

# RESCUE, REUNITE, AND TRANSPORT OF A BABY SQUIRREL

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

- 1) Obvious signs of illness or injury like visible wounds, a bloody nose, injured limbs, twitching/shaking, or discharge from its 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 squirrel shows any of these symptoms or you think it may be otherwise sick or injured, you should seek help right away. 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. Call **Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center** at **(303) 823-8455**.

Please be careful when handling wildlife. **Use thick, gardening-type gloves and cover the animal with a sheet.** Keep in mind that if you are injured, you cannot help the animal. When in doubt, do not attempt a capture.

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 Squirrel with Its Mother**

It is very important to give mother squirrels every opportunity to find and continue to care for their baby. If the squirrel seems healthy, it should be left out for at least **one full day** during daylight hours for the mother to claim it. It is possible that she is still around but has become temporarily separated from her baby. Mother squirrels will retrieve their babies one at a time and take them to the original or an alternate nest provided they can find their young.



**IMPORTANT:** Do not leave baby squirrels outside overnight – the mother will not be out looking for her baby after dark, and the baby will be vulnerable to predators.

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

The box should be just deep enough so that the baby cannot crawl out. Line the box with a clean sheet or t-shirt. Make sure the sheet or t-shirt does not have holes or fringe to prevent injury to the baby. Make sure to wear thick gloves when picking up the baby to avoid getting bitten. Cover the baby with a t-shirt when picking it up. Keeping the animal covered minimizes the stress of being handled and offers you some protection.

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

Even on warm days, babies can quickly become hypothermic. Babies can die from hypothermia, and mother squirrels 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 bottle filled with hot tap water. The hot water will need to be replaced frequently as it cools. Tuck these under the linens in the box with the baby squirrel. **DO NOT place an uncovered heat source directly in contact with the baby.** Always cover the heat source with a t-shirt or linen.

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

If you have seen the mother, place the box along the route where you think she will 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 there is no shade over the box, place a flat piece of cardboard over half of the box to give the baby shelter. This technique can also be used if it is raining or snowing lightly.

***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 Squirrel, Now What?"**

***What if it's late afternoon?*** If the baby was found late in the day, leave it out for the rest of the day, then move it inside overnight in the container with the heat source. **DO NOT feed the baby or give it water.** Put it outside again the following morning to give the mother a full day to return for her baby.

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

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 squirrel will return and take her baby back to the nest.

Squirrels are excellent mothers and take good care of their young. If you have disturbed a nest and frightened a mother squirrel, you might see the squirrel run away from the nest or her baby. **DON'T PANIC!** There is a very good chance that she will return and continue to care for her young. Even if the baby has fallen from the nest, its mother can pick it up by the scruff of its neck and take it back to the nest.

Leave the nest alone and watch from a distance for several hours. If possible, temporarily stop any activities going on near the nest site that might scare the mother.

If you see the mother returns to the nest, that's great! The mother squirrel will continue to care for her babies, and they do not need further assistance.

If, by the following day, you do **NOT** see the mother return, the baby is likely orphaned and in need of help.

### **The baby is orphaned. Now what?**

If an attempt to reunite the baby squirrel with its mother for one full day is unsuccessful, it is time to **call Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center at (303) 823-8455**. The baby will need attention from a wildlife rehabilitator.

### **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 a 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.

Do not leave food or water in the box with the animal. Because the animal has not been medically examined, it is impossible to know the extent of its injuries. Feeding it or forcing it to drink water at this point could cause death. If the animal gets wet, it could become cold (hypothermic).

As with humans, hospitalized animals need to be very gradually rehydrated and fed using special formulas and techniques. Greenwood Wildlife begins this process as soon as the animal enters our Intensive Care Unit.

## Safe Capture and Transportation of a Baby/Juvenile Squirrel

- 1) Make sure the animal is contained in a box with a secure lid.
- 2) Place the covered box on the seat or floor of your car.
- 3) Keep the car warm and quiet. No radio and minimal talking while you travel. Avoid sudden stops and sharp turns.
- 4) Do not let anyone, especially a child, hold the animal on his or her lap during the trip.
- 5) Once the animal arrives at Greenwood Wildlife, it will be given care by a licensed wildlife rehabilitator.

**Step 1:** Get a cardboard box with air holes big enough to comfortably contain the baby. For squirrels who are very active, a small dog crate or wire cage will work. Be aware that a large juvenile or adult squirrel can chew out of a plastic dog crate. The box, cage, or crate should have a secure lid or door. Line the container with a sheet or a couple of t-shirts. Do not use towels because their nails can get caught in the loops. Do not use linens or t-shirts with holes in them as the animal can injure itself.

