

Does This Baby Raccoon Need Help?



Situation: You've found one or more baby raccoon(s) with no mother raccoon in sight.

Why This Happens

Unlike some humans, mother raccoons do not have baby sitters or daycare services for their "kids", so busy raccoon mothers must leave their babies unattended for periods of time while they travel around to find food. This often means being gone for hours at a time. In mom raccoon's absence, the youngsters sometimes get in trouble (e.g. fall out of their nest tree) when they explore outside their nest. Another reason the raccoon kits may be alone is their family may have been displaced from their nest, and the mom may have had to go off exploring for a new den site. And even when she does find a new den, she can only carry one baby at a time. Finally, of course, baby raccoons are sometimes truly orphaned when their mother is killed, or live-trapped and relocated.

VERY IMPORTANT: If you are assisting a young raccoon, **it is IMPERATIVE that you protect yourself and others from being bitten or scratched by the raccoon!** While rabies in raccoons is not currently known to be common in Wisconsin, **rabies is a deadly virus and possible exposures to the virus (mammal bites and scratches) MUST be taken very seriously and handled properly.** If you are bitten or scratched by a wild mammal, **IMMEDIATELY wash the wound thoroughly for several minutes with soap and running water.** Then call a doctor for further advice. For more information see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/exposure/index.html>

FAQs and Humane Solutions:

"I found a baby raccoon that is injured [or cold, dehydrated, or sick]. What should I do?"

If the baby raccoon is injured, feels cold to the touch, seems very weak, or it has flies, fly eggs (they look like tiny whitish or yellowish rice grains), maggots or ants on it, it will need the care of a licensed wildlife rehabilitator if it is to have any chance for survival. If you are in Milwaukee County, you are welcome to call us at 414-431-6204. To help you find a licensed wildlife rehabilitator for elsewhere in the state, see the Wisconsin DNR's web site at: <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/wildlifehabitat/directory.html>. Or call the DNR at 1-888-936-7463. **IMPORTANT: Please do not attempt to raise these animals yourself: it is illegal; they may have a disease or parasites that could be transmitted to you, a family member, or your pet; and they deserve the experienced care of a licensed wildlife rehabilitator!**



"I've found a baby raccoon that doesn't seem to be injured or sick, but there is no mom raccoon in sight. What should I do?"

No one can do a better job than a mom animal at raising her own baby, so if the raccoon you found seems to be healthy and warm, then there is a good chance it can be reunited with its family. The mom raccoon usually travels the same route each night when she forages for food. To give her a chance to find her baby, put the baby in a dry cardboard box that the baby can't get out of but the mom can get into to retrieve her baby and then climb back out (see "*How to temporarily house and warm a baby raccoon*" below). Put this box in the location where you found the baby, or as close as you possibly can if the original location is unsafe. You'll be leaving this baby out overnight in the hope that mom will find her lost baby. If it is forecasted to rain, you should cover most of the top of the box so the baby has protection from the rain. Check the following morning to see if mom has come and claimed her baby. If she has, then the box will be empty. If the baby is still there, it is usually safe to assume the baby cannot be reunited with its family and it should be brought to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator.

"A raccoon nested in my home's fireplace chimney. Tonight, the babies have been crying for over an hour. Could that mean they're orphaned?"

Raccoons are nocturnal animals, and since you are hearing the babies cry at night, they are probably crying because their mom has left them to go out foraging for food. Crying that goes on for a few hours, especially if it happens during the day when the mother Raccoon should be "home" with her young, **may** be an indication that something is wrong. But **before concluding that the babies are orphaned and removing them from the nest**, please talk with a licensed wildlife rehabilitator in your area that is experienced with raccoons. For more information on wild animals in your chimney or fireplace please see:

<http://wisconsinhumanesociety.blob.core.windows.net/production//Wildlife/PDFs/AnimalinChimney-FINAL2-22-13.pdf>

"I found a baby raccoon. I touched it. That means the mother will reject it, right?"

Not true. If a mother wild animal rejects one of its young it is usually because the youngster is injured, sick, cold, or has a birth defect.

"My children found a baby raccoon. They brought it home and now they want to raise it. What should I do? Do raccoons make good pets?"

