

# Feeding wildlife: Harmful or helpful?

A bale of hay left out for the deer. A garbage can sitting open in an alleyway, ready for a raccoon to hop right in. A peanut offered by hand to a squirrel.

Many people feed wildlife. Some feel they are helping animals. Others just want to see wildlife up close. And some are feeding wildlife without even knowing it!

Whether done on purpose or accidentally, feeding wild animals is a bad idea. Here are just a few of the reasons why.

PHOTO: MICHAEL BECKETT

## Stay wild, stay alive

Wild animals normally have a healthy fear of humans. They like to keep their distance, which is a good thing – it keeps us both safe. When animals are attracted by food, they tend to come closer to us to get it. Over time, they become “habituated.” They get used to eating near people, and are much less afraid.

Being unafraid puts wild animals at risk of getting hurt or killed. They can be hit by a car, or even poisoned or shot at by someone looking to get rid of their “wildlife problem.” They may also become really bold, and break into buildings or threaten people and pets for food.

## Easy pickins

When you attract smaller wildlife by feeding, you also encourage their larger predators like coyotes, bears and cougars. While eating food laid out on the ground, predators can easily sneak up and attack.

## Junk food junkies

Wild animals have evolved to eat natural foods from their environment to stay healthy. Human food usually contains too much sugar, salt and fat. It makes them unhealthy and can even cause tooth problems. And if they're feeding off of garbage, they often ingest dangerous items like plastic or glass.

Plus, all food – natural or not – can go bad. Food put out for wildlife often gets damp and goes mouldy. Then, when animals eat it, they can get sick.

MAIN PHOTO CREDIT: MICHAEL DURHAM/GETTY IMAGES

## Spreading sickness

Wild animals don't often get together in large groups. But when they are all attracted by food to the same spot, they can be found in big numbers. This can encourage disease spread, not only among wildlife, but to pets and people too.

## Creating couch potatoes

Wild animals are smart. They remember the places where people feed them and will go back to the same spots again and again. Plus, they like an easy meal. So it's not surprising when animals start to rely on people for food. But this can lead to habituation and all the health and safety risks already mentioned.

Also, when mothers bring their young to the feeding spots, it teaches the babies that humans are not to be feared. The young also lose the ability to find food in the wild. Dependence on human hand-outs over the long term hurts wildlife.

So, for everyone's health and safety, it's best for wildlife to stay wild. And we can help keep animals wild by not feeding them!



## Help the BC SPCA celebrate Wildlife Awareness Month!

The BC SPCA has selected April as Wildlife Awareness Month. Here are some things you can do to help wildlife:

- ✓ Encourage your school to adopt a “food-free schoolyard” policy. Many schools allow students to eat their snack outside at recess. Some students toss apple cores and half-eaten sandwiches into the bushes. This can attract wildlife. Ask your school to create a rule where all students have to eat their snack inside.
- ✗ Don't throw apple cores, banana peels and other garbage out car windows. Tossed food from cars attracts wild animals to the sides of roads, putting them at risk.
- ✓ Secure your garbage. Keep your trash can inside until the morning it gets collected. If you must keep it outside, secure the lid with a bungee cord.
- ✓ Use roadside compost pick-up. Compost bins can attract wildlife, including rats. Write a letter to your municipal council, asking them to adopt a roadside compost pick-up system. Each household gets a plastic bin to fill and the city empties them. That way, the compost isn't just sitting there waiting for wildlife!
- ✓ Store hay indoors to avoid attracting deer.
- ✗ Don't feed your pets outside – it's an open invitation for raccoons and skunks!
- ✓ Pick up fallen fruit. It can be dangerous to have bears and coyotes too close to your house.

**Note: It's also against the law to feed bears and coyotes!**

And remember to celebrate wildlife by visiting a local nature reserve or going for a walk, and taking photos!

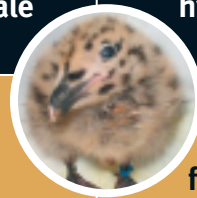


**Hum!** Baby birds tap the beaks of their parents to stimulate them to regurgitate food.

# Wild ARC



PATIENT:	REASON AT WILD ARC:	IN
Beaver Adult, female	Dragged out of a lake by a dog running free	Fra sh
Eagle Adult, female	Electrocuted by hydro wire	Badly wing – n tissue permanen and
Gull, juvenile	Fell from roof	Minor
Fawn Male, 6 months	Orphaned – mother was killed by a car	
Litter of raccoon kits, a few weeks old	Orphaned – mother was likely hit by a car	Deh em



