

ON THE POSITIVE SIDE: We need a local wildlife rehabilitator

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For the Sun-News

LAS CRUCES >> For most people in beautiful southwestern New Mexico, the mountain views, climate, clear skies, flora and fauna are aspects of why we choose to live here.

We appreciate how all of nature combines to create the beauty of this area.

Living in close proximity of natural areas brings us in contact with wild animals frequently, whether we choose to or not.

When this occurs outside of the chance encounter, when human intervention is required, the expert to contact is a licensed wildlife rehabilitator.

These people are trained to raise orphaned young, treat injuries and illness, then return the animal back to the wild.

Wildlife rehabilitators as volunteers provide a valuable and unavoidable service to the community.

They volunteer their time, homes and money to answer calls from the public about animals they find in their home; hungry, dehydrated and possibly injured.

Sometimes a family member, including our furry companion animals, happens upon a nest of rabbits or birds and happily brings the orphan back to the house, or encounters an adult animal in distress.

In any case, a trained wildlife rehabilitator is who needs to be called.

These individuals have knowledge of the species' diets, how they eat and what habitat they require to keep them wild and help them grow and heal for eventual release.

One should not attempt to do this on our own. We can create issues in the animal which can prevent their return to the wild. This is particularly true with birds due to their need to fly proficiently to survive. Reptiles have very specific nutritional needs that only a trained rehabber should tackle. Even with this training and experience, the innocent victim may die, so always solicit a person trained to handle wild animals.

New Mexico and the federal government have regulations and requirements that provide permits for the rehabilitation of sick, injured, orphaned or otherwise incapacitated wildlife under their respective jurisdictions for return to the wild or other disposition.

Interested persons can learn about these requirements by reviewing Wildlife Rehabilitation Permits, Code of New Mexico Rules, Title 19, Chapter 35, Part 5, Wildlife Permits. 19.35.5.

For more information, also contact the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico at 575-523-8020.

Usually, wild animals are not in need of our assistance. Baby birds need to leave the nest, explore their environment and practice the skill of flying as they fledge. Keep pets away from the bird or lift them into the closest tree for safety. It is a myth that a handled baby bird will be abandoned by his/her parents. Wash hands after handling any wildlife. Baby rabbits in a nest may appear to be in need, but are in fact being cared for by their parents. If an animal appears weak or injured, only then is intervention warranted and that should be a permitted wildlife rehabilitator.

Sadly, Doña Ana County is currently without a provider of this type. Please speak with your neighbors and see if anyone is willing to step into this valued position for our community.

It takes commitment and dedication along with legal authority but can be a rewarding, interesting and even exciting activity to those who accept the challenge. Our region of Southern New Mexico needs a licensed wildlife rehabilitator. Can you help? Do you know someone who can?

Susan Alderman is a longtime animal advocate in Las Cruces. Interested guest authors can contact the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico at 575-523-8020.