimer- California Department of Fish and Wildlife discourages feeding deer. That being said, the deer in our area typically have plenty to eat - their major help comes in the form of a source of reliable clean, fresh water. If the deer look excessively boney, you can gather wild plant material in the area, branches, leaves and twigs, and leave them in a pile somewhere safe from roads and people. In dire emergencies alfalfa cubes soaked in HOT water become chopped alfalfa, and can be left out, but remember, feeding wildlife prevents them from learning to fend for themselves and may lead to greater problem for the animals in the future.

I observed a juvenile deer (no spots) who had been run to exhaustion by coyotes. How can I help it recover?

In the case of a deer run to exhaustion, or if it has dehydration or capture myopathy (aka white muscle disease), you may offer water, and shade. Then leave the deer alone, and allow it to rest. All humans must leave the deer's sight, and not attempt to approach it again, as this can startle the recovering animal.

I found a fawn in my fenced yard, but the mother is not here. What should I do?

Make sure the doe can get into the area to reunite with her fawn. If this is not possible, find the hole in the fence through which the fawn entered, put the fawn outside of it and close the hole. The mother will return for the fawn soon. If no humans are around when she returns, the doe will likely reclaim her fawn despite the human scent.

There are lots of deer in my area and they eat my plants. How can I stop this from happening?

"Fence or share" is the general rule when coexisting with deer. Deer fencing should be 8 feet high if possible and made of high-tensile wire, mesh fencing, or electric wiring (does not initially have to be electrified); placement may be angled out to prevent the animal from jumping over. A wide electric ribbon is one option, with stand-offs to the outside; one that is yellow/black since it has higher visibility, & put it up fairly high, but not so the deer can hop between it & the regular fence.

If fencing the entire area is too expensive, fencing individual plants is effective. Black Dacron bird netting, purchased from a plant nursery, is effective when placed over planting beds or individual plants. The nets let new growth through, so they must be lifted and reset every few days to maintain protection. Netting can also be used as an extension above a fence that is too low. If you have no fences, you can try a motion sensor operated sound or water device where the deer go through. Deer typically have a routine route they travel, and this can discourage them.

Repellents can be effective through bad taste and others indirectly by sight, smell or sound. The following homemade concoction can be effective if sprayed directly on plants and reapplied weekly. Mix well two eggs, one glass of skim milk, one glass of water, and a spreader- thickener (a wetting agent purchased from plant nurseries). Apply.

Hang indirect repellents, including nylon stockings containing small amounts of human hair, mirrors, strips of tinfoil, or commercial smell repellents. Or hang rags soaked in ammonia on branches; replenish with ammonia regularly to maintain the odor. Deer are adaptable, so it is important to vary the methods, or the animals will learn that the repellents are not harmful and will no longer be deterred by them.

Planting deer-resistant plants can be an alternative, although none is totally guaranteed, especially when drought conditions constrict food sources.

***Many people choose to share their yards with deer and other wildlife and purposely plant vegetation that will support wildlife.**