

# RACCOONS

Baby mammals often appear to be orphaned when in fact they are not. Many species of mammals will leave their babies safely hidden while they are out searching for food. If you suspect a baby raccoon is orphaned, patiently and unobtrusively observe the animal in an effort to determine if help is truly needed.

A baby animal's best chance of survival is to be raised by its natural parents. **It is imperative that you make every effort to reunite the parents with their children before you consider removing the orphan from the wild.**

Raccoons are excellent mothers and take good care of their young. If you have disturbed a den or frightened an adult raccoon, you may see the adult run away from the den or her baby. **DON'T PANIC!** There is a very good chance that the mother will return at night and continue to care for her young. Even if a baby has strayed from the den, the mother can pick it up by the scruff of the neck and return it to the den.

If the raccoon you have found is with others of the same size or is smaller than an adult cat, it is probably a juvenile/young adult.

## **Determining If a Raccoon Needs Help**

To determine whether a young raccoon needs help, answer the following questions:

- 1) Does the animal appear coordinated and able to climb well?
- 2) Is the animal avoiding people, or trying to get away when approached?
- 3) Is the animal quiet?

If the answer to any of these questions is "**NO**," you should contact **Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center** at **(303) 823-8455**.

If your answer is "**YES**" to all of these questions, the raccoon is likely old enough to be away from its mother. If the raccoon shows any signs of weakness or begins to approach people, you should contact Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center. **DO NOT feed the raccoon.** If it is healthy, it will be able to find food on its own. Habituating raccoons to human food leads to conflicts which may result in the raccoon being euthanized.

## **Determining the Health of a Baby Raccoon**

A baby raccoon showing any of the following symptoms is NOT healthy and therefore needs help:

- 1) Obvious signs of illness or injury, such as visible wounds, a bloody nose, injured limbs, twitching/shaking, or discharge from the animal's eyes, nose, or mouth.
- 2) Known contact with a cat or dog, even if no injuries or puncture wounds are visible.
- 3) Bugs or fleas crawling on the baby, or fly larvae clinging to its fur (These look like little grains of white rice.).

If the raccoon shows any of these symptoms or you think it may be otherwise sick or injured, you should seek help right away from a licensed wildlife rehabilitator. Call **Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center** at **(303) 823-8455**. Injuries must be properly treated by a wildlife rehabilitator, and a baby that has been out of its mother's care long enough to have bugs crawling on it is likely orphaned.

If the baby shows NO symptoms of illness or injury, it may be possible to reunite the baby with its mother.

## **How to Reunite a Baby Raccoon with Its Mother**

It is very important to give mother raccoons every opportunity to find and continue to care for their babies. If the raccoon seems healthy, it should be left out for the remainder of the day and one full night (when raccoons are most active) for the mother to claim. It is possible that she is still around but has become temporarily separated from her baby.

### **Step 1: Contain the baby in a box with clean linens on the bottom**

Using a medium-sized cardboard book box, cut air holes in the top third of the box. Then, cut a large circle out of one of the sides in order to create an entrance, but leave some cardboard attached to make a flap, allowing the mother to reach in and get her babies. Make sure the hole is large enough for an adult raccoon. If the baby is eight-inches long or smaller and seems passive, you can contain the animal by wearing thick gardening-type gloves, covering up the entire baby with a spare linen or t-shirt, then using the linen to scoop it up into the box, leaving the linen in with the baby. Tap the top of the box closed. The mother can get to her babies through the large, circular hole. Make sure to cover the babies with spare linens so that they are not exposed to the temperatures and weather. Do not put the box directly in contact with the ground. Use a piece of cardboard, blankets, or leaves under the box to act as insulation. You could also place a laundry basket upside down over the baby (this is more appropriate for bigger babies that may bite), leaving a rock on top of the basket to keep the baby from leaving the area. Make sure the rock isn't too heavy for the mother raccoon to push aside to retrieve her baby. **Do not use towels as bedding.** Raccoon's sharp nails can get stuck in the loops of a towel, which can cause injury. Also, be careful not to use linens with holes or large-weave blankets, as these can also cause injury to the animal.

