

CARE OF ORPHANED RACOONS



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For Wildlife Rehabilitators in Ontario and Canada

This information is from a conglomerate of sources including IWRC & NWRA. Conferences by OWREN, NYSWRC and years of my own experiences that those of other Canadian Wildlife Rehabbers. I am not an expert, only a small backyard rehabilitator since about 1980.

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INFANT RACCOON

Keep Warm: Put the baby/babies in a box or cage with lots of rags and place a portion of the box/cage on a heating pad on **low**, leaving a portion unheated to allow the baby to move from the heat if necessary. Hot water in a jar, wrapped in a towel or a 'hot water bottle' can be used but the temperature must be monitored. If eyes are closed they will not climb but if eyes are open a secure



lid with lots of air holes is recommended so they don't climb out.

Find a wildlife rehabilitator in your area and get the animal to them as soon as possible. Can't locate one yet? Do the following and get the baby to a rehabber as soon as possible.

Examine: At least wash your hands, wear an old shirt or apron you can get rid of. Let's take a good look at it. Do you have some latex gloves you can wear? Write

down what you find. If you cannot differentiate between the raccoons, put a nontoxic coloured mark on their foreheads or small coloured thread about an ankle. ...note also if they are male or female...if you are unsure, it is probably a female.

If possible, weigh the animal [kitchen scales] and weight will determine food intake and allow you to track the growth of the baby. Check the chart. After working with the baby wash and sanitize your hands.

Watch for fleas and lice [some look like dandruff] and treat as you would a feline kitten. *Be careful with flea powders or sprays which can harm their lungs, put on to your fingers then apply sparingly to baby. Flea shampoos or Selsun Blue can also be used. Frontline or Advantage spray or drops for cats may be used on your raccoon. You can try putting a little Garlic Juice in the food almost every day.

*Discharges from body orifices? **Maggots?*** Check ears & under armpits for *ticks*. Does it look healthy or sick? Any of the above call a vet or treat like you would a cat, puppy or other infant wildlife.

If they have any of the above and you don't know what to do, you get to go to your local vet!

Dehydrated? Baby has been without Momma for how long? Don't know? Then presume it is dehydrated. Pinch the skin. If it stays 'pinched' it is dehydrated. You need to Re-hydrate.

Re-hydrate all orphans for a day at least or more if the animal needs it. *Homemade version:* 1-teaspoon salt, 1-Tablespoon sugar and 1-quart warm water. If you want to buy something, go a pharmacy and ask for Pedialyte a liquid of which you will throw out most of it or powders like Gastrolyte, which you can mix what you need. Administer with eyedropper or preferably a syringe [no needle]. You can get them from 1 to 10 CC sizes. Very slowly so they do not aspirate.

Wean the baby from the rehydration fluids onto the formula over a day or two, depending on how dehydrated it is. Give $\frac{3}{4}$ hydrating formula + $\frac{1}{4}$ formula. Next feeding $\frac{1}{2}$ + $\frac{1}{2}$. Then $\frac{1}{4}$ + $\frac{3}{4}$ etc.

New Information on formula: A study done by two Vets, one being Dr. Sherri Cox, felt that **Esbilac was better for raccoons** then KMR [Kitten Milk Replacement]

Formula: Esbilac puppy formula is available in pet stores and can be used although many rehabilitators use species specific like Raccoon Formula from Fox Valley nklc@aol.com www.foxvalleynutrition.com or (815) 385-6404. Whichever formula you can afford and get when needed, mix per instructions of you use Administer with bottle or syringe. Raccoons love to suck [beware of hickeys] and take quickly to human baby bottles although if very small and preemie nipple makes it easier. [I find most will take the bottle] At first, they may not want it, as it does not taste like Mom. Slip a syringe between their lips and get some in. Very quickly they get the idea and adapt to the new taste. Try to rub some formula on the nipple and they will probably take it. They are small and will only take a small amount depending on their size, note the chart below which will give you an idea of the approximate amount of intake. When they don't want more, stop. Watch their belly; do not feed so much it gets distended.



