

RACCOONS

Determining if a Raccoon Need Help After-hours

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 growling at you?

If the answer to any of these questions is “**NO**,” do not approach the raccoon. Leave the animal alone until you can contact Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center at (303) 823-8455. We open at 9 a.m. seven days a week. Remember, raccoons are rabies vector species and carry other diseases. The animal’s best chance for survival and/or rehabilitation comes from minimum human/pet contact.

If the answer to any of these questions is “**YES**,” the raccoon may not need assistance. Do not approach the raccoon. Leave the animal alone. If the raccoon is still around in the morning, and you are still concerned, contact Greenwood Wildlife at (303) 823-8455. We open at 9 a.m. seven days a week.

Reuniting

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.

NEVER use bare hands when handling a baby raccoon. Keep all skin covered. Wear thick gardening gloves and wrap a t-shirt or pillow case around the baby. Maintain a barrier between your skin and the raccoon at all times. If you are bitten or scratched, call your local health department for further instructions.

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.

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
3. Foods that are not a normal part of the animal's diet, like cow's milk or other milk replacers, can cause serious digestive problems.

Transporting

1. Make sure that the box containing the animal is secure on the seat or floor of your car.
2. Keep the car warm and quiet (no radio, minimal talking) while you travel. Avoid sudden stops and sharp turns.

3. NEVER let anyone, especially a child, hold the animal on his or her lap during the trip.

It is very important to think first about what the injured animal needs and the fact that contact with people is stressful for the animal. Once the animal arrives at a rehabilitation center, it will be treated by experienced staff and volunteers who will ensure that it receives the best care possible.

Nuisance raccoons

Contrary to popular belief, live-trapping a wild animal and relocating it elsewhere is not a good way to solve problems with wildlife. In the State of Colorado, you must get permission from Colorado Parks and Wildlife to trap nuisance 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. Call Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center at (303) 823-8455.

I have a raccoon living in my attic, under my deck, in my chimney! 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 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 MARCH TO JUNE 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.

***Sight-Sound-Smell Harassment** – place the following items near the den opening:

- a. **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.
- b. **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.
- c. **Ammonia-soaked 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 near the entrance to the den and replenish daily. Keep in mind that ammonia can be toxic if placed too close to the babies.

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: Contact a humane wildlife removal service. We recommend Jack Murphy with **Urban Wildlife Rescue** at **(303) 340-4911** or **www.urbanwildliferescue.org**.