

# Raising Orphan Reindeer Fawns

Applied Reindeer Research Project

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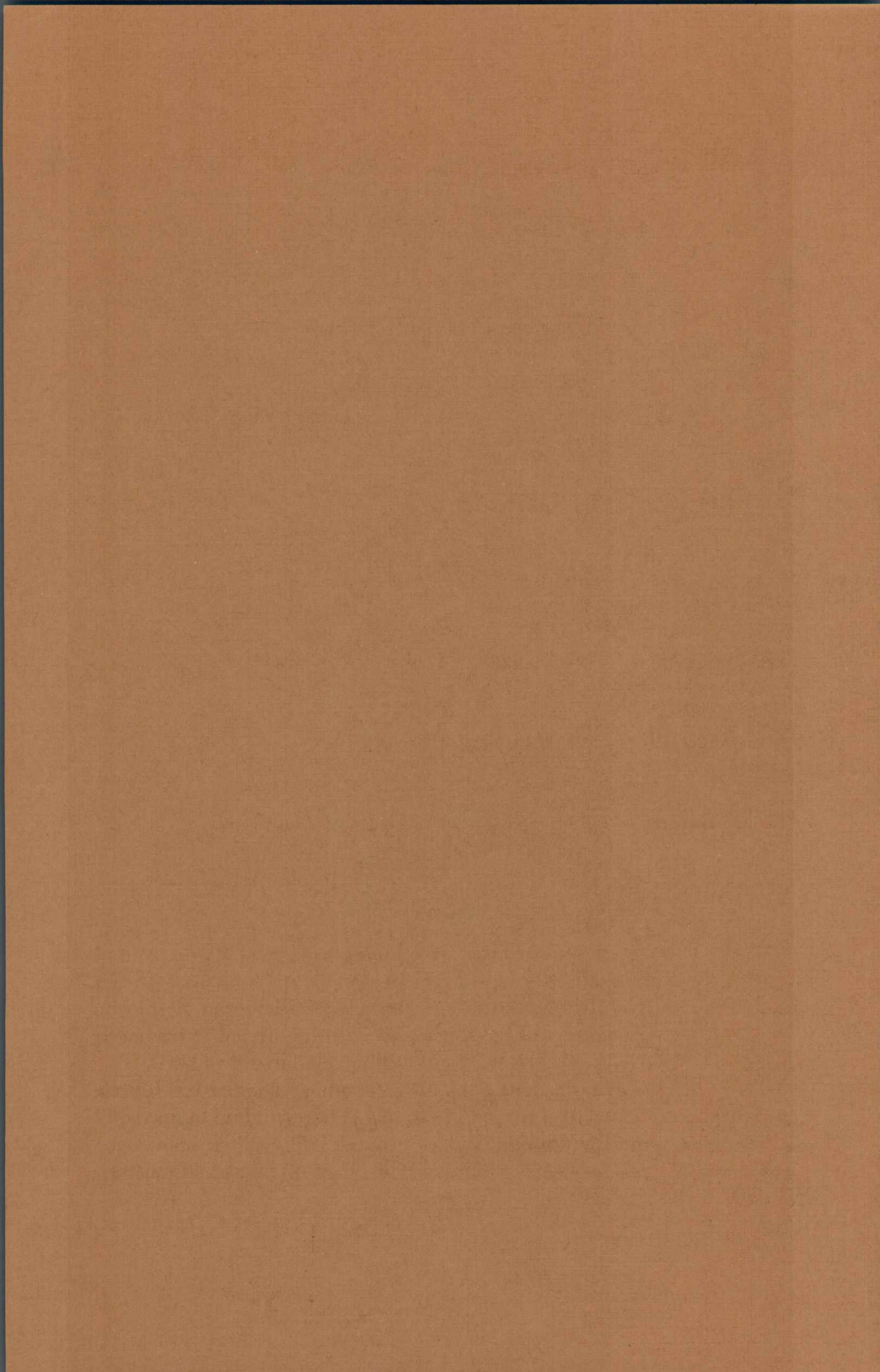
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## Raising Orphan Reindeer Fawns

