

## Simple Ways You Can Help Wildlife

- ✦ **Don't Litter!** If you see litter outdoors, pick it up and place it in a secure garbage container. Many birds and other animals can become entangled or try to swallow items such as plastic, fishing line and hooks, cans, bottles, cigarette butts, string, balloons, and batteries. When animals try to free themselves from entanglements, they often make matters worse, and the result can be serious lacerations or even limb loss. If they swallow litter, it will often block their airways, causing asphyxiation. Animals can suffer internal damage from ingesting toxic items as well.
- ✦ **Keep your dogs and cats under control, don't let them roam about unsupervised. Raise your cats to be indoor pets.** Not only is this safer for our wildlife, it is safer for your cat as well. Many of the injured animals brought to us are the result of dog and cat attacks. Cats kill large numbers of native birds every year. Cats transmit bacteria that can cause infections, which are often life threatening to wild animals. Cats who spend their time outdoors are susceptible to diseases, parasites, being caught in traps, being hit by cars, being shot, etc. (FYI-the average life span of a cat living outdoors is 18 months, while the average life span of an indoor cat is 17 years!) **Bottom line** is that cats and dogs have been domesticated, are not members of the wildlife ecosystem, and they deserve to be cared for responsibly by pet owners.
- ✦ **Prevent birds from crashing into your windows at home by placing shiny pieces of ribbon, aluminum pie pans, wind chimes, or sticker silhouettes outside your windows.** Reflections from windows can confuse birds into thinking they can fly right through them, or that their reflection is another bird trying to compete for their territory. Doing these things can also help to prevent some of the wing, spinal, and head injuries that are common with window collisions.

- ✦ Limit the use of toxic chemicals around your home for insect control. Not only are they toxic to animals, they infiltrate the ground water systems as well. By finding environmentally safe alternatives, such as natural repellents, and providing bat houses to encourage natural predation, you can reduce wildlife deaths and promote a healthy ecosystem.
- ✦ Keep an eye out for wildlife around your home. Before you mow your lawn or rototill your garden, check for rabbits or ground nesting birds that could be injured. If you do find a nest, try to wait a couple of weeks for the babies to grow and just work around the nest until then. Before you cut down or prune trees and shrubs, check carefully for nesting birds or squirrels. You could accidentally destroy a nest or remove important wildlife habitats. If you have a dead tree or snag, and it poses no safety hazard, consider leaving it standing. Dead trees and snags provide shelter and food to a variety of wildlife.
- ✦ Put caps over all chimneys, and cover vents on your roof to prevent birds, bats, squirrels, and raccoons from getting into your home. If you have vents up by your attic, check to make sure no animals are inside, then put netting over it to prevent bats and other critters from coming in. Laundry vents and eave troughs should be covered as well.
- ✦ Once you start feeding the squirrels and birds in your yard, you will have certain responsibilities. You need to feed proper food items, bread is not to be fed to wild animals, it has little nutritional value and can become compacted in the crop of birds, causing them to starve to death. Feeders must be cleaned on a regular basis to prevent contamination of the food and the spread of disease. The ground underneath feeders should be raked routinely to break up waste.
- ✦ When you feed wildlife, you tend to attract more animals to the area. If this area isn't large enough to support the extra animals, an environment may be created where diseases like mange, squirrel and bird pox, and even the West Nile Virus are more easily transmitted species to species. None of these diseases are directly transmittable from animals to humans, but your outdoor pets can get mange from squirrels, and WNV-affected animals can be bitten by mosquitoes that can bite you or your pets.

