
Caring For and Observing Our Wildlife

By Marilyn Gaffney

Editor's Note: WGCSA members know Marilyn Gaffney from her role on the staff of the Wisconsin State Golf Association. One of the things she does in her free time is serve as a volunteer at the "Wildlife In Need Center" in Waukesha. She has taken her knowledge of golf courses and lots of what she knows from her work at the Wildlife Center and put them together for us in this excellent article. Next time you call the WSGA office, thank her for the fine advice!

Oh Spring! Isn't it nice that spring is here in full force? The weather is getting better by the day and everything seems to be coming back to life. The plantings are starting to bloom, golfers are seen on the golf courses, the color of green is intensifying, and wildlife can be seen showing increased activity and new found energy. In spring, the wildlife of Wisconsin are busy selecting mates, defining territory, setting up suitable nesting and denning areas and, of course, producing offspring.

It sounds like a very pretty picture, but the modern-day world makes basic survival difficult at best for our wildlife. Just as humans suffer from the stress created by a highly industrialized society, so too does wildlife. There are three main categories of stressors with which wildlife must contend. The more you know about each of these, the more you can do to decrease their impact on wildlife. The three categories are PHYSICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND EXTERNAL.

Each of the three main stressors is manifested or caused by a variety of things. For example, physical stress is caused by disease, injury, malnutrition, dehydration, hypothermia and/or hyperthermia. Types of psychological stressors include those things that would cause an animal or bird to experience alarm, fear, frustration and so on. External stressors are those that are naturally occurring, such as the weather, but also those that are man-made. The one of most concern in this category is exposure to chemicals in the form of pesticides and herbicides. Pesticide poisoning is a serious problem for our wildlife. In addition to causing genetic defects - crossed bills in birds, for example - many are potent neurotoxins.

It is an unfortunate fact of life that many of the stressors a wild animal encounters are a direct result of interaction with humans which almost always has a negative impact on the animal. However, there are things that we can do to lessen an impact on wildlife. Many of us would like to help but don't know how. Here are some suggestions:

- (1) Encourage nesting sites away from areas of heavy human traffic by providing habitat and shelter in those areas.
- (2) Continue your judicious and careful use of pesticides, including IPM and the use of alternative controls.
- (3) Never allow trapping on the golf course. When fencing is required, use fencing that prevents an animal from being trapped underneath it.

It is also important to be able to recognize whether or not a wild animal requires assistance. Here are some clues:

- (1) The animal doesn't attempt to flee when approached (except youngsters).
- (2) It favors a leg or a wing.
- (3) A bird's wing is drooping or is slightly out of position.
- (4) A bird runs on the ground when others fly away.
- (5) A nocturnal animal is out in the daylight.
- (6) An unfeathered or unfurred baby is out of the nest.

If at any time you observe some young and you suspect they may be orphaned, here are some guidelines to follow:

- (1) If you find a nestling on the ground and it is cold to the touch, warm it by gently holding it in your hands. The parent bird may very well remove the replaced nestling if its body temperature is significantly colder than the other nestlings. When it is warmed, replace it in the nest. A nestling appears naked, its eyes are closed and it is completely dependent on the parent.
- (2) Do not attempt to feed or give the nestling water.
- (3) Do not assume that the parent will "smell human scent" and reject the baby bird. Birds have a very poor sense of smell.

If you come across a fledgling or brancher (which is a feathered juvenile bird that has jumped out of the nest a few days before it can fly), leave it alone unless it appears ill or injured. The parent bird will continue to care for it on the ground until it can fly.

If you have disturbed a rabbit's nest that contains young, put them back in the nest and replace the grass cover. Keep other animals and people away from the nest. The mother returns to her nest at dawn and dusk to feed the young. To determine if she has returned, place a cross of twigs or yarn across the grass top. If by morning the twigs or yarn have moved, the parent has returned. If not, the young are most likely orphaned and proper care should be taken. Cottontails are on their own at the tender age of three to four weeks. Their main defense mechanism against predators is to remain completely motionless so as not to be seen. That is why it is so easy to approach very young rabbits. If you see one that is about four inches long from nose to tail, it is already independent from its mother.

You may contact the "Wildlife In Need Center" any time you have questions or concerns about wildlife on your golf course. It is located in Waukesha and the telephone number is 414-574-7504. People are on duty 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. A licensed rehabilitator or volunteer will try and help you in any way possible. The Center is a non-profit organization provides rehabilitation for injured and orphaned native wildlife with the intent of release. This organization exists only through donations. If you care to help, you can send a donation to:

WILDLIFE, INC.
516 E. NORTH STREET
WAUKESHA, WI 53186

Take time to enjoy, care for and observe our precious wildlife. 🌿