## **Step 2: Give the baby a source of heat**

Babies can die from getting too cold (hypothermia). Additionally, mother raccoons typically will not retrieve cold babies. The best thing to use is a heating pad set on LOW under half of the box, because it provides a nice consistent source of heat. You may have to run an extension cord to the area. If you don't have a heating pad, you can use chemical hand warmers such as Hot Paws, a rice sock, or a plastic water bottle filled with hot tap water. The hot water bottle will need to be replaced frequently as it cools. **Tuck the heat source under the linens** in the box with the raccoons, rather than placing it directly next to the babies. You should only use heat sources inside the box if the baby raccoons are very young, as older babies can bite. No matter what the babies' age, avoid handling them directly to minimize risk of disease transfer.

## **Step 3: Leave the container in the area where the baby was found**

If you have seen the mother, place the box along her route where you think she would encounter it. Otherwise, put the box as close as possible to where the baby was found, as the mother will be most likely to look for it nearby. If using a box without a lid, place a flat piece of cardboard over half the box to give the baby some shelter from sunlight, light rain or snow.

***What if it rains or snows?*** In heavier rain or snow, try placing a plastic bin on its side and tucking the box inside for shelter. In the case of stormy weather, keep the baby in the box and bring it inside until the weather clears; mom won't be looking for it in the middle of a storm. As soon as the weather clears, put the baby back out where it was found.

***What if it's in a busy area?*** If the baby was found in a high-traffic area, put a sign on the box letting people know that the baby is being left out for its mother and request that it be left alone. Indicate when you will be returning to collect the baby if it is not found by its mother. **You can download and print a ready-made "Waiting for Mom!" sign from the previous web page titled "I Found A Mammal, Now What?"**

## **Step 4: Check to see if the mother has retrieved the baby**

Baby raccoons should be left out for one full night, from dusk until dawn, even if found during the day. Mother raccoons are most likely to retrieve their babies when it's dark, and there are fewer people around. Stay far away from the box so that you do not scare the mother. Either monitor from a distance or return to check the box periodically. Hopefully, the mother raccoon will return and take her baby back to the den.

If the baby has been out for a full night and the mother has not retrieved it, contact **Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center** at **(303) 823-8455**. Keep the baby in a securely closed container with air holes and continue to offer a heat source.

## **NO FOOD OR WATER!**

**People often think that feeding an orphaned baby will make it feel better, but doing so can actually endanger its life. Here are the reasons why:**

- 1) If the animal is dehydrated, emaciated, or suffering from trauma, it won't be able to digest food. If it tries to do so, it could bloat or go into shock.
- 2) Baby animals can easily inhale food or liquid into their lungs by accident, a situation which can quickly lead to pneumonia and possible death. This is particularly common with baby birds – you should **NEVER drop liquid into gaping bird's mouth or into the mouths of baby mammals who are at a suckling stage**. Even a small amount of liquid in the lungs can lead to infection.
- 3) Foods that are not a normal part of the animal's diet, like bread and cow's milk, can cause serious digestive problems.



### The Truth about Trapping

Contrary to popular belief, live-trapping a wild animal and relocating it elsewhere is not a good way to solve problems with wildlife. While it may seem like a humane option, it usually ends up being a slow death sentence for the animal. It also leaves your property vulnerable to ongoing wildlife conflicts, and here is why:

- 1) Wild animals removed from their home territory have trouble adapting and often can't survive in their new surroundings.
- 2) Babies are usually left behind and will die without their parent's care.
- 3) It doesn't work moving one animal out because it just opens up space for another one to move in.

Baby raccoons left behind after a mother has been relocated are definitely orphaned and in need help. Contrary to popular belief, babies will not be adopted by another wild raccoon or learn to fend for themselves if left alone. Call **Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center at (303) 823-8455**.

Before taking action, consider whether you are certain the baby you found definitely belongs to the adult that has been removed. More than one adult raccoon can live in a small area, so unless the relocated raccoon was removed directly from the den site, you should try to temporarily leave the baby out for its mother before intervening further. To do this for a baby found **INSIDE** a den, follow these steps:

- 1) Leave the den alone and watch from a distance for several hours.
- 2) If possible, temporarily stop any activities going on near the den site that might scare the mother.
- 3) In addition to watching for the mother, there is a simple test you can conduct to find out if the mother returns for her baby overnight. If the den is inside a hole or the hollow of a tree, lightly tape a single sheet of newspaper over the entrance to the den. This will serve as a visual test to see if the mother returns. You will know if she has returned if the paper is torn. If the den is not in a hole, you can leave a light dusting of flour in the

area surrounding the den to check for fresh tracks indicating that the mother has returned. Check the following morning to see if the paper has been disturbed or if there are raccoon tracks leading to the den. If so, the mother has likely returned to the den overnight and is caring for her young.