**Step 2:** If the squirrel is not very fast on its feet, approach the animal and drape a sheet or t-shirt over the animal's entire body, including its head. Wear thick gardening type gloves. Scoop the animal up in the material and place it inside the box, crate, or cage. If the squirrel is too mobile to be handled in this way, then place the box or cage upside down on top of him/her, slide a flat piece of cardboard underneath, and secure the cardboard "floor" to the container with tape.

**Step 3:** Give the baby a heat source. Even on warm days, babies can quickly become hypothermic. The best thing is to use a heating pad on LOW under half of the box, because it provides a nice consistent source of heat. You can also use chemical hand warmers, such as Hot Paws, a rice sock, or a plastic bottle filled with hot tap water. Place inside the box under the sheet or t-shirt.

**Step 4.** Do not give the baby anything to eat or drink.



### 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's 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 squirrels left behind after a mother has been relocated are definitely orphaned and in need of help. Again, contrary to popular belief, babies will not be adopted by another wild squirrel or learn to fend for themselves if left alone.

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 squirrel can live in a small area, so unless the relocated squirrel was removed directly from the nest 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 nest, follow these steps:

- 1) Leave the nest alone and watch from a distance for several hours.
- 2) If possible, temporarily stop any activities going on near the nest site that might scare the mother.
- 3) Keep all children and pets away from the nest.
- 4) If the nest is inside a hole, lightly tape a single sheet of newspaper over the entrance to the nest as a visual test to see if the mother returns. If the paper is torn you will know she has come back.
- 5) If the baby is **OUTSIDE** the nest, follow the reunite instructions.

**If a baby is found clinging to or within several feet of a dead adult squirrel**, that baby is likely orphaned since the baby squirrel only receives care from its mother, not its father. Call Greenwood Wildlife at 303-823-8455.

## **Baby/Juvenile Squirrels Who Are Mobile**

Baby squirrels normally remain safely tucked away in their nests above the ground in trees or buildings until they can climb well enough to explore further. When they are fully furred and more mobile, they begin to explore outside the nest during the day and return to the nest at night. Their mother should be close by during these early expeditions. As young squirrels reach independence, they venture farther and farther from the nest on their own. If the baby can run and climb trees on its own, it is old enough to be out of the nest, at least for short periods. Younger babies that are not this mobile should be in their nest at all times.



**IMPORTANT:** Young baby squirrels that would normally still be in a nest are not as obviously afraid of humans as adult squirrels are. However, when they are ready to venture outside the nest they learn to be wary of people and other predators. It is not normal behavior for a baby squirrel to follow people around, cling to their pant leg, or sit on their shoe. Baby squirrels that are approaching people have likely been away from their mother for some time and are seeking food and warmth. Unless there is a reason to believe the baby is not orphaned, like if the mother was recently seen nearby, a baby squirrel that is following people should be considered orphaned and in need of help.

### **WHAT YOU CAN DO:**

***If the baby is mobile enough to run and climb trees:*** To find out if the baby needs help, answer the following questions:

- 1) Is it able to run quickly, climb well, and escape capture?
- 2) Has the baby been seen only during the day?
- 3) Is it avoiding people? Does it try to get away when people approach it?
- 4) Does it seem active and healthy?

If you answered YES to all of these questions, the squirrel is likely independent and does not need help.

If the answer to any of the questions is NO, the baby should be not be out on its own. If there are no obvious signs of injury (see information above), you should try to reunite it with its mother. See reunite instructions.

***If the baby is NOT mobile enough to run and climb trees:*** The baby is too young to be out of the nest. The baby might be orphaned; however, squirrels are excellent mothers, and it is important to be certain a baby is orphaned before taking it from its mother's care. For example, in this situation it is possible that the mother has temporarily dropped her baby on the ground while carrying it to a new nest, or the baby may have fallen from the nest and its mother has not yet found and retrieved it. Leave the baby alone and observe from a distance to see if the mother comes back.

#### **How can you tell if the baby is orphaned?**

- 1) Has the baby been there for three hours or an entire day?
- 2) Is the baby showing signs of illness or injury (check the list at the beginning of the article)?
- 3) Are there any fleas, bugs, or fly larvae (they look like little white grains of rice) on the baby?

Based on your previous choices, the baby needs help. Contain the baby and transport it to Greenwood Wildlife. If you cannot contain the animal, contact Colorado Parks and Wildlife or Animal Control.



## What To Do If You Get Bit

**IMPORTANT:** As with all wild animals, direct handling of baby/juvenile squirrels should be kept to a minimum. We are predators to wild animals, and any contact with humans is stressful to them, though their stress may not always be obvious. Older babies when stressed may try to bite and scratch you if you handle them directly. Always use thick gardening type gloves and a sheet or t-shirt to secure them. Remember that wild animals of any kind, especially those that are afraid or in pain, do not understand that you are trying to help them. Animals will try and protect themselves if they can. 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.