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Orphan reindeer fawns are often observed at summer handlings. Sometimes an abandoned fawn is found on the range. These fawns can be saved and raised for pets or for sale as live animals. There is an increasing demand for live reindeer to be shipped to locations outside Alaska. Tame reindeer adapted to a commercial diet can be a potential source of income for the herder as well as a rewarding project for the family. The following information is intended for reindeer herders in Alaska who do not have ready access to modern veterinary facilities or care.

Raising a reindeer fawn on a bottle is one of the easiest ways to obtain a gentle deer. If started on a bottle within the first few days of life, a reindeer will quickly form a bond with humans. The older they are when started, the less likely they are to form a bond. However, there are other advantages to feeding older fawns; they don't have to be fed as often, and they can be fed solid foods.

No matter what the age, feeding a reindeer fawn is very rewarding and potentially profitable. The following is intended to be a guideline for feeding a fawn. One thing to remember is that no two animals are identical any more than two human babies are exactly alike. Each must be treated as an individual.

### For newly born fawns or fawns up to two months of age:

1. In our experience and that of others raising reindeer fawns as well as other species of wild fawns or calves, commercial formulas such as Land O'Lakes Lamb Replacer can be used as a milk substitute for nursing fawns. Alaskan feed stores might be able to special order a replacer formula for you if they do not have it in stock.

2. A temporary substitute formula of:  
*one quart of whole milk or reconstituted whole powdered milk (for example Milkman) mixed with one can of evaporated milk* can be used until the commercial replacer is available. The substitute formula, however, should be used only as a temporary substitute. It is not satisfactory for prolonged use. Regular human baby vitamins can be added to the formula at the same dosage as specified for human babies. Warm the

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formula to body temperature before feeding. Refrigerate any leftover formula or replacer between feedings.

3. Use either a regular baby bottle and nipple or a lamb nipple on a bottle to feed the fawn. The hole in the nipple can be made a little larger by heating the sharp end of a large safety pin in a flame. Then stick the hot point through the hole in the nipple. Don't cut big slits in the nipple to make a huge hole. Just as human babies like to suck their thumbs, fawns also like to suck. If the hole in the nipple is too big, fawns will suck too fast and finish too soon to satisfy their sucking reflex. It is better that they take longer to finish and feel more satisfied. They can also choke if they suck too fast. This can lead to pneumonia.

4. Hold the nipple end of the bottle between the thumb and first two fingers with the nipple pointed towards the palm of the hand. Cup the fawn's chin in the palm of your hand. The bottle and fawn's chin are now in the palm of your hand so your hand and the bottle can move together with the movements of the fawn to help keep the fawn from swallowing air. The last two fingers can be used to help direct the nipple into the fawn's mouth.

5. Start off feeding small amounts of formula or replacer.  
For example:

Age (weeks)	Ounces	Times/Day
0-1	2-3	5-7
1-2	3-4	5-6
2-4	4-5	4-5
4-6	6-8	3-4
6-8	8-10	3
8-12	8	3

Another guideline is that a baby animal usually requires 1/10 of its body weight per day of total milk replacement if that is all it is eating. In other words, if a fawn weighs 10 pounds, which equals 160 ounces (16 ounces per pound times 10), that fawn should have a total of 16 ounces (1/10 of 160 ounces) of formula or replacer per day. That 16 ounces could be divided as four ounces four times a day. A 15 pound fawn should have a total of 24 ounces per day, and a 20 pound fawn should have a total of 32 ounces per day. By the time it is eight weeks old, the quantity of milk replacement fed should be decreasing as the quantity of grain and greens increases.

