

# ARE YOU *My Mother?*

FOSTERING WILD ORPHANS BACK TO WILD FAMILIES

## WHEN FOSTERING DOESN'T WORK

- ◆ Species of orphan has been identified incorrectly
  - ◆ A suitable adoptive family cannot be located
  - ◆ An orphan is too old to be accepted into an adoptive family (eg. non nursing coyote)
- There may be delays so don't forget things like food for the orphan, water and snacks for you, bug spray, extra batteries, proper clothing for the weather, note pad, pen and cell phone.

## What is Fostering?

*Fostering is the act of placing wild orphans into a suitable wild foster family, taking into consideration the species, age and whether there is appropriate space in the adoptive family.*

## ~ Developing a Fostering Plan ~

- Don't try to foster all your orphans in the first year – go slowly
- Develop a library of species ID books and recorded wildlife calls
- Be absolutely sure of the species and age of your orphan
- Develop a network of volunteers – bird banders / watchers, etc.
- Network with other rehab centers to share experiences
- Develop a database of nest sites, cooperative land owners and a record of your fostering
- Ensure the health of the orphan then find a possible site.

## FACTS

- *To date, no species of raptors or passerines in Alberta, Canada have been found to reject orphans.*
- *Mammals such as deer, fox, red squirrels, coyotes, snowshoe hare, white-tailed jackrabbits and skunks have all been fostered successfully.*

## WHY FOSTER?

Reduces Costs

Reduces Workload

Some Fish & Wildlife offices do not allow some species to be hand raised

Puts wild orphans back into the wild where they can be raised naturally and normally

# Fostering Methods



## **Passerines:**

Newly fledged orphans can easily be added to families with newly fledging young. Adding young to active nests can be very successful if:

- Young are exactly the same age
- There is appropriate room in the foster nest

## **Raptors:**

- Working with bird-banders is invaluable
- Identify nest with similar aged young and room for one more
- Banding, climbing and monitoring takes expertise

## **Waterfowl:** (ducklings, geese, coots, loons, snipes, grebes)

- Correct ID of ducklings can be challenging but it is critical, particularly in Mallards
- Orphans must be close to the same age
- Allowing chicks to sit and peep in an open cage on the shore will often bring in suitable parents
- Using the calls of chicks can be useful, especially if the chicks sit quietly

**Fox, coyote, squirrels, skunks and hares** can be placed into the den or nest if it is known that the young from the adoptive family are close in age.

## **Fawns:**

- Ensure the age and species of deer.
- Ensure that the fawn is healthy; clear of diarrhea and rehydrated.
- Identify a site for release - it helps to have landowners who will play a part.
- You may mark the fawn with a tag, self-releasing collar or colour mark to assist in monitoring.
- We recommend 2 –3 people should take part in the fostering.
- Take your fawn call, extra batteries, speaker, extra length of speaker wire and a bottle of milk to feed the fawn if the fostering doesn't work.
- Some deer tend to be more shy and will hide in the trees and snort loudly - others protect more aggressively and may run right at you and the fawn.
- Take a few minutes to look at the situation, play out the fostering in your head and make a plan. If you aren't prepared properly you may lose the window of time that the doe will participate. A doe called in when the fawn is not ready will generally leave after a few minutes and won't be fooled again.
- If you don't have a response in five minutes of calling you likely won't. It is also a concern that prolonged playing will bring in a predator instead of a doe.
- If your fawn sniffs the air or ground and then suddenly turns and makes an obvious run into surrounding trees they've picked up the scent or call of a doe and are running to join her.
- Using a shed already on the property, hide inside with the fawn. Place the speaker just outside the blind. Turn the call on and when the doe either begins to snort from the trees or shows herself as she searches for the fawn, slide the fawn through the door of the blind and allow the two to meet up. Watch carefully for acceptance by the doe. She generally will scoop the fawn and move it out very quickly.
- Place your vehicle in a suitable position. Place the speaker on the top of the car and a small carrying cage with the fawn in it near the open door of the car. One person plays the call while the other is ready to open the door of the cage and let the fawn free once the doe is in sight. We prefer to use this method when fostering.
- **Get creative!**