Letting the kids keep or even continue to handle the raccoon is a **REALLY BAD IDEA!** Why? There are several reasons: It is against the law; because the raccoon will ultimately lack the necessary survival skills acquired from its mother, it will not stand much chance of surviving in the wild if it is raised by someone other than a licensed wildlife rehabilitator who has experience raising raccoons; the raccoon can carry diseases and parasites that can cause serious illness or even death to your family members



No one can do a better job than a mom raccoon at raising her own babies



*Baby raccoons are cute, but even one this age is capable of biting a handler if it becomes frightened.
Photo © Lisa Heriges.*

and pets unless handled properly; as it gets older the raccoon will eventually become unmanageable and will be capable of inflicting serious bite wounds; and wild animals have nutritional needs that are different from domestic animals – if improperly fed the raccoon may suffer from nutritional deficiencies, some of which can be crippling.

So the first thing to do is put the baby raccoon in a secure, warm, and quiet location (see photos and instructions below). For their own safety, **don't let the children handle it again**. Have the children wash their hands with soap and water and ask them if anyone was bitten or scratched by the raccoon. If the children say they were bitten or scratched, or if there is evidence of a bite or scratch that may have been caused by the raccoon, see below. If no one was bitten or scratched and the baby raccoon is warm and does not appear to be injured or sick, then it needs to be put back where it came from (or another nearby location where the mother is likely to find it) so its mom can retrieve it and resume care.

To give the mother raccoon a good chance of finding her baby again, place the raccoon in a box or other container that the baby cannot get out of but the mother can get into it to retrieve her baby. See "How to Warm a Baby Raccoon," below. Place it as close as safely possible to where it was found (e.g. at the base of its nest tree). Make sure the baby raccoon is protected from the elements (i.e. rain) and leave it out overnight. Check the box/container in the morning. If the baby raccoon is still there, call a licensed wildlife rehabilitator for help. **Do not try to care for the raccoon yourself**. Check the WI DNR's Directory of Licensed Wisconsin Wildlife Rehabilitators: <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/wildlifehabitat/directory.html> or contact the WI DNR's Call Center at **1-888-936-7463** for help finding the nearest licensed wildlife rehabilitator that is able to care for raccoons.

"What should I do if I (or someone else) is bitten or scratched by a baby raccoon?"

If at all possible, secure the baby raccoon in a container from which it can't escape. If it is one of a litter, keep the raccoon that bit someone **separated from its litter mates**. Keep pets and people away from it and do not handle or let anyone else handle the raccoon. **Immediately and thoroughly wash the bitten or scratched area of the body for a minimum of 5 minutes with warm water and soap**. Then call your physician for advice and possible treatment, and the public health department of the municipality or county in which the bite or scratch occurred to report the bite or scratch. The health department will likely ask you about the circumstances of the bite or scratch and tell you how to proceed. They may decide that the risk of rabies transmission requires that the raccoon be tested for rabies. If a raccoon bite or scratch occurred in the City of Milwaukee, you can reach the City of Milwaukee Health Department by calling 414-286-3521. If you are in Milwaukee County, you are welcome to call us at 414-431-6204 for further information.



Once sexually mature, a "pet" raccoon will likely become unmanageable and can inflict serious bites



How to temporarily house and warm a baby raccoon

Most young wild animals are dependent on body warmth from one or both of their parents as well as the protection of their nest or den to stay warm. A baby that has fallen from its nest or otherwise become separated from its parent(s) may suffer from hypothermia (sub-normal body temperature). Prior to either attempting to return a baby to the care of its mother, or while you are transporting the animal to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator, warming the animal to normal body temperature can mean the difference between life or death for that animal. Note: instead of using a water-bottle or bag, you can use a heating pad set on "low" under half of the box. The reason the heating pad goes under only half of the box is so the baby can climb over to the cooler end of the box if it gets too warm.



Fill a zip-top plastic bag with very warm tap water. The water should not feel so hot that you can't comfortably keep your hand in it indefinitely. Expel as much air as possible from the bag



Cover the water-filled bag with a single layer of ravel-free (no loose strings) cloth.



Place the cloth-covered water bag inside of a cardboard box that has had several pencil-sized air-holes punched through it



Place the baby on the cloth-covered water bag and cover the baby with another ravel-free cloth. Feel the water bag every 20-30 minutes. Replace the water in the bag with warmer water as needed to keep the baby warm.



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*The Wisconsin Humane Society is a charitable organization that depends entirely on donations to fulfill its mission to create a community that values animals and treats them with respect and kindness. Your support for the WHS Wildlife Rehabilitation center makes possible the distribution of information like this to thousands of people who request it each year, and makes possible the humane care of over 5,000 injured, sick, and orphaned wild animals from our community each year. You may **donate** online at www.wihumane.org/donate.aspx or by mailing a check to the following address: WHS Wildlife Center, 4500 W. Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53208*