



Wildlife Lodge and Clinic director Lynn Posey feeds a rescued baby squirrel Thursday, Aug. 4, 2010 Aug. 3, 2010.....Sioux City Journal photo by Tim Hynds

Wildlife Lodge and Clinic

## **Expert: Use caution when aiding sick or injured wild animals**

**By Dolly A. Butz - [dbutz@siouxcityjournal.com](mailto:dbutz@siouxcityjournal.com) | Posted: Friday, August 6, 2010 10:30 pm**

SIoux CITY -- Sitting at her dining room table Wednesday, Lynn Posey filled a syringe with a special warm formula sweetened with a touch of syrup and placed it in the mouth of a baby squirrel wrapped in a fleece blanket.

The squirrel the director of the Wildlife Lodge and Clinic calls "Ginger" was found abandoned just north of Sioux City a week ago.

But Posey cautioned that wild animals should not be viewed as potential pets.

She recommends that anyone who finds an abandoned or injured baby wild animal place the creature back in its nest and wait to see if its mother returns. If she doesn't, Posey said, you should pull on a pair of rubber gloves, pick up the animal, put it in a safe, warm place and call a wildlife rehabilitator. Don't feed the animal, and by all means, don't try to nurse it back to health yourself and keep it as a pet.

"It's not a good idea," Posey said. "Wild animals should be released into the wild. (A pet) isn't what they're meant to be. They're meant to be wild animals."

Posey, a former nurse trained in emergency medicine who has worked with wildlife for 15 years, warns that there are many dangers associated with taking in a sick or orphaned animal, including numerous parasites and diseases, such as rabies.

A northwest Iowa family found out that wild animals don't make good pets when the baby skunk they brought home to raise became ill last month. The skunk was tested and found to have the rabies virus that affects the central nervous system. The family, who has not been identified by the Iowa Department of Public Health, is undergoing treatment for rabies.

Question: What is rabies?

Answer: The rabies virus is a disease of the brain that ultimately results in death. An infected animal most often transmits rabies to a human through a bite.

Q: What animals carry the rabies virus?

A: Rabies is most common in skunks, foxes and insect-eating bats and raccoons. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that the current strain of raccoon rabies virus has not been documented west of Ohio. Rabies is sometimes found in very large rodents. Birds, fish, insects, lizards, snakes and turtles never get rabies. Sioux City Animal Adoption & Rescue Center operator Cindy Rarrat said the rabies virus is more prevalent in wildlife than in cats and dogs because more people are vaccinating their pets for rabies. "Typically they've seen it in bats, that's usually where the greatest concentration of rabies is because you can't vaccinate bats," she said.

Q: How prevalent is rabies?

A: The CDC reports that in 2008, 49 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico tested more than 121,000 animals and found 6,841 cases of rabies in animals and two in humans, a decrease of 3.1 percent from the 7,060 cases reported in 2007. The number of human deaths in the United States attributed to rabies has declined from 100 or more each year to an average of two or three each year, according to the CDC. The last person to die of rabies in Iowa was a 20-year-old man who became infected with a variant of the virus associated with silver-haired and eastern pipistrelle bats in September 2002. It was the first case of human rabies in the state since 1951.

Q: How can you determine whether a wild animal has rabies?

A: Rarrat said seeing a nocturnal animal out during the day, if the weather isn't overcast or cloudy, should raise red flags. "If it's a animal going around in circles, it's acting sick, it's very withdrawn, that is cause for concern," she said. However, frothing at the mouth doesn't necessarily indicate a rabid animal, according to Rarrat. "It can be a sign of rabies, but a lot of time they have to remember when it's hot out like this, a lot of animals -- dogs, cats wildlife -- will froth at the mouth only because they're hot or they've been running."

Q: If you've been bitten by a bat or suspect you've been bitten, what should you do?

A: The virus can only be transmitted three to 10 days before the death of a rabid animal. The need for rabies post-exposure prophylaxis -- preventive treatment -- is an urgency, not an emergency. "You might just wake up in a room and there's a bat. It might have bitten you while you were sleeping and you didn't know," said Michelle Clausen Rosendahl, environmental division coordinator for the Siouxland District Health Department. "You've got some time to get to the doctor and start that post-exposure prophylaxis." People cannot transmit rabies to other people unless they themselves are sick with rabies.

Q: What symptoms do humans with rabies display?

A: Clausen Rosendahl said it's likely too late for humans showing symptoms of rabies, an infection that progresses over a period of two to 21 days. Once symptoms have begun, the illness is almost always fatal. A prodromal -- or early symptoms -- phase, lasting two to 10 days, is characterized by

pain and numbness or tingling at the site of the bite. Other symptoms include fatigue, headache, fever, apprehension, anxiety, agitation, irritability, insomnia and depression. During the neurologic phase, the patient may suffer disorientation, hallucinations, paralysis, episodes of terror and excitement, hydrophobia, hyperventilation and seizures. Coma and death follow.

Q: If you come across an injured or orphaned wild animal, what should you do?

A: Rarrat said anyone who sees a sick or orphaned wild animal should not touch it and should contact the proper authorities: the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, outside of city limits, and Sioux City Animal Adoption & Rescue Center inside the city.

Q: How are humans infected with rabies treated?

A: The patient is given one dose of rabies immune globulin and three or four doses of rabies vaccine. The vaccine used to be injected daily into the stomach. Today the vaccine is administered through the arm, like a flu shot or tetanus vaccine.

Q: How many animals are infected with rabies in Iowa per year?

A: As of July 27, the rabies virus had been detected in 12 animals tested in the state. Five of them were bats, six were skunks and one was a fox. Two of the rabid skunks were found in Lyon and O'Brien counties.

Q: How can you protect your pet from rabies?

A: Get your pet vaccinated. "A rabies vaccination is good for several different reasons: It protects your animal from infectious disease. The second thing it does is, it provides information on who that animal belongs to so that if we pick it up, we can get that animal back to the owner. The third thing it does is provide information if you get bit by an animal," Rarrat said.

Q: What should you do if your pet is bitten by a rabid animal?

A: Unvaccinated pets exposed to a rabid animal should be euthanized or placed in isolation for six months and be vaccinated one month before being released. Dogs and cats that have been vaccinated should be kept under observation for 45 days, according to the CDC.

Positive rabies cases in Iowa 2004 - 2009

2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 Total

Bat 47 60 28 13 11 11 170

Skunk 28 33 13 5 7 13 99

Cat 11 5 7 7 9 3 42

Cow 10 7 4 0 1 5 27

Dog 3 2 2 5 1 2 15

Horse 0 1 3 1 0 0 5

Fox 1 0 0 0 0 0 1

Squirrel 0 0 0 0 0 1 1

Badger 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Total 100 108 57 31 29 35 360

Source: Iowa Department of Public Health