- ✦ Another consideration to make is that when feeding wildlife, wildlife will probably build their nests in close proximity to the food source. This may affect your yard, and possibly even your house, unless you have covered all the vents or other possible entryways into your home. Providing bird and squirrel nest boxes can help to alleviate this situation, and if you put up a bat house, bats will be less inclined to go roost in your attic. Bats are great at eating insects, including WNV-carrying mosquitoes.
- ✦ If you have a bird bath, make sure you change the water regularly to prevent disease and a breeding spot for mosquitoes.
- ✦ Also know that when you put food outside, you could be attracting Raccoons, skunks, and opossums as well to your yard. Do not feed deer. The DNR discourages feeding deer for various reasons. Feeding deer, like feeding other animals, can cause too many deer in an area that can't support them, causing damage to the vegetation in the area, starvation of the deer, and the possible spread of tuberculosis. It also increases human and deer interactions, meaning more car accidents and easy hunting of the deer. The improper diet that most deer are fed can often cause health problems for the deer as well.
- ✦ Be careful when driving, especially at night and near areas that are rural or near water, to avoid hitting wildlife. You don't want to cause an accident just to avoid hitting an animal, but if you are alert to what's around you while driving, you can prevent many of the injuries we see from most of the wildlife brought in here. If you see a turtle near or crossing the road, you can pull off to the side of the road and move it away from the road. Be especially careful if it is a snapping turtle, since they are vicious biters. Children should never put themselves in the road.

- ✦ Educate your children to respect and care for all wild creatures and their homes. Don't allow children to pick up animals and play with them. It's not only harmful to the animals, but can be harmful for your children as well. Animals will try to protect themselves, and they often carry diseases. Don't allow children to destroy nests, burrows, and other wildlife homes. Education of children, as well as adults, is key to protecting our environment.
  
- ✦ Do not automatically pick up infant wildlife. People often mistakenly think a young animal is orphaned when it isn't. Parents are often in the area or will be coming back while you're not around to care for their young. Mother rabbits feed their young at dusk and dawn, when they're not easily seen by predators, or humans. If a young rabbit has fur, is about the size of a fist, eyes are open, and the ears are somewhat perked up, they are actually old enough to be on their own, and they may stay together in a group before finally dispersing. When rabbits are brought in, they get easily stressed out and can die from the stress, which is a shame when they don't even need to be brought in. Baby squirrels are nearly never abandoned by their mothers, so unless it looks injured, leave it alone and the mother will come get after you're gone for awhile. Baby birds are only truly babies when they have no to very little feathers on their body. If you see a young bird on the ground with feathers on most of the body, leave it alone. It is a fledgling, and it is out of the nest because it needs to learn how to feed on its own and fly. The parent birds will be in the area, trying to keep an eye on it. They won't be right there, especially when you're there. If you do find a baby bird on the ground with no feathers, and it isn't bleeding or injured anywhere, you can pick it up and put it back into the nest. The mother will take it back if you don't handle it a lot. If you can't reach the nest, you can find a plastic container, poke small holes in it for drainage, and secure it as close to the nest you can get, and place the baby in there. If you see a baby deer, a fawn, leave it alone. The mother will come back within 24 hours. If you see what you think may be injured infant wildlife, call Blandford's Wildlife Education Center before doing anything, so we can confirm if it really needs help, and how you can safely transport it to a wildlife rehabilitator.

✦ Do not attempt to raise, keep, or rehabilitate wildlife yourself. Wildlife rehabilitators have to have experience, training, and the proper permits to be able to handle wildlife, and for good reason. To care for wildlife, one has to know the proper diets, the environmental needs, the behavior, physiology, and diseases of wildlife. Often people try to take care of wildlife on their own, and the animals become sick, permanently injured, or die. We have had people unintentionally kill baby animals because they thought they were helping them by feeding them cow's milk. Wild animals are lactose-intolerant, and if all that the starving baby is getting is something that it can't digest and makes it sick, it will die. Turtles that don't get the proper lighting and diet often have shell problems and can die as well. Turtle populations in Michigan are so fragile right now that many turtle species may face extinction in the next 50 years, and part of the reason is the illegal taking of turtles from the wild. Wild animals can carry a variety of diseases, some of them fatal to humans. Turtles can carry salmonella, and raccoons can carry rabies, as well as a roundworm that can burrow into your brain. It is illegal to handle wild animals unless you have the permits to do so. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) takes away illegal wildlife and charges hefty fines for having illegal wildlife. The US Fish and Wildlife Service does the same for migratory birds and endangered wildlife.

✦ If you'd like to help the animals in Blandford's Wildlife Education Center, you can help by making a donation of food, money, or volunteer your time and talents. Money donations are tax-deductible, and help provide the animals with vet care, medicine, and food. It's donations from people like you that help keep the Wildlife Education Center running and allows us to continue to serve the human and wildlife community.