Feeding intervals depend on age and weight and the individual animal. Raccoons under 150 g may need five or six feedings per day. From 150-300g., they will likely require four feedings a day; from 300-600 g., three feedings daily may be sufficient. Amounts fed will vary by individual animal. A comfortable rule of thumb is 50 cc. /kg. Feed with the animal on its stomach, not flipped on its back. If stomach is a problem hold upright in one hand. Depends on the baby and your hands. **Growth Chart Age, on page 5. Feeding Schedule by IWRA by weight on page 6**

Nipple Extras: if the nipple aperture is too large, the animal will take in too much formula and often it will bubble out the nose. This situation has the potential to cause aspiration pneumonia should the animal inhale the formula. A set of similar sized nipples be given graduated aperture sizes. This helps prevent the problem of taking a nipple with a small aperture and making it larger and then not being able to use it on the next small infant. Finding nipples with small holes can be accomplished by purchasing preemie or juice nipples. Nipples should be kept very clean by washing with dish soap and hot water after each use. Old nipples that are frayed should be discarded. The size of the aperture on that nipple is too large for most infant mammals as well.



Many other types of nipples have been use for wildlife rehabilitation; Small mammals are often raised using "pet nurser" nipples. Some people have gotten creative and adapted their things to work. For examples, 3 cc syringe with a pet nurser pressed over the top of the syringe allows for the use of a nipple in a system where positive pressure can be applied and milk can be dripped onto the tongue to tempt them to feed.

*Do not use a microwave as essential enzymes are destroyed, making it more difficult for any wildlife or humans to digest their food, normally not a problem if healthy but if their health is uncertain or compromised it can make a difference. Recommended by a Naturopath and personal experience with family and wildlife. Mix small amounts and warms up in hot water in a bowl or sink.

GROWTH /AGING CHART

100 grams is 3.5 ounces!

Birth	62g & 100mm [4"]	Large head ears sealed, eyes closed.	Heating pad partially under cage-watch for dry skin	
3-4days	60-70 g up to 140g	lose umbilical cord	“	
1 week	100g	Fuzzy fur, faint mask spider crawling	“	
2 week	200g	Mask defined, tail rings, Ears flat to head Holding with hands	“	
3-4 weeks	Approx. 350- 400g	Eyes open by 4 th week	Heating pad can often be removed at this time if there are siblings	Put litter in cage
4-5 weeks	Approx. 500g	Ears unfold Vision still cloudy Eyes can cross Wobbly walking Teeth are coming in	Can try soaked kibble mixed with formula Try eating on their own.	
6-7 weeks	Approx.600-700g	Getting mobile Start climbing in cage	Use water bottle Start sampling alternate foods.	enrichment items to play with.
7 weeks	700-800g	Run, walk, climb React to motion objects and light	Nature items like Branches, weeds pinecones, stones	
8 weeks	Approx. 850g +	They are very busy and playing	Should be in large outdoor cage with branches to climb	Basin or little pool of water to play in.
+	These are the fun	weeks when they grow. like weeds and are amazing		Play. Enjoy!
16 weeks	Time to assess if they ready to go as a group.	If necessary hold them back to everyone is ready. Depends on the release site and weather		Mom's milk is dried up
Anytime after	16 weeks the	Raccoons can be released	If you feel they are ready.	Are they pacing, restless etc.

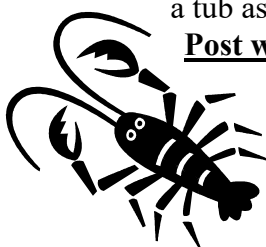
WRA FEEDING CHART

A comfortable rule of thumb is 50 cc./kg The following chart is to be used as a **guideline**. Remember every animal is different and will eat varying amounts, just like children.

How to use this chart: Weigh the animal periodically. Refer to the table on the right and based on the feeding intervals used, feed the corresponding amount shown.

<u>Body Weight</u>		<u>DAILY CALORIC</u>	<u>AMOUNT TO FEED AT VARIOUS</u>		
		<u>Intake Reqmt</u>	<u>FEEDING INTERVALS IN C C</u>		
			<u>Convert cc to oz divide by 28.35</u>		
<u>Oz</u>	<u>grams</u>	<u>KCAL/Day</u>	<u>3X/day</u>	<u>4X/Day</u>	<u>5X/day</u>
1.76	50.00	14.80			
2.65	75.00	20.06			
3.53	100.00	24.90			5.72
4.41	125.00	29.43			6.77
5.29	150.00	33.74			7.76
6.17	175.00	37.88			8.71
7.05	200.00	41.87			9.63
8.82	250.00	49.50		14.22	11.38
10.58	300.00	56.75		16.31	13.05
12.34	350.00	63.71		18.31	14.65
14.11	400.00	83.24		20.23	16.19
21.16	600.00	95.44		23.92	19.14
24.69	700.00	107.14	41.05	27.43	21.94
28.22	800.00	118.43	45.37	30.79	24.63
31.74	900.00	129.36	49.56	34.03	27.22
35.27	1000.00	140.00	53.64	37.17	29.74
38.80	1000.00	150.37	57.61	40.23	32.18
42.32	1200.00	160.51	61.50	43.21	34.57
45.85	1300.00	170.45	65.30	46.12	39.18
49.38	1400.00	180.19	69.04	48.98	41.42
52.91	1500.00	189.76	72.70	51.78	43.62

