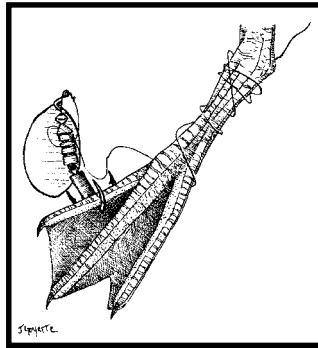
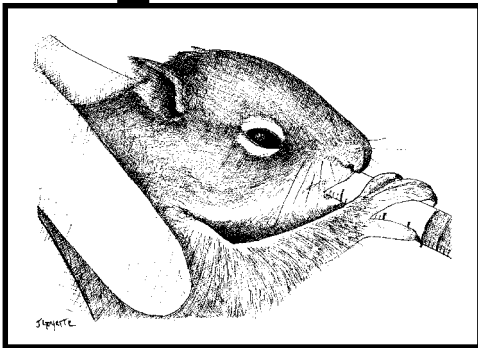


# WILDLIFE REHABILITATION

## IS IT FOR YOU?



*developed by*

**The Wildlife Rehabilitator Recruiting Project**

*Thank you for your interest in wildlife rehabilitation. We are always happy to explain wildlife rehabilitation to people who are interested in and care about wildlife. Before we tell you what is involved, let us first explain what it is, why it is needed, and some of the benefits of being a wildlife rehabilitator.*

### ***What is Wildlife Rehabilitation?***

Wildlife rehabilitation is the process of providing aid to injured, orphaned, displaced, or distressed wild animals in such a way that they may survive when released to their native habitats. The spectrum of activities ranges from direct care of wildlife to arranging suitable release sites. Wildlife rehabilitation also involves anticipating and helping to prevent problems with wildlife as well as humanely resolving human-wildlife conflicts. Wildlife rehabilitation is part science, part education, part problem-solving, and part care-giving.

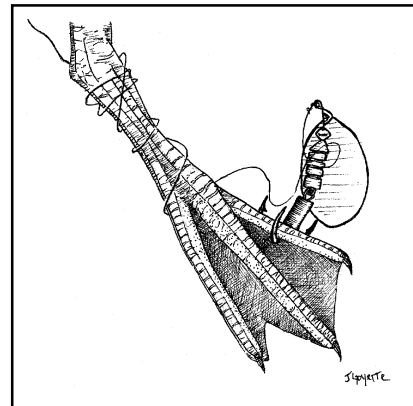
Wildlife rehabilitation is a growing activity with a rapidly expanding base of knowledge and ever-increasing professional standards. Generally, by law, free-ranging native wildlife is a natural resource that belongs to the public. Wildlife rehabilitation is regulated by state or provincial and federal wildlife agencies.

### ***Why is Wildlife Rehabilitation Needed?***

Contact between humans and wildlife grows daily as humans expand into or destroy wildlife habitat. In most cases, when humans and wildlife collide, wildlife suffers. Wildlife rehabilitation gives these wild animals a second chance to live free in their natural habitat.

In an increasingly urbanized world, people are less likely to have personal knowledge of and experience with nature and wildlife. When they encounter wildlife in their communities, people both want and need information about how to co-exist with their wild neighbors. Reducing human-wildlife conflicts can help both wildlife and humans. Rehabilitators often provide critical education which helps reduce human-wildlife conflicts and expands the sense of stewardship of the natural world. Rehabilitators can provide valuable assistance and advice to growing numbers of people who value wildlife and make personal efforts to help wild animals in need.

Helping wildlife in need is not an easy task. Working with wildlife requires specialized knowledge, skill, and facilities. Potential dangers exist for the public, domestic animals, and wildlife when untrained and uninformed people attempt to provide care for wildlife. Wildlife rehabilitators are trained to provide specialized care that reduces risks to humans and animals, and increases the chances for the animal's return to health and successful release back to the wild. They hold the permits or licenses to allow them to legally possess wild animals for rehabilitation and release.



