

ANR-1396

# Lost, Abandoned, or Orphaned Deer Fawns

Every summer in Alabama, usually around July and August, white-tailed deer give birth to fawns. On occasion, these fawns are discovered by humans outside working on their property, hiking, camping, sightseeing, or bird watching. Most people are excited to find a fawn, and it is an amazing sight. Many times, the fawn's mother (called a *doe*) is not in the immediate area, and people assume that the fawn is abandoned, orphaned, or lost. Frequently, their good intentions lead them to pick up the fawn and carry it home. However, this is not the right thing to do.

## Fawns and Does

Unlike humans, white-tailed deer mothers don't spend much time with their fawns for the first few weeks after giving birth. In fact, a doe will only visit her fawn about four to six times a day and for only about 15 to 30 minutes per visit to nurse the fawn. It's more common for the doe not to be with the fawn during this period. This is normal, natural white-tailed deer behavior that increases the chance of the fawn's survival.

Why don't does spend more time with their fawns? They don't spend much time with their newborn fawns because they want to reduce the chance that a predator may find the fawn. Deer fawns are nearly scentless at birth; however, the doe is not scentless. She smells like a deer. The more time she spends around the fawn, the more scent she leaves in the area, and the greater chance a predator may key in on her scent to find the fawn. Additionally, her behavior when around the fawn may cue predators that a fawn is in the area. Although the fawn is capable of walking soon after it's born (similar to horses), it is still relatively weak and can't outrun most predators. It's in the fawn's best interest to hide and remain still until it is developed enough to outrun predators.



White-tailed deer fawns are born in July and August in Alabama.

### **What should I do if I find a fawn?**

- Leave it alone. Do not disturb, distract, or touch the fawn.
- Walk away from the fawn quietly and slowly.
- Do not call a conservation officer. Officers know that fawns are being born.
- Do not take the fawn to an animal shelter or veterinary clinic.

### **What if my neighbor picked up a fawn and brought it home?**

- Possession of live wild animals is illegal. A conservation officer won't grant you a permit to keep the fawn. He or she will write you a ticket for illegal possession and confiscate the fawn.
- Immediately return the fawn to the exact place where it was found. The doe will be looking for it.



**Does will only visit their fawns four to six times a day for 15 to 30 minutes per visit to nurse.**

### Fawns Raised By Humans

Aside from it being illegal to possess wild white-tailed deer fawns, there are many challenges to raising a wild fawn at home. The chances of success are slim. The fawn has a far better chance of surviving if it is raised by its mother in the wild. Additionally, fawns that are raised in captivity and then released into the wild have relatively low survival rates because they become accustomed to living around humans and lose some of their natural instincts.

Keeping buck (male) fawns can present additional problems as they become sexually mature. Mature bucks that are raised in captivity often become aggressive during the breeding season. This aggression may be turned toward their human caregivers, frequently resulting in serious bodily injuries.

Although it may seem like you have to do something to help a fawn, it is far better for the fawn if you do nothing and leave it where you found it. Remember, it is illegal to possess wild white-tailed deer fawns.

### Myths About Deer Fawns

**Myth:** I didn't see its mother. It must be orphaned or abandoned.

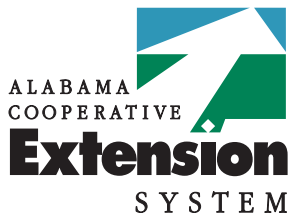
**Fact:** The doe is likely somewhere close. As mentioned earlier, white-tailed deer mothers spend relatively little time with their fawns during the first few weeks after they are born. The mother knows exactly where she left her fawn. Research with radio-collared does and fawns has shown that doe survival is very high during the summer months, and does rarely abandon their fawns.

**Myth:** If a human touches a fawn, its mother won't accept it.

**Fact:** If a fawn has been handled by a human and has human scent on it, the doe will still accept the fawn. She just spent 7 months carrying this fawn. A little human scent won't make her give it up.

**Myth:** It is okay to touch the fawn, you just have to leave it where it is.

**Fact:** It's not a good idea to touch fawns or to disturb the area where you find one. The more time a person spends around a fawn, the more human scent is left in the area. A clever coyote or domestic dog may follow your human scent trail and find the fawn at the end of it. It is best to slowly leave the area and not return.



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**For more information**, call your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find the number.

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