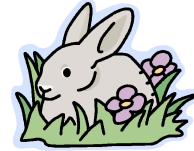


I Found a Baby Rabbit....What Do I Do?



Step 1: Is the rabbit bleeding, very cold, limping, a victim of an animal attack, or unconscious? If so, call the center immediately for instructions.

Step 2: If the answers to the above questions are NO:

- A. Search for the nest or den. If the nest is intact, replace the baby.
- B. If it has been disturbed, you can still put the baby back and cover it up with dry grass. Place two sticks in the shape of an "X" over the nest. Leave the area. Mother rabbits only come to the nest at dawn and dusk. Check the nest in 12 hours. If the sticks have been moved, leave the baby alone, the mother has come back. If not, call the Center for instructions.

Step 3: If you find rabbits that have their eyes open, are hopping around, munching on grass and are 4-5 inches long. **LEAVE THEM ALONE**, they are already weaned and **DO NOT NEED HELP**.

Nesting Rabbits

The Eastern Cottontail Rabbit is one of the most common and popular small-game animals in Pennsylvania. They're also the animal that wildlife centers and rehabilitators get the most calls concerning. Unlike the conventional mental image of a rabbit, cottontails don't live in burrows.

They prefer open fields bordered by trees or brush, which makes our backyards a perfect environment. Cottontails sleep in shallow depressions in the ground, called 'forms', and even give birth to their young in the open. Many people don't realize that our local rabbits live above ground, and are surprised when they overturn a nest. Baby rabbits are often found by people mowing their lawns or doing yard work.

A pregnant doe (female rabbit) digs a hole about four inches deep and eight inches long near a tree, rock or wall that suits her. She lines the hole with grass and tufts of fur pulled from her own body. Cottontail gestation is about a month long, and they may give birth to as many as nine or as few as two babies at a time. Rabbits are born without hair, with their ears and eyes closed.

Once born, the mother covers the babies with dried grass and leaves. She only returns to nurse them for a few minutes in the evening. This doesn't mean that rabbits make bad mothers; by avoiding the nest, they keep predators from finding and eating their defenseless babies. Their eyes and ears open after a few days, but they instinctively remain motionless in the nest. After about ten days, they begin to nibble on the grass around the nest. By three to four weeks old, they are weaned and on their own. The mother will no longer return to the nest. As soon as she's given birth to one litter, she immediately mates again, and may be about to have another batch of babies even as the first group is weaned.

These month-old rabbits are only about six-inches long. Many people mistake them for babies and bring them to rehab centers, or search for a mother. A matured rabbit will be almost entirely brown, with only a little bit of white patch in the center of its forehead. Its ears should stand well away from its body, and its eyes will be wide open. **If it looks like a tiny adult, it's old enough to be on its own.**

The best course of action with a rabbit nest is to leave it be. If you accidentally uncover one with a rake or a lawnmower, check to make sure that the babies aren't injured. If they're fine, cover it back up and set two twigs in an 'x' above the nest to mark it. If the 'x' has been taken apart the next day, it means that the mother is still visiting the nest. Avoid that area of your yard for a few weeks to give the babies time to leave.

If the 'x' is still in place the next day, check the babies for body temperature. Don't worry, touching a baby rabbit won't make the mother reject it. If the babies are warm and moving, then they're still being cared for. If they're cold and limp, call your local wildlife center immediately. You can bring the babies inside and place them in a small, dark box with holes in the lid. Set half of the box on top of a heating pad set on 'low' to warm the babies up. Don't handle or touch them more than necessary, as they panic and stress very easily. The best course of action for injured or orphaned bunnies is to take them to a wildlife center as soon as possible.