### ***Benefits of Being a Wildlife Rehabilitator***

- Rehabilitation provides a personal connection with nature and wildlife.
- Rehabilitation offers a positive and personal way to give back to nature for all that humans take and the problems we create.
- Rehabilitation brings a feeling of satisfaction from releasing a healthy, strong, viable wild animal back to live wild and free in its natural habitat.
- Rehabilitation provides a unique opportunity for learning about wildlife, nature, environmental issues, and human values.
- Rehabilitation creates an on-going opportunity for personal growth, involving such skills as problem-solving, priority-setting, decision-making, conflict and crisis management, and building self-confidence .
- Rehabilitation provides an opportunity to talk with people about wildlife and impart an appreciation for native wildlife and habitat.
- Rehabilitation can help individual wild animals and help us discover ways to help wildlife populations at risk.

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Many people are attracted to wildlife rehabilitation because they believe it is a valuable and rewarding activity. However, there are more facets to wildlife rehabilitation than most people initially expect. It can also be demanding and difficult. We believe that a better understanding of what is involved can help you make a more informed decision about if, how, and when **you** might want to become involved in wildlife rehabilitation.

As we begin to describe wildlife rehabilitation, we will also highlight some of the commonly held myths.

### **Different Types of Wildlife Rehabilitation**

The majority of wildlife rehabilitators in North America have independent home-based facilities. Some may admit a wide range of species, ages, and health conditions. Others may specialize in certain types of animals, such as swallows, hummingbirds, bats, or squirrels. Some further restrict their rehabilitation to either juvenile or adult animals. Some may work with all types of injuries or conditions, while others may specialize in raising orphans with minimal health problems. Some accept wildlife from a wide region, others accept animals from a limited area. Some have a small facility and work with a few animals each year, while others have a larger facility and work with several hundred.

#### **Myth 1**

***Anyone who finds an injured or orphaned wild animal can take it home and care for it, and everything will be wonderful.*** Wildlife requires specialized care to survive, especially those that are injured or orphaned. Without such specialized diets, feeding, cages, and treatment, these animals may suffer or die. Working with wildlife carries risks of injury, disease, and parasites for humans and domestic animals. Inappropriately released wildlife can result in problems for wild populations. Possession of wildlife requires various permits and licenses. Working with wildlife is a serious activity and has special requirements.

Larger wildlife rehabilitation centers may also take in a wide range of species or specialize. For example, some rehabilitation centers admit everything from turtles, pigeons, songbirds, and waterfowl, to rabbits, raccoons, and coyotes. Others specialize in raptors, deer, reptiles, or marine mammals. Wildlife centers often admit and rehabilitate larger numbers of animals, ranging from hundreds to thousands.

#### **Descriptions of Wildlife Rehabilitation Facilities**

Wildlife rehabilitation may be conducted in the homes of permitted or licensed wildlife rehabilitators; in dedicated, stand-alone rehabilitation facilities or centers; or as a separate affiliate of another organization such as a humane society, animal sanctuary, or veterinary clinic.

Regardless of where the rehabilitation is conducted, it needs to meet established criteria; standards for safety, cleanliness, and sanitation; and government agency regulations (including rehabilitation, health, and zoning regulations and ordinances).

Wildlife rehabilitation requires facilities for wildlife that are separate from humans and domestic or exotic animals in order to reduce stress and the transmission of disease and parasites, and to avoid improper imprinting on other species. This includes both indoor and outdoor caging. If wildlife rehabilitation is conducted at a home, quiet sections of the house and yard must be dedicated to wildlife.

