

Wildlife Rehab

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Caring for New Hampshire's white-tailed deer fawns

A little more than a decade ago, Elaine Connors Center for Wildlife became licensed to care for New Hampshire's injured and orphaned deer fawns. This program was put into place with center working cooperatively with New Hampshire Fish and Game Department to provide care for these fawns to be raised until they can fend for themselves. Since deer that have become acclimated to human contact at an early age typically do not exhibit the normal fear of people that deer raised in the



Feeding a newborn fawn.



A group of fawns in the day yard at Elaine Connors Center for Wildlife.

wild do, it is imperative that these orphaned fawns be raised in such a way as to minimize exposure to human contact and any acclimation to humans.

Fawns begin to arrive at Elaine Connors Center for Wildlife in mid to late May and these admissions continue to spike through June. These are usually the animals which are orphaned when the doe (dam) is killed on the highway. More often that not, the young will be lying next to the dead mother on the road. If the fawn is older, it may be off in the woods nearby. During these months we also see fawns which are picked up unnecessarily by humans who are only trying to help but are in reality, kidnapping the fawn from its mother. When a fawn is seen by itself, the first instinct is to intervene. In nearly all cases, this is not necessary. A fawn alone does not mean the animal is orphaned or needs assistance. Questions or concerns about a fawn seen alone, or any wild animal, should be discussed with New Hampshire Fish and Game or Elaine Connors Center for Wildlife (367-WILD) prior to intervention. The first question we ask a caller is "How long has it been seen without the mother?" If it has been a few hours, even overnight, we want to wait to allow the mother time to retrieve her youngster. It is normal for the mother to leave her fawn while she goes off by herself and the doe typically feeds her fawn at dawn and dusk, leaving in between. The fawn, born without a scent, is actually safer from predators when left alone. Any continued presence or frequent visits to check up on the fawn will only contribute to the likelihood of the fawn being abandoned or being found by a predator. Unless you can verify that the fawn's mother is dead, please leave it alone or call us so we can help make a decision in the best inter-

est of the fawn. Resist the temptation to continually check on the animal; doing so only serves to further separate it from the doe.

In later summer months, July and August, fawns are usually admitted because the fawns themselves have been struck by vehicles as they follow their mothers across roads and highways. Minimally injured fawns can be treated at ECCW with a fairly high success rate if they are admitted early enough in the summer. All fawns need to be released by mid-September to allow them time to acclimate before winter. Therefore injuries which consist of broken legs are best dealt with as early in the summer as possible. We have had callers contact us about fawns in parking garages, on median strips, at the Ford dealer and one marooned on an island. The most unusual call was about a fawn which had fallen into an oil pit used in a garage to change oil. The fawn was removed, wiped down and released back to its mother.

Newborn fawns are admitted weighing about 5 pounds but this can vary. If a dam were to have twin fawns, the birth weight for each fawn would be lower. It is interesting to note that we can tell by the shape of the back legs if the fawn is a single or a twin because of the way the fawns were positioned in the doe in pregnancy. So if a fawn is found near a road hit doe, we can usually tell if we need to look for more than one fawn. Some does will have triplets and in 2007 we were called by a homeowner who was witnessing a doe giving birth to 4 fawns in her yard. When giving birth, the doe will deliver a fawn and then walk off a short distance to drop another; not delivering her youngsters together. The smallest fawn admitted at our Center was a little over 2 pounds and was probably a triplet. The fawn unfortunately didn't survive, possibly because it was too small to reach the doe for the necessary colostrum to survive both short and long term health. We had a three pound fawn admitted this year and this fawn was raised to be a healthy youngster and was released with the group.

Fawns are fed colostrum when admitted because we usually do not know the full history of the animal. Colostrum is the mother's first milk and affords the antibodies which all mammals need to survive. By giving colostrum to our fawns, we are assured that they have received it. The problem with colostrum is that it needs to be given within 48 hours of birth to be effective. Colostrum is also good for scouring (diarrhea) in fawns and is given when a fawn has been fed by the general public. If the instance ever arises when you know the doe is

deceased and the fawn MUST be picked up, do not feed the fawn any milk products. (And always wear gloves when handling any wildlife.) The best thing to give the fawn is Pedialyte, found in the baby aisle in any drugstore, which will keep it hydrated until you can get it to a provider who is licensed to care for deer and that should be done without delay.

Once admitted to our Center, the fawn is allowed time to calm down. If necessary, the animal is placed on heat or into an incubator. A weight is taken and a number placed into the right ear which corresponds with the intake records. Fawns are fed 4 times a day unless it is a neonate (newborn) and then 2am feedings are also necessary. A little hectic if you have multiple newborn fawns and a full rehab center of other animals. This is why summer months in rehab centers are known as "baby season." Weights are tracked daily on all fawns as is their overall health. One care provider at our Center raises all of the White-tailed fawns from admission to release to prevent the animals from habituating (taming) on humans. Our pen was specifically constructed away from the Center to isolate the fawns from voices and vehicles and no other enclosures are near it. Our rehabilitation center is not open to visitors, although our Butler Education Center is.

We have found that thunderstorms and fireworks are the largest stress factors that we see in raising fawns. It is not unusual in a severe thunderstorm for the rehabilitator to have to sit in the pen with the animals. Homeopathic calming agents are sometimes used if we know storms are in the area.

Fawn care is funded 100% by the general public. We depend on donors purchasing "Fawn Sponsorships" which help cover the cost of fawns raised at our Center. Please call for more information or if you wish to purchase a fawn sponsorship as a special gift for a friend or family member for the upcoming holidays.

To raise a fawn from admission to release is about 5 months. "Round up" day is when fawns are able to be released, having grown into wild, young deer and able to fend for themselves. It is stressful, emotional and joyful all at once. To say goodbye to the fawns which we have cared for around the clock through the spring, summer and part of the fall is undoubtedly difficult. But this isn't about me, the rehabilitator; this is about our Center's mission of giving a second chance to these animals so they will have the opportunity to live their lives in the wild.

Elaine Connors Center for Wildlife is a non-profit wildlife rehabilitation facility which provides care to injured and orphaned wild animals in crisis. We are not a 24 hour emergency clinic and we ask that you call us at 367-WILD (9453) if you have an animal so that we can arrange to be here for you during our business hours. Should you have questions about our work, please e-mail us at rehab@myfairpoint.net; we would love to hear from you! Contributions to our work are gratefully accepted and appreciated.



A three-month-old fawn.