

# Raccoons: Deadly Pets

By *Michael E. Sievering*, Biologist III, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Many of us enjoy strolling through the woods observing nature's many splendors. On occasion, we stumble across wildlife that appears displaced or we assume has been "abandoned."

Commonly found animals include deer fawns, fledgling birds, young squirrels, and young or juvenile raccoons. Often, a protective instinct kicks in and we decide to

take these "orphans" home and raise them. This is not the right or legal thing to do.

A "biological package" typically accompanies all kinds of wildlife. This package can consist of a variety of internal or external parasites and several diseases that are harmful to humans and domestic pets. Raccoons in the southeastern United States, although cute and adorable, can be carriers of many internal parasites and/or diseases.

Nematodes, or the large roundworm, are an intestinal parasite common to raccoons in rural and urban habitats. During a certain stage of its development, this parasite can be infectious to humans. In the past, two human fatalities have been confirmed and several non-fatal cases reported in connection with this parasite



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been vaccinated. Rabies, a well-known disease, is carried by a variety of wildlife species. In the Southeast, raccoons seem to be the prime carrier. The Alabama Department of Public Health reports that 10 percent of the 509 raccoons submitted in the year 2000 tested positive for rabies.

in the United States. People handling raccoons that are possibly contaminated with this parasite should use basic personal hygiene to avoid contamination.

Canine distemper occurs in raccoon populations throughout the state. This disease exhibits a seasonal pattern with a peak during the winter and early spring months. Although not a threat to humans, domestic pets that are not vaccinated against this viral disease are susceptible to contamination. Contamination can occur either through contact with an infected animal or through contact with their excretions or secretions.

Raccoon parvo, like canine distemper, does not infect the human population. However, this viral disease can be transmitted to domestic pets that have not

If you happen across abandoned wildlife, do not be tempted to take these animals home. You must consider that when dealing with wildlife you are dealing with a "biological package" and not just an adorable woodland creature. In addition to the disease issue, wild animals generally do not make good pets and it is illegal to possess wild animals without proper permits. 🦋

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