



Do's and Don'ts
-by Marjorie Davis

As fawns start emerging, hands off is the best approach.

Spring has sprung and that means babies of all varieties are being born. Here in Sonoma County we are blessed with an abundance of creatures, both domestic and wild. Our most prolific wild animals are deer, and this is the time of year that fawns are hitting the ground in all their spotted adorableness.

Fawns are born with a very specific set of characteristics meant to help them survive. Fawns are born scentless and have spots for camouflage for a reason. This is so the does can leave them all alone to sleep in the tall grass while mom is out foraging. The challenge often comes when people come upon these fawns, and finding them alone, assume them abandoned or orphaned.

Many times people find, or their dogs flush, a fawn and they assume it is an orphan. It is not. The mothers can be gone for several hours and will reunite with their fawns at that time. "Most of the time the fawn is fine," Matt Wolfe, animal care coordinator for Fawn Rescue, said. "The mom will leave them, and people have a hard time with that because they are so fragile and tiny. They'll hover over the fawn and mom won't come back while they are there because we are a predator to them. If they are standing over the fawn because it's alone, they are making the problem worse."

Deer are really hard to handle, they are super reactive. If a fawn is lying upright, eyes wide open, but flattened to the ground, this is its camouflage position, which allows it to blend in with its surroundings. "The fawn will bleat for Mom," Wolfe said. "Over time the fawn will let you know it's in trouble. If they are dirty, that's another warning sign we look for.

They should be spotless; Mom keeps them clean so they don't have a scent to predators." It is critical that people keep their dogs on a leash, (when out and about) as even running after a fawn or a pregnant doe can stress them enough to be deadly. Human interactions with fawns are common.



Listed below are some fawn questions you might have about what to do or don't do.

1. What should you do if you find a fawn?

If a fawn is obviously ill, lying on its side, kicking, crying – pick it up and place it in a quiet place. A light cloth placed over the animal's head will sometimes calm it. Keep it away from pets and all human activity. Petting the fawn, talking to it, holding it, does not comfort it. This is a wild animal. Human voices, odor and touch only add to the stress and will cause additional harm besides the illness or injury.



When a fawn seems calm it may be in shock. If the weather is cold, a blanket may be placed over its body to keep it from becoming chilled. In hot weather a cool location, out of drafts, is all that is needed. **DO NOT FEED THE FAWN ANYTHING** other than water. Baby formula, cow's milk, feed store mixes, pet store domestic animal formulas, soy products – will cause scouring, dehydration and death. Outside of Sonoma County, please **CALL YOUR WILDLIFE CENTER** at once for help.

If an uninjured fawn is seen on the road or beside the road, **DO NOT PUT IT IN YOUR CAR**. Place it off the road about 20 feet and leave the area. The fawn would not be there if the doe were not nearby. You will not see her. She will return for the fawn as soon as the human disturbance is gone.

A doe **WILL** accept it even though it has been touched by humans, but she cannot retrieve her fawn if you linger in the area.





If a fawn is seen lying upright, eyes wide open, but flattened to the ground, do not touch it. This is a fawn's camouflage position. It blends with its surroundings. When it is picked up it will hold its legs tight against its body with its head forward. Its legs are not broken. Sometimes the fawn allows its body to become limp and dangle in your hands. Put it down, walk away and leave it alone.

This fawn is too small to follow the doe for the long distance she must travel to find enough food to make milk for her baby. The milk is very rich and will sustain the fawn for the many hours it spends alone. The doe will return only when there are no humans nearby. Do not sit and wait for her to return.

If you have removed the fawn from its resting spot take it back at once and walk away. The doe will be searching for her fawn, she will accept it and care for it much better than any human can. Humans cannot teach the fawn the skills it will need to survive in the wild. Humans do not have the correct diet to properly nourish a wild animal. **LEAVE IT ALONE.**

Allow it to retain its wildness and natural fear of humans. This is the greatest gift we can give it. Wild animals do not make good pets. They are genetically programmed to be wild. As they mature they become dangerous and can inflict serious injuries on humans. Call Fawn Rescue for help or answers to your questions (707) 931-4550. YOUR CALLS ARE WELCOME.

2. How do you know when to intervene?

If the fawn is obviously injured, crying, walking in circles, or you see that the doe is dead — call Fawn Rescue immediately at 707-931-4550.

3. When to steer clear because Momma Deer has it well in hand?

If the fawn looks like it is 'hiding', leave it alone. When it is old enough and strong enough it will be able to keep up with its mother.



4. What should you do if you hit an animal?

If you hit ANY animal, **please STOP** to see if it is injured or dead. If it is an adult deer, check for orphaned fawns nearby — if it can be done safely.

- If it can be done safely, **MOVE IT** to the side of the road to prevent any driver behind you from hitting the body and possibly being injured.
- Use extreme caution when approaching any injured animal. Do not attempt to pick it up. Do not risk being bitten or kicked.
- You may cover it to provide warmth. Covering its head will calm it.
- Do not give it food or water.
- If possible, wait by the injured animal until help comes.

In Sonoma County:

- For Injured Spotted Fawns, call Fawn Rescue at (707) 931-4550. Give exact directions.
- Call Sonoma County Animal Care & Control at (707) 565-7100 for injured adult deer. Report a dead deer to Sonoma County Animal Care & Control, and then leave it.



5. What should I do if I have a fawn at home?

It is against the law. Wild animals do not belong to us. The law against raising any wild animal without a permit was not written to deprive humans of having them as pets. The law is there to keep these naturally wild animals wild.

Fawn Rescue specializes in the care of fawns. Therefore we are experts in understanding this species and their needs. We never destroy a fawn, no matter how tame or ill. We work with it. We take the fawn to a vet, we strive to make it well, and then place it among other fawns.



It is raised with its own species, which allows it to develop its natural, wild instincts. We teach it survival skills and to recognize its natural foods. We release it, with its companions, back into the wild.

There are so many reasons that a fawn, or any wild creature, should not be raised alone or as part of a human family. Deer are genetically programmed to be wild. They do not make good pets. By being raised as a pet they do not know they are deer. To make a pet of any wild animal is to give it a death sentence. They quickly become unruly, unmanageable and dangerous as they mature. They have been known to attack humans during mating season and are shot.

They will demand their freedom. If they escape, or are put out alone, they are unable to cope in the wild. They must compete with the resident herd and will be driven away from the area. So often they die of stress even before they die of starvation. To put a lone fawn out into unfamiliar territory, without the survival skills they learn when being raised with their own species, will lead to an early death after release, due to human, domestic, or natural predators.

In order for their bones and body to grow strong, powerful and agile enough to survive in the wild, a fawn must be fed an especially rich formula that provides the complete nutrition they require for proper growth. Goat milk, baby formula, soymilk, food that can be purchased at a feed store, or human food cannot provide that nourishment. Although the deer may visually appear to be healthy, internally it is not. Each wild animal species requires a different diet for proper development.

Your decision to attempt to keep it, or to call us for help, will mean life or death for this wild fawn. Please do not deprive it of its wildness, which is why humans are so strongly attracted to wildlife in the first place. Think how comforting it would be for this fawn to curl up with other fawns tonight and to eat the natural food it will find in the wild. Please love it enough to let it go while there is still time for it to grow up to be the deer it was born to be. We will not report you. **We are here to help. Please call Fawn Rescue at (707) 931-4550.**