



Springtime Wildlife

by Mary Wilson

One of the pleasures of springtime is having an opportunity to see a new generation of all kinds of wildlife – whether it be baby birds, bunnies or foxes. As cute as they are, they should be valued as they will help to sustain their niche in the Connecticut wildlife scene.

Unfortunately, many species make their homes and nests in edge habitat including roadsides. Be aware especially while driving on local roads that you may encounter a young family crossing the road or a single “baby” who has not yet developed a fear of human activity.

Most frequently seen near roads, especially early in the morning or at dusk, are ducks, geese, owls, possums, turtles and frogs. Please be watchful and avoid hitting them if at all possible.

BIRDS: As gardeners, most of us love birds and we encourage them to visit and nest in our yards. Some things we should keep in mind:

- Do not remove trees in the spring as there may be nests there. Wait until fall if possible.
- Be careful doing spring clean-up and do not use leaf blowers which are noisy and disruptive.
- If a baby bird falls from its nest, it CAN be put back. There has been much misinformation about this. Nest out of reach? Audubon recommends hanging a basket (sides just deep enough to keep the baby from falling out), on a tree close to where you find the nestling and gently placing him in it. Adding grasses or pine needles can make a nice soft “nest”. The nestling will be safe, and the mother will continue to care for it.
- If you find a fledgling on the ground, wait to see if the mother is bringing food to it.
- Birds that are cavity nesters will appreciate leaving any dead trees (snags) at this time of year.
- Put stickers on windows so that birds do not fly into your windows. If you find one that is stunned, it may survive if it is put into a box and kept in a dark place for several hours.
- Do not let your cats roam free. According to the American Bird Conservancy, cats are the number one threat to birds. In the U.S. alone, outdoor cats kill approximately 2.4 Billion birds every year. Allowing a cat to roam also puts your pet at risk. Tragically, millions of cats are killed by cars each year. Many cats are happy with cat-ios. These are outdoor enclosures where cats can happily commune with nature for their own safety as well as for wildlife.

DEER: Mother deer will leave a newborn alone since they have no odor and risk from predators is low. This is normal. DO NOT TOUCH the fawns.

RACCOON: Raccoons are out and about during the day at this time of year as they hunt for food for their young. Do not assume that they are rabid!

SQUIRRELS: If you find a baby squirrel who has fallen from the nest, the mother will try to retrieve it. Best to leave it alone.

Other things you can do:

- Keep a brush pile in your yard. They are good cover and protection for wildlife.
- Limit use of pesticides and certainly do not use rodenticides. The toxicity does not stop with the rodent but goes up the food chain to any creature who preys on them (foxes, coyotes, hawks, eagles, or even your pet!)
- Plant native plants as they provide the perfect habitat for all kinds of native wildlife.

In summary, make your yard an attractive and safe place for the birds and other wildlife you love to observe. Welcome those “babies” to a brand-new season.