

Young wildlife do not need your help; Leave them alone!

DURANGO, Colo. -- This is the time of year when wild animals give birth to their young and Colorado Parks and Wildlife provides this reminder: do not approach, touch or handle young animals. "We know that people are trying to be helpful, but the young animals are best cared for by their own parents," said Renzo DelPiccolo, area wildlife manager in Montrose for Colorado Parks and Wildlife. "The best thing people can do is to leave young wildlife alone."

During spring and early summer, people often see young animals that appear to be alone in the forest, in backyards, on or near trails or along the sides of roads. "The animals have not been abandoned. Young animals are often left alone to allow the mother to feed, to help them avoid predators and to learn how to live in the wild," DelPiccolo explained.

Deer provide a good example of how wildlife adapt behaviors to help them survive. Young fawns have no scent and are born with speckled coats that provide a natural camouflage. These two factors help them avoid being found by predators. When the mother doe senses a predator might be close by it moves away. Many other animals use similar survival techniques.

Elk and moose calves are also left alone by their mothers. If you see one, move away quickly. Do not move closer or attempt to get the animal to move.

Young birds often fall out of their nests or are pushed out of nests by parents to encourage them to fly. "If a young bird is on the ground it will quickly learn to fly. So let nature take its course," DelPiccolo said.

If you see a bird on a hiking trail and you think it might be stepped on accidentally or easily found by a dog, you can pick it up and move it a short distance to cover. People also need to keep their pets under control. In the woods, dogs acting on their natural instincts can find animals and attack them. The stress of being attacked often is fatal for young animals.

In neighborhoods and backyards cats are adept at finding eggs and young birds. Cats are pets; but they're also predators. Cat owners should place a small bell on the cat's collar and the sound will alert small animals. "Many studies show that

cats are damaging the songbird population. Please, don't let your cat roam free," DelPiccolo said.

Food should never be given to wildlife. There is plenty of natural food available for wild animals. Providing food causes animals to bunch up in small areas and that makes them vulnerable to diseases and predators. If they're provided food they also become habituated to humans and will stay in residential areas instead of natural lands.

People also need to understand that not all newborn animals will survive. "In the case of all wildlife, we have to understand that mortality is part of the natural cycle," DelPiccolo said.

If you see a young animal, admire its beauty from a distance, and then move on quietly. CPW also encourages parents to explain to their children not to disturb wildlife.

If you have any questions, call the nearest Colorado Parks and Wildlife office.

For more information about Colorado Parks and Wildlife, see: cpw.state.co.us.