

LOOK. ENJOY. MOVE ON.

Submitted by the Earthfire Institute

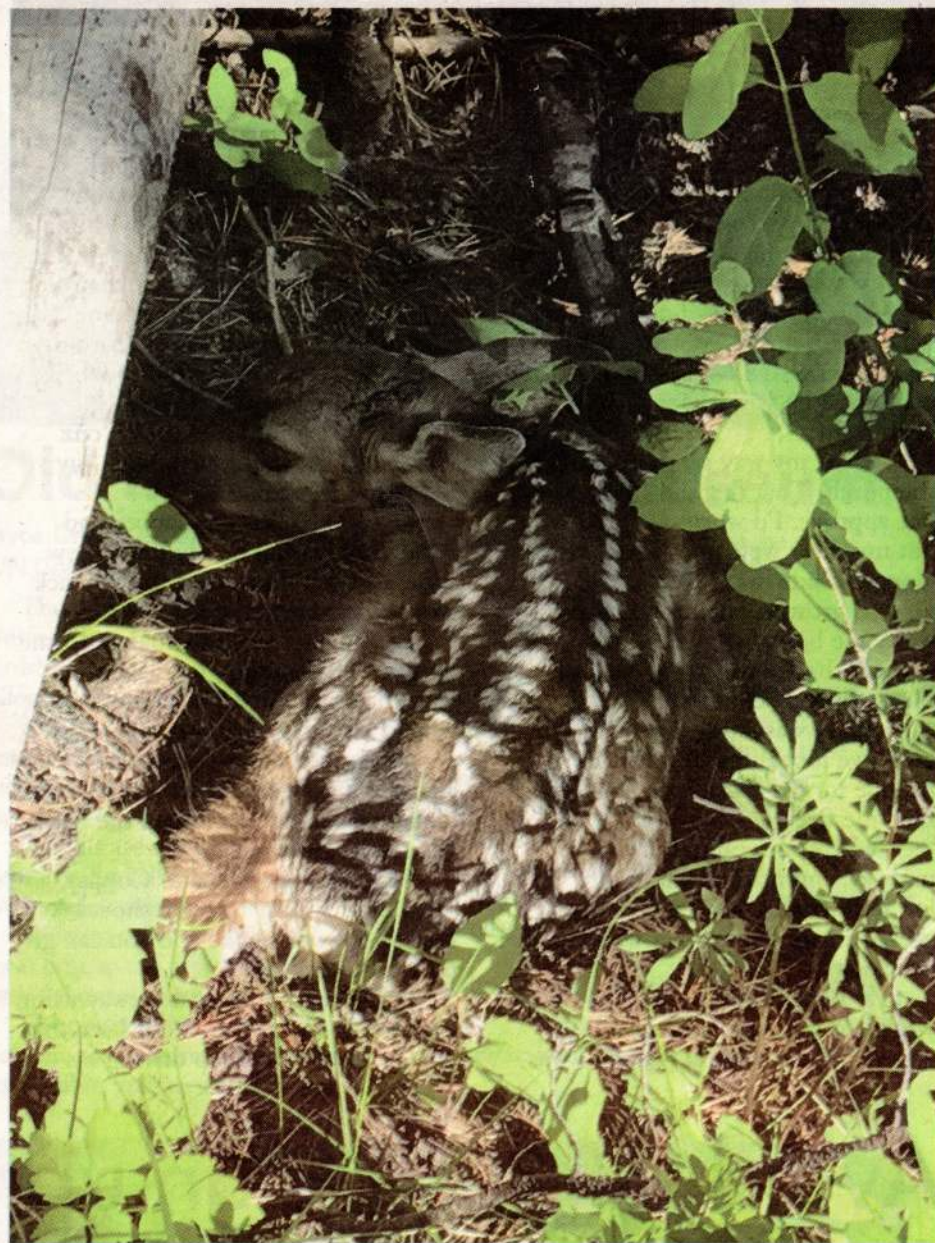
We in Teton Valley love our wildlife and want to do what's best for it. Our human heart responds when we see an animal baby that seems to be abandoned. But a warm, heart-based response needs to be coupled with knowledge of what is best for the animal. This is the season for baby deer, moose, elk and other hoofed wildlife. According to Fish and Game biologist Rob Cavallaro the normal birthing and early care of these animals is to literally "drop them" onto the ground during birth in a secluded area and visit them several times a day. Instinct makes the baby stay very still; which can be interpreted by those who see it, as injured or in need of help. But each time we pick up a fawn or similar baby that seems to be abandoned we are breaking the mother- infant bond and potentially dooming the infant. There are no rehabilitation licenses in Idaho for hoofed animals so there is no place for these animals to go and the risk is considerable that we are taking a situation that didn't need to be fixed, and interfering with an age-old biological system.

The Department of Fish and Game charged with the well-being of these animals have found that rehabilitation rarely works and almost invariably causes problems, mostly due to the fact that they tame easily and once returned to the wild can become a danger to people. Thus they have few choices if they receive a fawn – try to return it to its original location, if it is known, and hope

the mother has not given up looking for it; or euthanize it. They receive numbers of babies every spring and they simply do not have the resources to try to return each one to its original location. According to Cavallaro, all in all the chances for the baby's survival are better if we leave it where it is, especially if they are curled up not moving. He stated it is far better for the mother and fawn to call, than assume something is wrong and take it away from its mother. If it is clear that the animal is injured, call Fish and Game and they can make a decision on a case-by-case basis. As an additional caution he suggests that you control your dog, even a really gentle one because instinct takes off and they will often kill the fawn.

It is a similar situation for ground-nesting birds such as some species of owls and hawks. For example the short-eared owl nests in grass and can have up to ten young. As they grow they walk out of the nest but stay near it. Someone walking nearby may think it is abandoned or hurt because it is still unable to fly.

With so many new people moving into the valley it would be an interesting idea if realtors, and planning and zoning employees were able to hand out information on the how to interact with the wildlife in our valley, and how to build with wildlife in mind. Then we would truly be a community, letting people who move in know that we have a culture where we look out for the welfare of all the life in the valley. It would also be useful to have such a brochure at the Geotourism Center for tourists.



Mule deer fawn that does not need rescue.

Rob Cavallaro/Idaho Fish and Game