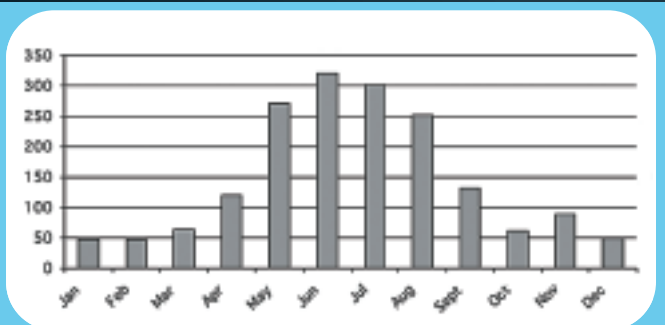
**From soaring eagles electrocuted by hydro wires,** beavers dragged from their homes by marauding dogs, to songbirds flying into windows – the BC SPCA's Wild ARC (Animal Rehabilitation Centre) helps all kinds of wild animals. Nestled on the edge of a wilderness ravine near Victoria, Wild ARC takes in close to 1,600 injured wild animals each year.

The task of caring for injured and sick wildlife is extremely challenging. Each animal has its own special needs and difficult decisions need to be made each time an animal is admitted to Wild ARC, as many animals cannot make full recoveries and, therefore, cannot be released back into the wild. Since opening in 1997, Wild ARC has helped over 143 different species of mammals, birds and reptiles and released over 4,000 animals! Check out just a small sample of animals cared for at Wild ARC (see table).

Though staff and volunteers work around the clock to help animals at Wild ARC, the reality is that not all can

be saved. In fact, only one third of animals are released back to the wild. But you can take action to do your part to keep wildlife safe. Keep your dog under control when off-leash; keep your cat indoors; place silhouettes of prey animals on your windows or use a product like WindowAlert to prevent birds from flying into your windows; and make sure your trash stays in the trash. For more information about BC SPCA's Wild ARC, including wish-list items and ways you can sponsor an animal in their care, visit [www.wildarc.com](http://www.wildarc.com).

**The bar graph shows the number of animals that come in each month at Wild ARC. As you can see, some months are busier than others but it doesn't mean staff and volunteers sit dormant during low animal periods – they keep busy catching up with paper work, maintaining the building and wildlife pens, promoting and educating the public about the work of the centre and doing lots of fundraising!**





**Fact:** At Wild ARC, animals are fed from sun-up to sun-down. Sometimes that's 50 times a day for just one animal!



# to the Rescue!

<b>JURY:</b>	<b>FEED:</b>	<b>STAY AT WILD ARC:</b>	<b>CAUTION:</b>	<b>OUTCOME:</b>
Fractured mandible	Yams, carrots, squash & sweet potatoes	In the care of staff and volunteers for one week, transferred to another facility with larger ponds.	Beavers will bite! They also carry the bacteria Giardia (Beaver Fever).	Died at second care centre, possibly due to an undetected internal injury or from stress from being in captivity.
Wing damaged no circulation, tissue necrotic – no flight wing use	Fish (herring, salmon) mice, rats, quail		Talons and beak are very powerful	Euthanized after initial examination – damage too extensive. Without the ability to fly, she would have never survived in the wild.
Wing injury	Fish	6 to 8 weeks	No risk of bites at this age	Released into groups with other gulls.
n/a	Formula, as she gets older, a variety of grains, various green plants and grasses	4 to 6 months	Challenges: Finding a place to release fawns can be very difficult. Staff must travel quite a distance to find a quiet area, where the fawn will not be in danger of traffic and human contact.	Released into the wild in the fall.
Dehydrated and malnourished	4 to 5 bottle feedings of formula per day when little. Gradually weaned onto solid food – an omnivorous diet.	4 to 5 months	Raccoons will bite! They can also carry roundworm, parvo and distemper viruses.	Released back into the wild.

**Tip:** Raccoon and deer mothers will forage for food and leave their young behind, if you find fawns or kits, do not touch or feed them. Watch and wait; their mothers will most likely return.



**Tip: Fledging period HELP!**  
When to call, when not...  
If you see a young gull that you think is stranded, monitor him. Chances are that his parents are around and you do not need to call a wildlife centre or the SPCA. If the gull is in a high traffic area, try to herd him to the nearest bush or grass area. Call a wildlife centre if:  
• Juveniles are still all downy and still have all their spots (at this age, they are too young to be away from the nest);  
• The gull appears sick or injured.

**Want to be a wildlife rehabilitator?**  
Visit [www.sPCA.bc.ca/kids](http://www.sPCA.bc.ca/kids) to learn what it takes to become one!