

Wildlife as Pets

Although many people think that finding a turtle or baby animal in the wild gives them a great opportunity for a pet that is definitely not true. Why not?

- The first and most important problem is the chance to infect you, your family, or your pets with diseases and parasites. Wildlife species carry a wide array of diseases: distemper (both canine and feline in the case of raccoons), parvo, and others. Then there is rabies... This is a fatal disease if not treated upon exposure. How can you contract Rabies? Any body fluids of an infected animal that mix with your body fluids by entering a cut, through a bite, or by entering your mucous membranes (eyes, nose, mouth). This means that not only a bite from a rabid animal can infect you, a sneeze into your eyes or mouth can transfer this deadly virus too. How can you tell if a baby animal has the disease? YOU CAN'T! Symptoms of rabies occur late in the infected animal's life and it cannot be tested for the virus unless the animal is put to sleep and the brain tissue tested in a lab.
- Almost all wildlife species carry parasites. External ones include: fleas, ticks, leeches, and lice. Many internal ones are shed in feces and easily passed to domestic animals using the same area. The most dangerous parasite to humans is the raccoon roundworm (Baylisascaris). The eggs of these roundworms are shed in the feces of the raccoon and can only be destroyed by using fire. Boiling water, Lysol, bleach, or any other household cleaner WILL NOT destroy the eggs. The worms from these eggs can cause skin irritation, blindness, and death in humans.
- It is illegal to keep wildlife as pets in Delaware.
- Wildlife species have not been bred to be domesticated. They will always be under stress in captivity, especially when kept by themselves and will be subject to health issues due to this stress. Diets for cats and dogs are not best suited for wildlife species. None of the vaccines for dogs and cats can legally be used for wildlife. As wild animals grow into adulthood, their behavior changes due to adult hormones. This puts everyone they come in to contact with in danger.
- Wild animals react instinctively. If you happen to step on your dog's foot, he will just move. If you step on a raccoon's foot, it will turn around and bite you. They possess wild instincts and should remain in the wild.
- Wildlife rehabilitators are trained to keep wild babies wild so they can be released as soon as they are able to take care of themselves. Rehabilitators receive many animal babies each year. Animals are separated by species and age, into "litters" and raised together. This enables them to react to each other instead of imprinting on humans or becoming friendly with dogs, cats or other domestic animals.
- Turtles require specialized housing with expensive UVA and UVB lights and have critical nutritional needs. Some species, such as box turtles, can live for over 50 years. In Delaware, reptiles held in captivity longer than 30 days can NEVER be released into the wild.

Do not put your family or pets at risk. If you find a wild animal that needs help, contact a licensed wildlife rehabilitator.