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Sharing information and knowledge for the benefit of native wildlife

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Call of the Wild

Answering Wildlife Calls

Welcome to the first installment of a new column: Answering Wildlife Calls. Often, rehabilitators hear the same questions over and over from the public. We will use this column to provide some professional answers to some of the most commonly asked wildlife questions.

“I’ve found a baby squirrel on the ground under a tree in my backyard. What should I do?”

Baby squirrels can be blown out of the nest in heavy winds. The mother squirrel will often retrieve the baby and, if the nest is intact, carry it back to the nest. If the caller has found a baby squirrel on the ground, have them check if the baby is alert and appears healthy. If it does, reuniting it with its mother is the best solution. Remove all pets, children and other distractions such as noisy equipment from the area and observe from a safe distance. The mother will not come for the baby if she doesn’t feel safe. Give the mother at least two hours to feel comfortable enough to pick up her baby. If it gets dark outside before the mother has time to retrieve the baby, bring the baby inside and keep it warm, dark, and quiet overnight. Place the baby back in the same location as soon as the sun is up. Wait two hours.

If the mother does not return, call a rehabilitator. Baby squirrels that are genetically defective are thrown from the nest on purpose and will not be retrieved. Sometimes, for reasons of safety, a mother squirrel will abandon her nest and move her entire litter to another nest. She will carry them, one at a time to the new nest. If she feels threatened while moving them, she may leave the one she is carrying and hide. In this case, it is important to remove any threats from the area and allow her to retrieve the youngster.

Callers often express doubt that the mother will return for her youngster. If the baby is not injured, insist that the mother be given the opportunity to retrieve her baby. Many times callers will call back surprised and excited that the mother actually did return for the young squirrel.

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