

Deer Fawns and What to Do If You Find One

To reduce the risks of a predator locating her fawn, a doe seeks seclusion just prior to birth, trying to be less conspicuous by avoiding other deer. For the first few weeks of the fawn's life, the doe keeps the fawn hidden except for suckling bouts. The doe may also feed and bed a considerable distance from the fawn's bed site. This way, even if a predator detects the doe, the fawn may still have a chance of avoiding detection.

To further keep her fawn safe from predators, the doe consumes the fawn's urine and droppings to help keep the fawn as scent-free as possible. The droppings provide the mother with further nutrition at a time when it is much needed.

When not nursing, the fawn curls up in a bed site and remains motionless, its white spots blending in well with the sun-flecked ground. Fawns lose their spots at 90 to 120 days of age, when they begin growing their winter coats.

Every year, wildlife departments and wildlife rehabilitators receive calls about "orphaned" fawns. Callers are told that in the spring it is a perfectly natural occurrence to come across a fawn that is seemingly by itself in the woods. The fawn is probably not alone; its mother is nearby, aware, and attentive.

The advice to anyone encountering a fawn lying quietly alone in the woods is to leave it alone. Mother will be nearby and will be taking care of it once you move away.

If you have handled the fawn, rub an old towel in the grass and wipe the fawn to remove human scent. Using gloves, return the fawn to where it was found. Fawns can often be returned to their mothers if taken back to where they were found within eight hours.

If a fawn appears cold, weak, thin, or injured, and its mother does not return in approximately eight hours, it may be orphaned. In such a case, you can call a local rehabilitator (look under "Animal" or "Wildlife" in your phone directory) or your local Department of Fish and Wildlife office for the name and phone number of a rehabilitator in your area. (For additional information, see the handout "Wildlife Rehabilitators and Wildlife Rehabilitation.")



Adapted from “Living with Wildlife in the Pacific Northwest” (see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living.htm>)

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