

Should you help a wild animal?

NEWARK, Del. — This is the time of year when many people are tempted to "rescue" injured or orphaned wild animals.

Dr. Paul Meckley, small animal specialist at the University of Delaware, says it's important to make sure the animal has really been abandoned before you come to its rescue. In many cases, the mother is simply out foraging for food and will return shortly.

In the case of an injury, Meckley also advises against attempting a rescue.

Rescuing a wild animal often means forcing it to endure a slow, possibly painful death when, left alone, it would either be cared for by its mother or be quickly dispatched by Mother Nature.

Besides being in their own best interest to leave such "foundlings" where you find them, it's also safer for humans to do so.

The American Veterinary Medical Association discourages the keeping of exotic or wild animals as pets. One of the association's main concerns is the threat of disease. Many wild animals such as raccoons and skunks, and exotics like ferrets and monkeys, are carriers of rabies and other diseases.

The potential for rabies isn't to

be taken lightly when you're handling a foundling from the woods. Meckley warns that even apparently healthy animals can be carriers of the disease.

He cites the case of one monkey that incubated rabies for 12 months before showing symptoms.

A raccoon in South Carolina incubated the disease for nine months before showing symptoms. By that time it had already bitten or scratched 25 people, all of whom had to undergo extensive treatment.

Because of the threat of rabies, the Delaware Veterinary Medical Association recently came out in favor of banning the sale of exotic pets in the state.

Among other concerns is the fact that many of these animals are endangered species. If one of them gets sick, you almost always need a specialist to treat it. And, says Meckley, most people haven't the foggiest idea of what kind of care and treatment such unusual pets require.

Malnutrition is widespread among both adopted wild and exotic animals. Free to forage for food, these animals instinctively know how to balance their diets. They don't have this chance in a cage.

Meckley knows of one case involving a spider monkey whose owners brought their pet to a veterinarian when it became crippled with several broken bones. The problem was due to extreme decalcification; the couple was feeding the monkey nothing but bananas.

So few people have experience in caring for wild animals that well over 80 percent of those rescued die.

A common cause of death is aspiration pneumonia. In this 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 comparison, most deaths in nature are mercifully swift.

Wild animals don't respond well to discipline, which is something else to consider when you're thinking of keeping some furry baby for a pet. You can never be sure one of these animals is fully tame, says Meckley.

In the midst of a disciplinary attempt, they often become vicious, revert to wild behavior and attack their owners. Youngsters are likely to be rough when playing, which is why small children are bitten more frequently than adults.

For all these reasons, Meckley says it's better to let nature take care of its own when you run

across what looks like an injured or abandoned animal in the wild. Only in unusual circumstances should the effort be made to pursue one. In such cases, your local SPCA or Humane Society often has the names of people qualified to care for them.

If you do try to help one that's injured, the most important things is to keep it warm. Sixty-watt light bulbs are an excellent source of heat. A hot water bottle may be used instead, if you take care to see it doesn't touch the animal directly and burn it.

A cold, weak baby should only be fed liquids at first, then be allowed to work its way up to a variety of foods. In the case of dehydration,

warmth and an oral rehydration formula prescribed by a vet are the first steps in treatment. In all cases, animals should be examined by a veterinarian to determine their overall health.

The vet can also give you tips on feeding and care. Some don't charge for the medical care of orphaned wild animals, but don't assume the service will be free.

One last point: tamed animals cannot be returned to the wild. They won't know how to survive. So if you do try to "rescue" one, remember that your main goal in doing so is to help it survive, and then quickly return it to its natural habitat.

Showing workshop scheduled for youth

LANCASTER — An Eastern Regional Fitting and Showing Workshop will be held at Guernsey Sales Pavilion, on June 18 at 9:30 a.m.

The workshop, co-sponsored by the Pennsylvania Guernsey Breeders' Association and the Pennsylvania Holstein Association, is open to any youth who has a dairy project, regardless of breed affiliation.

Featured will be demonstrations by outstanding dairy showmen and fitters on preparing dairy cattle for shows.

Each participant will work with

a calf under trained supervision. The calves for the event will be provided by local breeders.

Among the day's activities will be a pizza party to start at 5 p.m. Families are invited. A fitting and showing contest for the participants will conclude the event.

Participants are asked to bring a lunch; drinks will be provided. Also bring clippers, showhalter, and a change of clothing if possible.

All interested should contact the Guernsey Breeders' Association, 2497 Lincoln Hwy. East, Lancaster. Fee is \$5.

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