

## **Leave Those Babies Alone!**

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

I was about town last week looking at a diseased tree when I heard a couple of adult cardinals just having a fit. I turned around and saw a young cardinal that had obviously done an early launch out of the nest that was probably about 2 or 3 days away from being able to really fly well. It was in the middle of the street and the adults were trying to get it out of harm's way. I went over and picked it up and moved it to a location of taller vegetation under a tree. About then I heard more commotion and here came fluff nugget number two! I moved it to the same location as the first making sure that the parents saw me and heard the young 'un. I made sure that the adults were near me, watching me, and put the first with the second and then went on my way.

This is the time of year that animal babies are everywhere. If you encounter one of these babies the most important thing you can likely do is to LEAVE THEM ALONE. I moved the two young cardinals out of immediate potential harm and then left. Had they simply been on the ground near a tree, I would have done nothing. More young wildlife are harmed by well meaning humans every year than just about any other cause except cats.

The next thing you need to do is shed any notion that animal families are anything like human families. They aren't and you need to accept that. Baby rabbits are pretty much on their own within a few weeks. Even if they are still being fed by an adult, don't assume they've been abandoned because they are somewhere without a parent around. Animal babies, unlike human babies, do what they are "told". If they are left someplace they will likely stay there until a parent returns. So just leave them alone.

Nature Centers, Wildlife Rehab Centers, even veterinarians get slammed this time of year by people bringing in "orphaned" rabbits, squirrels, baby birds just any small animal you can think of. Many times the animal is already self sufficient if just left alone. Caring for these animals is time and money intensive. Yes, occasionally one does need help but the best help you can do is to often just leave them alone.

Humans are generally very soft hearted and well meaning. But they aren't designed to be animal parents. If there are young children in the home it can be even harder to get them to understand that what they see on TV is not necessarily a true depiction of the real world. Many young animals don't survive the first few months. That's just nature, cruel and heartless as it may sound. The sooner children learn the importance of leaving young animals alone the better everyone will be.

If you find a young critter, just leave it alone. Within 24 hours it will likely have moved on. If you find a young bird out of a nest look to see if there is a nest close by. If so, just pick it up and put it back in the nest. Don't worry about the old myth of not touching it. Many bird species have a poor sense of smell anyway. If there is what appears to be a half grown young bird around and there are agitated (very vocal) adult birds around, it's being tended to. Young birds grow very quickly and likely in just another day or two it'll be flying and fine.

The one thing that you can do is keep your cats indoors. Cats are major bird/wildlife killers, to the tune of several billion animals every year in the USA. Cats aren't native to North America and they raise havoc with our native animals especially birds. You will encounter young animals in the weeks ahead if you haven't already. They aren't pets and the two most important things you can do is leave them alone and keep the cats away!