



[Back](#)

## Rearing Orphaned Deer

**Deer need special care and their rearing should only be undertaken by experienced rehabilitators, usually at an established wildlife rescue centre.**

Please check if it really is orphaned or abandoned - watch from a reasonable distance, preferably downwind and using binoculars, to check that the mother returns to the fawn. They are left alone for several hours while the mother feeds herself. she will return to feed the fawn at long intervals and leave it concealed in long grass while she is away.

People are tempted to 'rescue' fawns that are perfectly healthy and that have a mother nearby. They simply think that because they are on their own, they must be orphans.

If you handle or move a fawn that turns out to be bright, alert and well fed, take it back to exactly where it was found, pull up several handfuls of grass and rub this over the fawn to disguise any human smells it may have collected. Then move right away and observe through binoculars. The mother deer should appear

### Estimating the age

#### New-born

Soft coat, very unsteady, moist umbilical cord, body looks 'hollow' and the animal very leggy

#### One week

Slightly wobbly, body more 'filled out', coat smoother

### Housing

Young fawns need close contact with the person rearing them and should ideally live in the house for the first few weeks, provided there are no dogs around.

They are small enough to sleep in a large cat basket and can go out into the garden to browse in the quiet mornings and evenings.

Later, they should be housed in a spacious, draft free shed or out building with a good layer of hay on the floor and access to a safe garden.

Straw can be used to pad the floor but must be hidden under hay to prevent the fawn from eating it.

Once weaned, there should be free access to a secure garden or paddock bordering wild deer territory, so they can meet wild deer and escape when ready.

Ideally the fawn should be raised with other fawns to simulate more natural behaviour and reduce dependence on a foster mother.

### Feeding

From the first day, calves need a shallow dish of soil to lick; this provides vital trace elements and helps activate the gut bacteria.

After each feed they can be given a few of the following delicacies:

rose petals, young rose leaves, buttercup and dandelion flowers, clover, young, tender leaves of apple, plum, cherry, gooseberry and bramble.

Once bonded with the foster parent, the fawn can be shown these items in the garden or paddock as its mother would do in the wild.

Wandering around and browsing twice a day will give the fawn some exercise and experience of life away from people.

## **Grooming**

Fawns should be groomed daily with a soft brush.

This will strengthen the bond with the foster mother and is very soothing. It also helps keep the coat in good condition.

## **Toileting**

This is done while the fawn is feeding.

Using a warm, damp sponge, gently stroke the perianal and genital area until urine and pellets are passed.

These will be soft until the fawn is about 2 weeks old and toileting should continue until the fawn is about 6 weeks old and voluntarily producing pellets regularly.

Fawns do not need to stand up to urinate and often wet their beds!

## **Milk Feeding Techniques**

Use a bottle with a lamb feeding teat if possible and enlarge the hole to a 1 cm slit.

Straddle the fawn and lean over it to simulate the body of the mother.

Keep the bottle at a 45° angle and gently hold the fawn's muzzle as the teat is introduced.

It will be tricky at first as the fawn learns to suck properly from the bottle but do persist and it will soon be taking the right amount of feed.

## **Milk Feeding - Roe Deer**

Use sheep's or goat's milk or best of all, Lam Lac formula designed for orphaned lambs.

If the fawn is only a few hours old it will also need colostrum for a few days in the regular feeds.

Record the amount taken each day for each feed and when urine and faeces produced each day.

## **Guidelines**

After about a week, try and teach the fawn to feed from a heavy bowl. First allow it to suck the index and middle fingers of one hand, gradually lower your hand and the fawn's mouth into the milk.

It will drink through the fingers and these can then be gently withdrawn.

Usually a fawn learns to drink from a bowl after about 3 feeds with fingers.

Be sure to toilet as usual and also to clean any milk from the face after feeding as it can damage the hair if left.

If a calf is reluctant to suck, try massaging and stroking the throat to induce the reflex.

**Age 1-7 days** 5 feeds per day. Keep to the same times  
10 ml per feed, gradually increasing to about 75-100 ml

**Age 8 - 14 days** 4 feeds daily, reducing to 3 feeds daily by day 12  
Give about 100 ml per feed, increasing to about 175 ml per feed.

**Age 3 - 8 weeks** 3 feeds a day  
About 180 - 250 ml per feed

**Age 9-10 weeks** 2 feeds a day  
About 250 - 300 ml per feed

**Age 11-12 weeks** 1 feed a day  
About 300-350 ml per feed

### **Feeding Guidelines for other species**

Muntjac fawns will need between a third and half of these amounts

Fallow Deer calves will need approximately twice these amounts

Red Deer calves will need about 4 times these amounts

### **Weaning**

Once the fawn is weaned more foodstuffs can be introduced to the diet e.g. hay, grass, calf rearing pellets, dry rabbit mix, oak, chestnut, hawthorn and willow shoots, apples, coarse calf mix, sprouts, potato, carrots, fern, acorns, rabbit pellets.

Reduce the amount of contact gradually until the deer becomes less inclined to want human contact.

If wild deer visit the area they may come and visit the fawn at dawn and dusk and help reduce its dependence on people for company.

### **Release**

Hand reared deer that remain very tame should never be released into the wild as they will not have the necessary fear of people to help their survival.

Those raised alone may also develop aberrant behaviour, particularly male animals, as they can become aggressive at mating time and

if unafraid of people, could get into a dangerous situation. These will need to be re-homed in a sanctuary where they will not come into contact with people.

[Top of page](#)

[Return to index](#)