Weaning: Introduce blended puppy kibble (a reputable brand, not generic) into the formula by four weeks of age. Offer moist puppy kibble from 6 weeks of age onward. Wean as early as possible. Certainly, there should be no bottle feeding by the age of 9 weeks. You might want to feed them in a tub as they are quite messy, and this makes easier clean-up for you.



Post weaning: Offer dry kibble at all times. Choice between Natural foods and Store-bought foods.

Wild Diet Two to three times daily, offer moist foods including natural foods such as chicks, rats, mice, crayfish, fish, insects, mollusks, clams, oysters, insects, snails, frogs, worms, and young fish, birds, and mammals, corn, acorns, fruits, berries, and fruits. Offer live foods only to pre-fasted animals.

Usually, the first kill is not efficient (they may bite the tail end of the animal). Do not start with a prey animal capable of mounting a major defense to the attack (i.e., large rat). Instead, start with a crayfish or fish and work up to mice and then rats. Following the first kill, they usually learn to go after the head or neck and quickly kill their prey provided, they are hungry.

Store Bought Foods. For those who don't have access to a raccoon's 'normal' food, you can substitute human foods. They require fruit vegetables, calcium, and protein. You can use thawed mixed frozen veggies as well as some broccoli and cauliflower. [In summer heat vegsicles can be popsicles enjoyed! Fresh fruits they would find in the wild are best. If using canned fruit cocktail



or other with syrup rinsed it off. Cottage cheese for calcium, cooked chicken for protein and the bones for calcium. They chew their food, dogs do not. A cat/dog one a day vitamin never hurts, if you can find one. The photo gives an idea.

How much? Watch, use common sense if they are getting too fat, cut them back. As they finish cleaning out the dishes you can add a bit more the next meal. By 8 weeks they should be on solids about 3x a day; By 3 months they could go down to 2 X a day.

For a litter I mix all the above in a big bowl and spoon out individual servings

Never use any type of canned pet food but you can use a nutritional puppy chow as a base.

Chocolate and too much salt can kill infants. **Our junk food is not good for them!** No marshmallows or chips etc. in the wild!

Poop & Pee: After feeding stimulate the intestinal and anal area, Momma coon would have done this by licking in a downward motion to their bum. You can do the same with a warm wet rag or cotton ball. If very dehydrated, they may not urinate or defecate immediately. After their eyes open their increased wiggling and playing allows them to eliminate on their own. No matter the age you do it until you are sure they can. [Normally the often go 2x a day.] When eyes open put a small container of litter, that they can climb into. I use unscented clay kitty litter which is not powdery and harder to inhale. Their stool/feces/poo will turn to soft yellow and should be formed but watch for diarrhea. A couple of drops of Kaopectate can be used for diarrhea. [Gloves, hand washing and careful hygiene are recommended here as raccoon feces carries a roundworm that is very harmful to humans and pets.]

Housing

Your little infants need appropriate size caging. Much depends on the number of raccoons you have. They will need room to run and climb. I go through a series of cage sizes ranging from hamster cage; double hamster cage to rabbit cages [3'x2'], or large dog steel dog cages, [covered in ½" chicken wire] while they are indoors. From 3-4 weeks they should have a heating pad under *part* the cage. If they get too warm, they can move off it. Hot water in a jar, wrapped in a towel or a 'hot water bottle' can be used but the temperature must be monitored.

Several cozy rags can be used for a nest, but make sure there are no raveling edges that they can get tangled up in. A nice little box with holes and a lid makes a great house. A series of plastic containers with appropriate air holes and doors etc. work well and are easily cleaned. As the baby grows, they prefer their house to be up high, if that is manageable.