If the baby is found **OUTSIDE** a den, follow the “**How to Reunite a Baby Raccoon with Its Mother**” instructions above.

### ***What about raccoons that I’ve seen out during the day?***

It is a common misconception that raccoons seen outside during the day are sick or have rabies. Although they are primarily nocturnal, even healthy raccoons will sometimes come out during the day to forage, if they feel it is safe to do so or if they are unable to return to their den. Baby raccoons are also commonly seen outside during the day.

It is never normal behavior for an adult raccoon to exhibit symptoms like loss of balance, difficulty walking, or lethargy. Goopy eyes and nose, and/or seizures are signs the animal is sick and needs medical attention from a licensed wildlife rehabilitator. Call Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center at (303) 823-8455 for instructions. Do not attempt to capture this animal yourself. You can also call Colorado Parks and Wildlife or Animal Control.

### ***I have a raccoon living under my deck, what do I do?***

Any raccoon inhabiting a den during the spring and summer should be assumed to be part of a family, even if only one raccoon is seen. You have three options:

**Option 1:** Do nothing at all. Often, this is the best course of action. Raccoons typically inhabit den sites for short periods. They seek dens in the spring and summer, when they rear their young, and in the winter during cold spells. Raccoon babies are independent by the end of the summer, when they leave the den and disperse from their family groups. Raccoons do not present a threat to people, and if minor inconveniences of their presence can be tolerated, it is easiest to simply wait until they leave naturally. Then, close off the area to prevent future use of the den site.

**Option 2:** Use humane harassment to encourage the raccoons to leave the den. This sight-sound-smell harassment is detailed below and should be placed at the opening to the den. If the raccoons are living in a chimney, you can put the items at the mouth of the chimney or at the base inside the fireplace, if the flue can be partially opened without the raccoons falling into the fireplace.

This method is best used in October and November after most babies are weaned and before the weather gets too cold. Unless it is necessary, **AVOID USING THIS OR ANY OTHER EXCLUSION METHOD FROM APRIL TO SEPTEMBER WHEN YOUNG BABIES MAY BE INSIDE THE DEN.** Although most mothers will move their young babies to a new den

site when frightened, it is always possible that an evicted mother might abandon or become separated from her babies.

Place the following items near the den opening:

- 1) **A bright light.** A motion activated light is ideal, but any powerful light will do. If the light is used near a structure, you may wish to enclose it in a wire cage so that it doesn't come in contact with flammable material.
- 2) **A radio.** Tune the radio to an all-talk station. The sound of human voices is threatening to raccoons. The radio should be as loud as possible, but does not have to be so loud that it keeps you or neighbors awake.
- 3) **Urine soaked rags/urine soaked cat litter or ammonia rags.** Wild animals often use urine to mark their territories. Raccoons are threatened by the smell of another animal's urine outside their den. Place rags or cat litter soaked in urine near the entrance to the den and replenish daily. Alternatively, you may use a rag soaked in ammonia. The rags should be placed in a plastic bag punched with small holes to allow the smell to escape. This barrier not only helps to keep the rags from drying out, but also limits the animal's direct exposure to ammonia, which can be toxic.

This sensory harassment should be used at night when raccoons are most active. Continue them for **three consecutive nights** from dusk to dawn. Sometime during this period the raccoon will probably relocate itself and its family to a new home. **After three days** remove the harassment and check to make sure the raccoons are no longer using the den by taping a piece of newspaper over the entrance hole. Check the newspaper entrance daily for **three days in a row**. If it is undisturbed for that period of time, and there are no sounds coming from inside the den, it is safe to close the hole without worry of trapping animals inside.

**Option 3:** Hire a humane wildlife removal company to remove the raccoon family from the space, and then seal the hole so the animals cannot get back in. Trapping and relocating animals is not the best option. Please refer to "**The Truth about Trapping**" above.



### What to Do If You Get Bit

If any person is bitten or scratched, you should follow these steps:

- 1) Clean the wound with soap and water.
- 2) Consult with a doctor, even if the cut appears to be minor. If the injury was caused by a raccoon, skunk, fox, coyote or bat, or any domestic rabies vector species, you should not wait for a doctor's appointment but instead see an emergency room physician.
- 3) If the animal is a raccoon, skunk, fox, coyote, or bat, you should also report the incident to your local health department.
- 4) If at any time you feel that the situation is unsafe or that you might be injured, call Colorado Parks and Wildlife or Animal Control.