



Don't Be a KIDNAPPER!

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Every year the lives of many young wild animals are doomed due to well-meaning caretakers who kidnap young wildlife from their parents. This is especially true with fawns. In a mistaken attempt to save them, people are taking fawns from their natural habitats. Although they may have the best interests of the animals at heart, these would-be rescuers are decreasing the fawn's chance for survival and even imposing a death sentence on them.

In most cases, the fawns you find are healthy animals with a parent nearby. It is natural behavior for wild animals to hide their young to protect them from predators. Fawns are born with no scent and white spots that help them blend in with the environment. The natural instinct of the fawn is to drop and hide while the mother allows the predator to chase and follow her away from the fawn. When the predator is gone and she feels it is safe, she returns. In other cases, young animals are curious and stray from protection while the parent is searching for food. When this happens, the parent usually has no trouble locating the wayward youngster and bringing it back to safety.

Taking animals from their natural environment robs them of an opportunity to learn to survive. They are prevented from learning about natural enemies and how to defend against them, how to find shelter and food, and other necessary survival skills. Furthermore, in many instances captive deer are improperly nourished because their natu-

ral food requirements cannot be duplicated in captivity. Commercially prepared foods do not have the balance of nutrition required and although deer may eat some of these foods, they often become sick and die because their system simply was not designed to tolerate this type of nutrition.

It is very difficult to rehabilitate fawns and Mother Nature does it much better than humans do. Even if you could successfully raise a fawn, upon release to the wild those animals generally have little fear of people. Some return to places where people live, only to be attacked by domestic animals, hit by cars, become a nuisance, or injure people. There are many tragic stories of once tame deer striking children and severely injuring them.

All of these problems can be avoided if we follow one simple rule: **LEAVE THEM ALONE!** This is the real act of kindness; resist the temptation to help them. Only when a fawn is found injured or with a dead doe is there reason to do something. At this point, the fawn must be delivered to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator or to an office of the Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries. Nearly all wild birds and mammals are protected under the law. They may not be legally taken from the wild or kept as pets.

Wild animals belong in the wild. Never take them from it; it is both illegal and unwise. They are born wild and free – please leave them that way, for their sake and yours! **DA**