

***Don't Pick Up!—***

# Baby Animal Time

"Please don't pick up baby animals!" is the caution of Alaska Department of Fish and Game Fairbanks Area Biologist Mel Buchholtz.

"Now is the time of year when we are starting to see the Spring crop of calves, pups, cubs, kits, goslings, ducklings, and other kinds of young wildlife," Buchholtz said. "Picking up these animals can be dangerous both to the animal and the person who picks them up."

Normally, young animals that seem to be wounded or abandoned aren't that at all. According to Buchholtz, moose, squirrel, bird, duck and other wildlife mothers will occasionally leave their young in what they think is a safe place and go off for a short while.

If a concerned person picks up the animal and moves it, chances are it may never be re-united with its mother.

"Sometimes people will try to be a substitute mother for the baby animals," he said. "Picking up or holding baby animals is prohibited by state or federal law, and beyond that, humans can rarely take care of all the needs of a young animal."

Buchholtz said that even if a wild animal is successfully raised, it usually cannot be returned to the wild. Merely turning it loose could result in its starving to death or being caught by a predator.

In many cases the animal will become a nuisance and must be destroyed, especially in the case of red squirrels.

A very real hazard in picking up some types of wildlife is contracting some type of disease. Foxes are a well-known source of rabies, but a number of other animal species also carry it. Persons who have been exposed to rabies must undergo a painful series of shots.

Another potential hazard of getting too near young wildlife is an irate mother, Buchholtz said. Moose and bear, and even smaller wildlife species can cause serious injuries to humans.

So what do you do if you come across an animal that appears to be lost, wounded, or sick? "First of all watch from a safe distance," Buchholtz advises, "then call your local office of the Department of Fish and Game, and we'll be happy to check it out."