Note that as they get older, they can often figure out how to open their cages in ways you can't imagine!

Once their eyes are open put a small container of kitty litter in the cage for them. It is amazing how quickly they will use it. If they don't place some poo into the litter so they get the idea!



Once the weather is moderate, and they are approx. five weeks old they can go in 'the big cage' outside. My cage is 4'h x 4'w x 6'l and made of ½" wire around a wood frame. I use this size for 3 raccoons. It has a wood floor, which is easily hosed clean and bleached etc.

Some rehabbers prefer to put straw for the flooring. Note it must be changed very frequently as they will use it for a toilet and fleas and mold can form quickly.

Large plastic container boxes [with lid] have plenty of air holes and a door cut out. These can be used later [with the door hole plugged] to transport them to the wild. Rags are used for bedding and when older you can provide them with leaves, twigs etc. to line their nest. They are also waterproof. Raccoons like to be up in trees so mount the box securely on a shelf near the top of the cage.

Some make permanently mounted wooden boxes or secure the plastic ones to a wooden shelf.

They also love to have a hammock to play, swing and sleep in up high in the cage. It can be made from old blankets or sweatshirts. Branches and levels help develop balances and muscles.

Pinecones and stones make good toys as well as most toys you would give a human toddler. They love to play toys help them develop the dexterity required in the wild. They will even wind a clock.

Water should always be available. Some rehabbers keep food in the cage at all times others prefer to have feeding time and remove to keep the flies and parasites down.

Make sure there is a container of real garden dirt in the cage for them. They will eat dirt for minerals and assorted insects as well as play in it.

Make sure there is shade for them. This can always be achieved by a tarp on top of the cage.

If you can't let them out of the cage for a romp, make sure the cage is larger. They love a dishpan of water to play in and learn to catch fish and crayfish in. Put some stones in it to practice with.

IWRA recommends 6'x8'x8' for 4 raccoons, which frankly I think is way too small to achieve decent exercise.

Roundworm: Raccoon feces carries a very dangerous type of round worm that can be transferred to other animals, pets and humans. It is very strong and cannot be killed by even bleach. Once a cage is used for raccoons it should not be used for other animals. Bleaching the cage after use is till recommended for other parasites and bacteria.

Raccoons **must be dewormed** once a week with Strongid T .25ml per pound of raccoon. We usually wait until their eyes are open to start, however if you are having with digestive problems with your baby diarrhea, gas, vomiting, try the Strongid. Or if you prefer the All-Natural way you can use seeds from Cantaloupe or pumpkin seeds Fig Juice or Cloves.

Quarantine of incoming animals is recommended for two weeks before introducing them to another group. We have seen lung infections and other serious transmittable diseases wipe out several litters. It doesn't happen often but it is devastating when it does.

If one of the babies is 'acting strangely' quarantine it until you are sure it well. It is not worth risking the lives of the whole litter.

Diseases

As you gain experience you will learn to recognize specific signs and symptoms of various diseases. As you learn keep a book that you can refer to later. Until then. Think of these babies much like a kitten. If they eat, poop and play...they are usually doing well. If any of those change, there is a problem. Call a fellow rehabber or get to a vet. If it doesn't look 'normal' it isn't. If they start staggering, walking in circles or sleeping too much. Call a fellow rehabber or get to a vet.

Lung Infections can come from aspirated formula, which their tiny lungs are unable to cough out. It becomes infected and eats away at the lung until it is perforated in the chest cavity and they die. This is probably the leading cause of infant death after they are orphaned.

Some lung infections are from exposure and malnutrition. If suspected get the animal on antibiotics immediately. To the Vet!

Coccidian a devastating disease as it is very contagious and can wipe out your whole litter. Symptoms will be apparent about one week after exposures so in most cases this will be very shortly after you receive the babies. Symptoms include Blood in stool [the poop looks very dark/black not

red]. Diarrhea, sever cough' runny eyes [almost like a white glue and is difficult to dissolve]; near the end convulsions. Beware that fatality rate is high. Most rehabbers have the animal put down when convulsions start.