The indoor facility includes cages or enclosures of a variety of sizes, shapes, and materials depending on species, age, and medical needs of the animals. There must be a dedicated, ventilated, climate-controlled room with a securely closing and lockable door where occupied wildlife cages are kept. A food preparation and storage area with refrigerator (such as a kitchen) is necessary, preferably separate from the household food preparation area. The area needs to have access to natural daylight or full spectrum light. Storage space for medical, handling, and cleaning supplies; housing accessories (e.g., water bottles, bedding); resource materials; and records is helpful. Running water, electricity, and telephone are essential. Easy access to an outside door is helpful. A vehicle is useful for taking animals to the veterinarian and release sites.

Outdoor caging allows wildlife to take the next step in recovery and preparation for release. These enclosures, generally much larger, provide the animals full range of movement, encourage normal behavioral activities, and allow for acclimation to weather. Outdoor caging also needs to offer protection from severe weather, predators, and privacy from curious humans and domestic animals.

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People often expect wildlife rehabilitators to spend the majority of their time providing direct care for wildlife. Rehabilitation, however, involves many activities. The following list identifies a variety of other tasks performed by rehabilitators. While a few items may be changed or eliminated, or the sequence adjusted, many of these steps are part of regular wildlife rehabilitation processes everywhere. Some of the activities are performed on a daily basis (such as cleaning and feeding); others may be done less frequently.

### **Common Wildlife Rehabilitation Activities**

- Answer a phone call from an individual concerned about what he/she considers a wildlife problem: determine the concern; help the caller understand the reason for the situation (e.g., natural history and behavior of the species); offer suggestions for humane solutions. Many wild animals may not need rehabilitation.
- Accept a phone call from an individual, business, or agency: determine if the animal is truly in distress or if it is the caller who is in distress (or both); calm the individual; educate about wildlife and offer suggestions; collect information and advise whether or not to assist the animal; identify risks from injury, disease, or parasites; explain legal issues on the possession of wildlife; arrange for appropriate and safe transport to a rehabilitator or veterinarian.
- Prepare for the animal's arrival: have handling and caging equipment ready for a safe transfer; prepare first aid supplies, parasite treatments, and admittance forms.
- Safely take possession of the animal(s); confirm correct identification of the species; assess each animal's condition; gather data from the rescuer; administer first aid; place the animal in a quiet, secure cage; treat for parasites if needed.
- Consult with a veterinarian for diagnostic testing and medical treatment.
- Administer medical treatment (e.g., give medications, change bandages, provide physical therapy) and confer with a veterinarian as needed.
- Consult with wildlife experts, as needed, on habitat, diet, behaviors, light needs, etc.
- Determine an appropriate diet and feeding schedule.
- Acquire and prepare formula or other food.
- Monitor health, growth, behavior, and waste elimination for animals in care.
- Maintain hydration and feeding schedules appropriate for the species, age, and condition (daily for adult animals, several times a day for juveniles, hourly for small mammals, or even every few minutes for some young birds). Provide fresh water as appropriate.
- Provide safe housing and caging or appropriate environment for the species, age, and condition.
- Maintain a clean and sanitary environment. This requires considerable laundering and disinfecting.
- Maintain records and comply with permit and license requirements for paperwork.
- Prepare the animal for release: determine if it can identify, recognize, or catch food; check for predator recognition and survival skills; provide outdoor acclimatization, physical conditioning, and socialization with its own species.
- Identify potential release sites that meet habitat needs for the species and regulatory requirements; obtain landowner approval, if necessary; obtain wildlife agency approval, if necessary.
- Arrange transport to the release site.
- Release the animal at the appropriate time of day and/or season.
- Disposition of the animal: if it cannot be released, arrange for euthanasia or placement with a licensed facility for permanent care; arrange for legal disposition of carcasses.
- Solicit donations to fund rehabilitation activities.
- Order supplies.
- Maintain communication with other rehabilitators as well as wildlife agency personnel.
- Build and repair cages/enclosures (less frequent).
- Devote time to continuing education, attending conferences, and researching topics that affect rehabilitation activities (less frequent).
- Give educational programs to schools, civic groups, and others (variable frequency). (*Note: wildlife undergoing rehabilitation cannot be displayed or used for programs.*)

#### **Myth 2**

#### ***Wildlife rehabilitation is fun.***

Wildlife rehabilitation can be interesting, stimulating, rewarding, and sometimes pleasant, but it is rarely fun. Rather, it is physically and mentally demanding, emotionally stressful, and considerable work. It involves many tasks that are not pleasant, such as cleaning wounds, scrubbing cages, and occasionally making the decision to euthanize an animal that is suffering and cannot recover.

