

Look but don't touch baby wildlife

'People think they're rescuing the animals but really they're kidnapping them'

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There's no doubt baby animals - wild or domestic - are adorable. People have to realize, however, that the best thing they can do for wild animals is to leave them alone, advises the Guelph Humane Society.

Often people come across a litter of baby wild animals and think they're abandoned, said humane society executive director Elizabeth Bonkink. They take the animals into their home or bring them to the humane society.

"People think they're rescuing the animals but really they're kidnapping them," she said.

It's not uncommon for the humane society to have baby wildlife in the spring, said Bonkink. Guelph is one of the few humane societies to be licensed to do some wildlife rehabilitation, she said.

They're licensed by the Ministry of Natural Resources to rehabilitate small mammals.

While the humane society cares about the well-being of all animals, she said, their focus is cats and dogs, and they have their hands full.



Humane Wildlife Control service technician Matt Miller holds a live bat that was removed from a home.



Field operations manager Corey Lewis tries to capture a rogue raccoon. Wild animals are cute but big trouble, as they can destroy property and buildings and cause major damage and safety and fire hazards.

They currently have five baby squirrels being cared for by kennel supervisor Shelley McCrae.

Bonkink wants the public to be cautious around wildlife and remember that even though a group of babies may look abandoned, the parents are likely nearby and hiding until the humans leave. She urged people to leave baby animals alone and not touch them or bring them indoors.

Once baby wildlife have a human imprint they won't survive in the wild. Unfortunately, wild animals that are brought to the humane society must be euthanized if an appropriate home can't be found for them. Organizations that care for tame wildlife are becoming more rare, she added. "Many homeowners think that feeding the local wildlife is a nice way to help squirrels, skunks, deer or raccoons," she said. "But these animals should be viewed from a distance and not encouraged to back-yard feed. They are well-adapted to living in urban areas, and feeding them, or allowing easy access to food sources such as garbage, only encourages them to cause damage and possibly a conflict with people," she stresses. Bonkink said some south end neighbourhoods are having trouble with skunks and deer. Because houses are springing up around green spaces and there are no natural predators, the animals thrive.

The key is making your yard undesirable for wildlife, she said. If they're removed and nothing else is done, another animal will just take over their territory.

The humane society recommends homeowners consider using a company called Humane Wildlife Control, because they humanely relocate animals. The company ensures humane relocation of the animals, keeping families together and finding them a safe habitat in the area, Bonkink said. For information on the issues caused by specific wildlife and resources to deter them, visit www.humanewildlifecontrol.com.

Tips to Keep You and Wildlife Safe

? Remove or seal potential food sources. Put garbage out in the morning rather than the night before, in sealed containers.

? Animal-proof your home. Ensure shingles, soffit, chimneys and other potential entry points such as fans, dryer vents or crawl spaces are sealed well. Animals seek out warm, dry shelter and will cause significant damage if they take up residence in your home. Bonkink said it's crucial to make sure all wildlife has been removed from the home before repairs are done. If a roof is patched up while raccoon babies are inside, for example, the mother will cause damage again getting back to her offspring.

? Remove natural food sources. Raccoons and skunks are fond of grubs and are likely to be found on your property if you have a grub infestation. Standing water, building materials, toys and other household materials can also attract insects.

? Don't trap or kill animals. In Ontario, unlicensed trapping is illegal. Contact with wildlife is also discouraged because they can carry diseases such as rabies and be infected with parasites. Mothers can become extremely aggressive if they feel their young are threatened.

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