

PRESS RELEASE

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Kathy Finnie, Executive Director
Vermont Veterinary Medical Association
802-878-6888
Kathy@vtvets.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – May 20, 2014

Spring Wildlife and Your Pets: What You Need to Know

by the Vermont Veterinary Medical Association
M. Kathleen Shaw, DVM

Spring is finally here and young wildlife is everywhere. With this abundance of young wild animals, it is important to be aware of the more common animals your pet may encounter and what to do if it does.

It is quite common in the spring for our dog or cat to present us with a live baby rabbit. In addition children may find one in the yard and bring it inside, thinking it has been abandoned by its mother. If the bunny's eyes are open, it is able to eat and fend for itself in the wild. If you come across a nest of bunnies in the wild and the mother is nowhere to be seen, DO NOT disturb them - this is normal. By removing them from the nest you are greatly reducing their chances of survival. The wild rabbit mother only feeds in the middle of the night; she leaves her babies all day to not alert predators, so don't assume she is not caring for them and take them from her!

So if your pet or child presents you with an uninjured baby rabbit, confine your pets in the house, and return the bunny to wherever it was found, immediately. It will do fine and the less time it spends in human hands, the better. If it appears injured, contact your veterinarian for the name of the closest wildlife rehabilitator near you. (Not all veterinarians are licensed to treat wildlife.)

Skunks present a smelly problem. They possess two small glands under their tail that produce a foul smelling material which the skunk can spray in the face of a predator or curious pet. While the spray is not toxic to our pets, it can cause tremendous irritation to the eyes, causing them to water and sting. Furthermore, if you think skunks smell bad, imagine how it is for our dogs and cats, whose sense of smell is up to 30 times stronger than ours! That horrible smelly material is usually sprayed right in the face of our curious pets, and the smell is so bad to them they will often vomit. Because these encounters are always a surprise, it helps to be prepared by having some products on hand to clean up your pet.

Your local pet store or veterinarian has products available to clean up your pets if they are "skunked." Another option is a homemade solution made by mixing one quart of hydrogen peroxide with a half box baking soda, and 1 tsp of a grease-cutting dish soap. You must mix and use within an hour as it won't keep. Whichever you use, remember you shouldn't get the pet wet first: put the de-skunking material right on the pet. AVOID the eyes! If your pet will allow, you can rinse around the face with plain tap water. If your pet persistently paws or rubs at the eyes and they are red and tearing, call your veterinarian.

Porcupines have sharp quills that can imbed into your pet's face, skin and paws. If your pet has been "quilled", do not attempt to remove them yourself. The quills can break off under the skin, and also it is very painful for your pet. Call your veterinarian immediately for help with this problem. The longer the quills remain in the pet the more difficult they are to remove.

Baby birds are commonly found on the ground or retrieved by pets. If there is no obvious injury, the baby should be replaced in the nest or in a tree or bush as close to the nest as possible. Parents will not abandon their offspring, so even if you don't see any adults around, leave the area so as not to frighten the parents away. Do not attempt to treat any wounds or feed the baby bird – they require specific types of food and are VERY difficult to care for. For any injuries or wounds, contact your veterinarian, who will help get the bird to a licensed rehabilitator.

Keeping your pet on a leash or in a fenced yard will greatly reduce the encounters with spring wildlife. Also remember with any wild mammal rabies virus is a concern. Rabies is always fatal to the animal, and it can be transmitted to people through saliva and bites. Vermont law requires your pet to be vaccinated for rabies, so make sure your pet is up to date on rabies vaccination, avoid handling wildlife, and report any wildlife acting in an unusual manner to the game warden or wild life officer. If you have any questions or concerns about spring wildlife and your pet, contact your veterinarian or visit the Vermont Veterinary Medical Association website at www.vtvets.org.

###

The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA), founded in 1898, is a professional organization of 330 veterinarians dedicated to compassionate animal care and quality medicine.