

## Forget about 'rescuing' wild animals

DOVER, Del. — That cute little raccoon kit you find along the roadside or up a chimney may look awfully cuddly, but think twice before you decide to "rescue it." Wild animals make unreliable, destructive and potentially dangerous pets. For one thing, they may be incubating rabies.

Considering this hazard along, University of Delaware small animal specialist Paul Meckley thinks it's crazy to try to keep raccoons, squirrels, skunks and other wild animals as housepets. He says it's equally unwise to try to raise the exotic animals sold in pet stores.

Besides the very real possibility that some of them may be carrying the deadly rabies virus, it's also a cruel practice. "Few people understand their needs," he explains.

"In many cases, 'rescuing' a wild animal merely means forcing it to endure a lingering, possibly painful death. Left to nature, it might either be cared for by its mother, or be much more quickly dispatched by some predator.

Even apparently healthy animals can be carriers of rabies, says Meckley. For this reason, the Delaware Veterinary Medical Association recently came out in favor of banning the sale of exotic pets in Delaware. Several neighboring states already have such laws.

One monkey incubated the disease for 12 months before showing rabies symptoms. A baby raccoon raised as a family pet in South Carolina last year incubated rabies for nine months before showing signs of illness, including sudden aggressiveness that resulted in bites and scratches of

family members and friends. A total of 25 people required expensive, prolonged treatment because of exposure to that single animal. They're lucky to be alive.

Rabies isn't a threat to be taken lightly. Until a few years ago, there were no recorded survivals from human rabies. Two years ago, an Elkton, Md., woman died after exposure to a rabid bat in spite of prompt efforts to save her life.

The standard treatment for people exposed to a rabid animal is injection of a series of 21 shots into the abdomen with a material that's now produced from duck embryos. The treatment is very painful and can cause a hyperimmune reaction and death. For this reason treatment is always given in the presence of emergency resuscitation equipment.

In the case of light exposure, or when there's no visible rabid reaction in the patient after treatment has begun, the entire series of shots may not be administered.

The virus causing rabies doesn't enter the bloodstream, but travels along nerve fibers. Also known as "hydrophobia," the disease causes paralysis of face and throat muscles of human victims so that they can't swallow.

Because of the danger of rabies—especially in skunks and raccoons—Meckley says it's usually better to let nature take care of its own. Many times the mother is nearby and will return to her baby if she has a chance.

If you know she's dead, find out why she died. This may involve having an autopsy performed at a state Department of Agriculture's Veterinary Diagnostic

Laboratory. The only way to determine whether an animal is carrying rabies is by examining its brain. So if you find one suspected of rabies, drop either it or its head off at any of the state health units.

Besides the disease potential, Meckley says there are other arguments against trying to keep exotic or wild animals as housepets. Some of the exotic ones sold in pet stores are endangered species. Some may also need a specialist to diagnose and treat them, should they become sick.

What's more, most people haven't the foggiest idea of what kind of care and feeding any of these animals need.

Managing director of the Delaware SPCA, Patricia Peterson, agrees.

"Malnutrition is widespread among the exotic and wild animals people try to raise," she says.

"In the wild these creatures how instinctively how to balance their own diet. They don't have a chance to do that when all you're feeding them is what you think they'll eat."

Most people are so inexperienced in caring for wild animals that well over 80 percent of those they try to help die of aspiration pneumonia from forced feeding, reports Meckley. This is a terrible, lingering death. The baby animal doesn't swallow fast enough, or can't swallow, so the food forced into its mouth or beak enters the lungs. By contrast, most deaths in nature are mercifully fast.

A baby raccoon looks so cute and cuddly that it's hard to remember what it will become. A full grown animal weighs 25 to 30

pounds and is extremely hard to control. By then, you've got a problem getting rid of it.

You can't return it to the wild—it doesn't know how to survive. If it does manage, it may become a neighborhood pest until disposed of by some irate homeowner.

"A raccoon can live 10 to 15 years," says the vet. "Are

you willing to undertake responsibility for it that long?"

There are occasional success stories about wild animals that have been taken in as pets. But these cases are rare. The greatest percentage will die as infants or young. The next largest percentage will be given away from someone

else to care for. Chances are, that will be a temporary home, too.

So the next time you find a wild creature that looks injured or abandoned, think twice before you try to adopt it. It may be better off without your intervention. If it's a potential carrier of rabies, you may be better off, too.

## Retail promotion urged to boost meat sales

PAK RIDGE, Ill. — Farm Bureau has called on the nation's food retailers to use in-store promotions featuring red meats and poultry in recognition of plentiful supplies and reduced farm prices.

In a mailgram to major retailers of the nation, Robert B. Delano, president of the American Farm Bureau Federation, asked food retailers to "feature beef, pork and poultry as inflation fighters for consumers."

Delano urged retailers to quickly reflect price changes

at the meat counter "When prices for live animals decline or increase at the farm level."

Noting that production costs for beef, pork and poultry producers far exceed current prices received at the farm or ranch, Delano attributed the cost-price squeeze on producers to more than ample total supplies and "a weakening general economy and increased costs of production caused by double digit inflation."

should reflect the abundant supplies available at this time, Delano urged retailers to initiate a balanced marketing strategy to feature beef, pork and poultry to help alleviate the depressed price situations faced by producers.

The action by retailers to push sales of red meat and poultry would benefit both meat producers and consumers, Delano concluded.

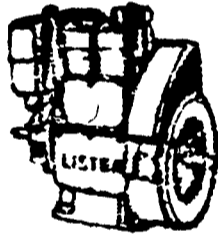


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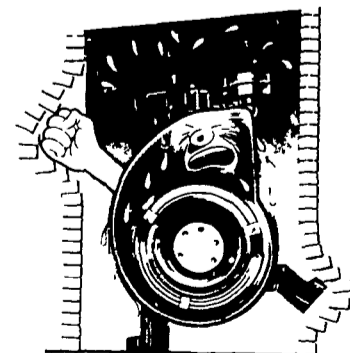


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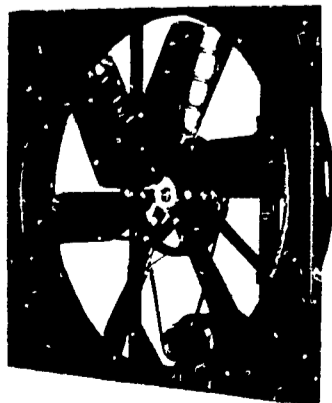
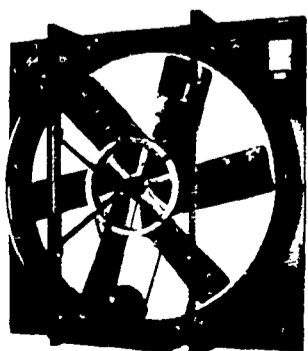
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