Care for Orphaned Woodchucks

Is This Woodchick Truly Orphaned?

If the baby woodchuck is out of its burrow for extended periods of time on its own, it is likely orphaned.

Raising a Single Woodchuck

If you determine that the woodchuck is orphaned, it will have littermates that also need help so continue to check the area frequently for up to a week. If no others are found it is vital to the woodchuck's proper socialization and release to be raised with other woodchucks, a single woodchuck has little chance of a successful release. Contact vets or local humane societies to try and find a buddy. If this is impossible, handling of the woodchuck should be minimal, give toys to stimulate, keep confined (i.e. in a cage), and **do not** treat as a pet. It is illegal to keep as a pet plus it wouldn't make a good pet, as it's a wild animal.

Aging the Woodchuck

In order to properly care for the baby you have found, it is important to know its age. Consult the chart at the bottom of this page to assess age.

Feeding

Required Formulas/Tools

- Pedialyte
- Esbilac powder
- 1cc or 5cc oral syringe

Orphans that have been without their mother will be suffering from chill and dehydration. They must be thoroughly warmed first, and then offered warmed rehydration solution. **Pedialyte** is a rehydration solution that is available in drug stores- it should be heated to body temperature and offered every couple hours for the first several feedings. Feed the baby woodchuck **Esbilac powder**, mix only enough for 24hrs and keep it refrigerated. Esbilac is a puppy milk replacer, which you should be able to purchase at a vet or pet store. Cow's milk, human baby formulas, and most pet products (except Esbilac) are **not suitable** and will likely cause death. Use a 1cc or 5cc oral syringe (try a vet or pharmacy), warm the formula, and hold the woodchuck in a towel, firmly, and covering its eyes. **CAUTION:** The woodchuck will suck very quickly and take too much formula if you are not in total control. If this happens the woodchuck will sneeze formula out of its nose, **STOP** feeding, turn upside down, gently rub its back, and gently wipe the excess formula from its nose. Repeat this for about 5 minutes or until the sneezing stops and breathing returns to normal. If severe this can cause immediate death or pneumonia on a long-term basis. This is why bottles are not suitable to use. To avoid this from occurring feed in a quiet room, go slowly and watch both the woodchuck and the syringe, if air bubbles appear in the syringe, stop feeding and expel the air, (see chart on back for feeding schedule). Once feeding is finished, wash its face well with a damp face cloth, as formula dries quickly and causes fur loss.

Critical Step After Feeding (stimulation to urinate or have a bowel movement)

It is very critical that baby woodchucks are stimulated to urinate before and after every feed. The woodchuck may be doing it a bit on its own but this may be overflow and if not stimulated the bladder

will rupture. To stimulate a baby woodchuck hold it over a face cloth. Dip either your finger or a Q-tip in warm water and then light feathery strokes over its genital area will cause the woodchuck to urinate and/or have a bowel movement. Once the woodchuck starts to pee don't stop as the woodchuck will then stop.

Housing

Housing requirements will change as the woodchuck grows and develops, see chart for details.

Release

The woodchucks will not be ready to be released until they are **13-14 weeks old**. It is ideal for the woodchucks to spend **4 weeks** in their large outdoor cage (8ft x 4ft, made of 1" welded wire mesh including the bottom), with a nesting box (2ft x 2ft) on the floor of the cage. The cage must also provide a sandbox area so the woodchucks will learn to dig as well as a regular supply of branches they can chew on. Do not allow the family pets access to the woodchucks, otherwise you will be teaching them that they have nothing to fear from domestic cats and dogs, something that could cost them their life in the wild.

For release, the site should be a clearing, field, or rocky slope with existing woodchuck burrows. The site should not be a site where dogs are present. Ideally, the site chosen should be one near where either you or someone you know lives in case the woodchucks get into difficulty. Before releasing it is important to investigate the area, if there are neighbours trapping or harming woodchucks, they should not be released there. Also, check the forecast to be sure there will be at least 2-3 days of dry weather after the woodchucks are released. Woodchucks should be released during the day and transported as far as possible from roads. Find an existing and unoccupied burrow or dig them a starter hole. Leave food in the immediate area, away from the burrow entrance by at least ten feet.

***In some jurisdictions it is illegal to care for wildlife and you should consult your government wildlife agency.**