6. Make each increase gradually. Do not jump from one level to the next all at once.
7. **DO NOT OVERFEED.** Fawns will always act like they want more. Overfeeding is the most common cause of diarrhea. A fawn's manure is normally soft but it should not be watery. Prolonged diarrhea can cause death. Fawns can actually eat themselves to death.
8. If diarrhea does occur:
  - a. Cut back on the amount of formula at each feeding until diarrhea is under control. You can use less powdered milk with the usual volume of water until the manure is normal again. Then gradually increase the milk powder back to the proper amount according to the recipe.
  - b. If diarrhea continues, give a baby's dose of human medicine for diarrhea such as Kaopectate or Pepto-Bismol. Use the dosage directed by the instruction on the bottle.

OR
  - c. Add a little baby rice cereal (Gerber's for example) to the formula.

*NOTE: Diarrhea is usually watery and yellowish from eating too much milk or from a disease. It is usually green from eating too many greens.*

9. After eating, at least two times a day until the fawn is well trained (generally one to two weeks old), gently rub its rear end with warm water on a washcloth to stimulate the fawn to pass manure. Female reindeer lick their fawn's rear end to do the same thing.
10. If your fawn is older than three weeks when you start, it may not be willing to drink from a bottle. If it doesn't, offer the milk replacement in a pan or bucket.
11. After the fawn is about five days old, offer it some grain as soon as it finishes the milk replacement. To get the fawn started, dip your fingers in some milk replacement, then in the grain so some grain sticks to your finger. Put your finger into the fawn's mouth. It will usually suck your finger, getting the grain at the same time. Do this until it gets used to the taste and texture of the grain and eats grain by itself. Don't force it. Some fawns take to grain right away. Others just aren't interested for a while.

During the first few weeks of life, use a commercially available feed prepared for young calves. Purina's Nursing Chow and Calf Manna are two examples of the many brands on the market that can be successfully used at this stage of the fawn's life.

When a fawn is about six weeks old, mix your starter feed 1:1 with pelleted feed mixture suitable for reindeer. The University of Alaska Fairbanks has had years of experience and success feeding reindeer a mixture which contains:

Crude Protein	16% (minimum)
Crude Fiber	8% (maximum)
Crude Fat	3% (minimum)

This feed is a mixture of rolled corn and/or barley; ground oats, barley and/or corn; cottonseed and/or soybean meal; wheat mill-run; wheat middlings; beet pulp pellets; salt and molasses. Commercial feeds such as Wod-Lyn Feeds or a feed specifically formulated for reindeer from Alaska Mill and Feed meet these requirements. Check with your local feed supplier for a ration that meets these nutritional requirements.

Fawns will usually not eat more than about one cup of grain twice a day until they are older than four weeks. From four to six weeks of age, they will eat about one and one half cups of grain twice a day. From six to eight weeks, they will eat about two cups of grain twice a day.

12. When the fawn is about one week old, provide some willows for it to eat. Start with a few leaves at a time and gradually work up to a small branch. If you are feeding too many greens, the fawn will develop a green colored diarrhea. Cut back on the quantity of greens until the manure is normal again. If you are keeping the fawn in an outside pen, fawns usually have no trouble grazing on natural feed.

13. Keep a pan of clean drinking water available at all times.

14. Provide some dirt for it to lick if you are keeping it inside.

15. Keep the fawn in a clean, sanitary, dog-proof area. Provide shelter from the sun and the rain.

### Summary

Age weeks	Quantity milk replmt	Frequency times per day	Greens	Grain
0-1	2-3	5-7		
1-2	3-4	4-5	Offer willow leaves	Offer commercial calf feed
2-4	4-5	4-5	Willows natural feed	1/2-1 cup twice a day calf feed
4-6	6-8	4	Willows natural feed	1 - 1 1/2 cups twice a day calf feed
6-8	8-10	3	Willows natural feed	2 cups twice a day calf feed with equal parts of adult feed
8	8	3	Willows natural feed	1 part calf feed to 2 parts adult feed twice a day
8-12	8	3	Willows natural feed	1 part calf feed to 3 parts adult feed twice a day

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