Treatment-Get to a vet! Quarantine your animals, blankets, bottles etc. For one rehabber Amoxicillin was given twice a day then was followed by a Sulpha Drug S125, was proscribed one tablet twice a day crushed and given in their formula. [Unfortunately, the whole litter died] But give this information to your vet so they know what has happened precious and contact me to change this if it occurs to you and various treatments were successful. Email-lbeechey52@gmail.com

Toxemia all though rare does occur in wildlife babies. Symptoms include sudden signs of distress: crying; dragging their behind; assuming a fetal position; lethargy and lack of defecation. Can be fatal within 10 hours and only if diagnosed immediately, extensive, heroic measures by a veterinarian might be successful.

Distemper & Rabies :no cure or treatment for the animals at this time. Vaccines are available for pets to prevent infection.

Rabies is spread through bites that break the skin getting infected saliva in an open cut, sore, mouth, nose, eyes or other wounds. Rabies **cannot** be transmitted through contact with the blood, urine, or feces of an infected animal.

Distemper is more visible in early stages and **Humans don't get Distemper.**

Signs and symptoms of canine distemper

Distemper affects the immune, respiratory, and neurological systems of infected animals. Distemper signs and symptoms can vary greatly between individual animals and species. Signs can include:

- ❖ runny nose
- ❖ watery eyes
- ❖ respiratory infection
- ❖ vomiting
- ❖ diarrhea
- ❖ fever
- ❖ thickening of the foot pads

+ *Neurological signs such as ---these symptoms are from the sentence & listed to be more visible*

- ❖ **paralysis,**
- ❖ *disorientation*
- ❖ *wandering aimlessly in a circle,*

MNR<https://www.ontario.ca/page/canine-distemper#section-2>

Symptoms Rabies in wildlife

Rabies is most often bats, foxes, skunks and raccoons.

There are two forms of rabies in mammals: dumb form & furious form

Some animals can show signs of both forms.

❖ **Dumb form**

Animals with the furious form of rabies may:

- ❖ lose their fear of humans
- ❖ become depressed and retreat to isolated places
- ❖ become partially **paralyzed** (watch for abnormal facial expression,
- ❖ drooling, drooping head,
- ❖ sagging jaw,
- ❖ strange sounds,
- ❖ paralysis in the hind limbs that spreads to the rest of the body)

○ **Furious form**

- be extremely excited and aggressive.
- gnaw at and bite their own limbs.
- attack other objects or animals.
- be alternately agitated and depressed.

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/rabies-wildlife#section-1>

The test for rabies in wildlife, requires the animal to be killed first. Rabies is spread through: bites that break the skin* getting infected saliva in an open cut, sore or other wound* getting infected saliva in the mouth, nose or eyes * direct contact with infected brain or nervous system tissue through broken skin or mucous membranes in the eyes, nose, or mouth

2023 saw 6 confirmed cases of rabies in Ontario

Release

MNR regulations state they must be released within 15 km from where they were located.

Raccoons are released at about 20 weeks (5 months) of age, depending on the individual and the way in which they are released. Those that are **slow released** [open the cage and they come and go], or food is provided at the release site, can be released at (16 weeks).

Weather and location can also vary the release age. If further north where cold and snow comes earlier and a soft release maybe achievable, if you need get them back in the wild before snow comes. They should be monitored in case food supplements are needed.

Fast/Hard Release They are typically 16-20 weeks of age. They often let you know when by pacing the cage; becoming more aggressive with each other etc., they are ready! Hopefully they have had some training in your enclosure/yard and should be self-sufficient and good hunters and foragers before leaving.

Make sure there is water, berries, insects, frogs etc. in the bush. This is getting more difficult as humans encroach on their territories. Care should be taken not to place them in areas where prey species are of special concern, the numbers of raccoons released in a given area should be controlled so that their impact on the area is minimized. They should have had no interaction with dogs or humans.



Post-release feeding can be provided for several weeks or until no longer utilized by the raccoon. Feeding stations should not be permanent! Good rule of thumb is to take food out for them every day the first week. Every second day the second week. Every third day the third week. Unlike some other animals, raccoons will hang around for the food and you must wean them off. Do not bring them their favourite foods. They must learn to forage for their own food.

It is hard to leave them, at first especially and they will often follow you or your scent, so get your car as close as possible and get out of there asap so there is no scent to follow.

The two in this photo in less than 1 week with a soft release, didn't come to the site until after we left. Sneaking back later we found them in the creek hunting and having not touched what we brought. After that they were not seen at the release site again for their Uber Eats delivery.