Reasons Not to Feed Wildlife

- Feeding wild animals, whether on purpose or not, does more harm than good.

We know they're cute and they might seem hungry, but feeding wild animals—whether in your own backyard, a local park, or while on vacation—just isn't a good idea. Here's why.

1. **“People” food isn’t good for animals.** Human foods aren't nutritious enough for animals and may cause serious health problems (especially when animals are continually fed french fries, bread and popcorn). These processed human foods are empty calories with little protein that fill animals up but provide minimal nutrition.

2. **It makes wild animals lose their natural fear of people.** Feeding can make large, potentially dangerous animals become too comfortable in residential or recreational areas. Once animals learn they can panhandle for food, they can become a nuisance or even worse, a safety risk. Animals that are habituated to human feeding may approach people that are fearful or unfriendly to wildlife creating health and safety risks for both humans and animals.

3. **Feeding wildlife from or near vehicles is dangerous to animals, people, and property.** Animals can be hit by moving vehicles or might try to enter vehicles in search of food. Roads and vehicles represent one of the major causes of mortality in wildlife. Encouraging animals to approach or cross roads and parking lots for food is a sure way to injure or kill wildlife.

4. **Wild animals who depend on people for food can cause injuries or spread disease.** When wild animals gather for food handouts, it can cause crowding and competition. These unnatural conditions increase the chances of fighting and injury among animals. It can also increase the spread of diseases, some of which may be transmitted to pets and humans. Feeding wildlife close to nests or dens increases the chance that predators will find and destroy nests or young animals.

**So what can you do for wildlife?**

**Stop the unintentional food supply:**

- Rinse all recyclable glass and plastic containers to remove any food remnants and odors. Some animals, like skunks, can get their heads stuck in containers and wind up starving to death. Cut and/or crush plastic containers, and cut each ring of plastic six-pack carriers.
- Feed your pets inside. Wildlife drinking or feeding from pet bowls can spread disease to pets.
- Make sure plastic food wrap is rinsed and secured in a tied bag or securely covered garbage can. Loose garbage represents choking or tangling hazard for wildlife.
- When visiting parks and similar settings, clean up after yourself and follow the rules regarding wildlife. Encourage others to do the same.
Learn when to step in. If you see an animal who you think may be injured or orphaned make sure the animal needs your help before feeding the animal anything or attempting a "rescue." Many young animals are not always traveling with parents but may be hiding out until mother returns. Never move an animal to another place unless the current location is dangerous. Returning parents will look listen or smell young and return to feed them where they last left them. A list of licensed wildlife rehabilitators is available from www.michigandnr.com

Feed backyard birds (and squirrels, if you want). We oppose feeding wildlife when it might cause problems, but feeding birds and squirrels is generally harmless. Don’t feed them by hand, though—set up a feeder where you can watch them from a distance.

Provide some natural food sources. Plant some native trees, shrubs and perennials and put up a water feature for your local wildlife. You'll be on your way to creating a backyard wildlife sanctuary that is safe for humans and wildlife alike.