

Babies in Your Backyard

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As all of us are spending more time looking out the windows of our homes, we should remember we are looking out at the homes of wildlife. Our backyards can provide a perfect place for wildlife to raise a family. The abundance of food and warmth make springtime an ideal time for wildlife to have offspring. Below are a few of NJ's common wildlife species you may discover.

If you come across wildlife babies and wonder if they need your help, please remember that more often than not, the parent is nearby still keeping an eye on them. Please visit the NJ Fish and Wildlife website for more information on what to do if you find young or injured wildlife and a list of licensed wildlife rehabilitators. <https://www.state.nj.us/dep/fgw/bornwild.htm>



Eastern Cottontails:

The female rabbit will search out a secure and sheltered area to make a shallow nests made of soft grasses and line the nest with tufts of her fur. After she gives birth to her litter (average litter size of 5), she will usually only visit the nest twice a day to nurse her young. To try to keep the nest location hidden from predators she will usually visit the nest at dusk and dawn. After 15 days, the babies are ready to head out into the world alone.

Raccoons:

These masked marauders will make their nest in tree cavities, brush piles and even in attics. Newborn raccoons, also known as kits, are blind and deaf for their first three weeks of life and are completely dependent on the care of their mother. The kits will stay in the den with their mother for 8 to 10 weeks and then begin to explore and forage for food on their own. While the young kits are somewhat independent at this stage, they will continue to stay with their mother for over a year.





White-tailed Deer:

Fawns best defense against predators is their ability to lie still. After fawns are born, their mother clean them well to remove any scent and guides her offspring to a bedding site. Instinctively the fawn knows to lay low and not make any sounds. The fawn's reddish pelt with white spots mimics the forest ground with sun dappling through, lack of developed scent glands and the ability to lower their heartrate when frightened all help to keep it well hidden from predators. The mother will return regularly to nurse and move the fawn to a new bedding area.

Skunks:

These guys are stinking cute! Skunks are burrowers, so females will often make a den under sheds and outbuildings. Similar to raccoons, the baby skunks are born hairless and will have their eyes shut for the first 3 weeks of their lives. The babies will have the ability to spray their infamous liquid when they are 8 days old, even before their eyes open! The kits will remain in the den for the 8 weeks and then waddle out on their own. Because of their offending odor very few animals prey upon them. One of the exceptions is the great horned owl and guess what they don't have a good sense of smell.