## ***Description of Activities at Larger Wildlife Rehabilitation Facilities***

Larger wildlife rehabilitation facilities carry out the same tasks listed above. While home-based rehabilitators generally do all of these tasks, larger facilities often have paid staff and volunteers assigned to just a few of the tasks (i.e., telephone hotlines, building cages, feeding orphans). In addition to direct or indirect animal care, larger rehabilitation facilities also recruit, train, supervise, and monitor staff members (whether paid or unpaid); conduct fund-raising and community outreach; and much more.

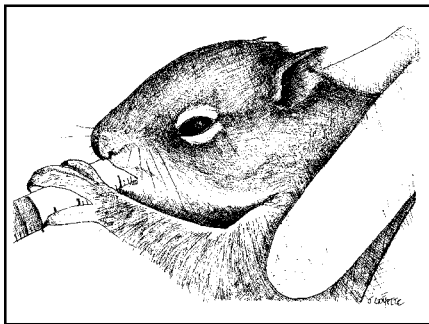
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*As you can see, wildlife rehabilitation includes quite a range of activities, whether conducted at a larger facility or a wildlife rehabilitator's home. Since most rehabilitators are home-based, the following sections describe some of the basic requirements, such as time, commitment, knowledge and skill, and more. We hope this will give you a realistic idea of what is required and help you consider further if and how you want to get involved. If being a permitted or licensed home-based rehabilitator seems to be more than you can take on right now, remember that there are many other opportunities to get involved that may better fit your schedule and interests. These alternatives still provide valuable ways to help wildlife (see page 9).*

### ***Basic Requirements of Wildlife Rehabilitators***

**Time** is a critical requirement for wildlife rehabilitators. They may be called for help with a wildlife question or situation any time, day or night. Calls can come in any day of the week or month of the year, especially during weekends and holidays when more people are outdoors and find wildlife in need. These calls are important, since they may allow the animal to be helped without admittance for rehabilitation, they are a way to help educate the public about wildlife, and the sooner an animal that does need help gets it, the higher its chances for survival and release. Seasons of the year when there are young or migrating animals bring more calls.

Some wildlife will need rehabilitation and this increases the time demands. Young animals require numerous and regular feedings. In the case of young birds, this can range from several times an hour to several times a day during daylight. Young mammals



may not be fed quite as often, but may have to be fed over a 24-hour period, including nights (feeding frequency decreases as they get older). Since feeding schedules seldom match for different animals in care, the amount of time involved in feedings can be more than one expects. It also takes time to acquire and prepare food or formula, clean cages and bedding, monitor health, take animals to the veterinarian, administer medical treatments, research problems, and more.

When wildlife is in rehabilitation, some time is required every day on an as-needed basis. This can range from one to many hours a day depending on the numbers of animals admitted, types of species, injuries or conditions, and ages. Plus, unexpected events routinely occur which can take more time, such as rapidly changing wildlife health conditions. Wildlife rehabilitation is not something that can only be done on a weekend.

These heavy time commitments and unpredictable schedules can interfere with other plans and activities, such as family commitments, work, sleep, education, hobbies, travel, and so on. This can be stressful on families and other relationships or situations that also require significant time, such as young children, family illness, or demanding jobs. Even a supportive family can get stressed when routines are regularly disrupted and privacy invaded by calls from the public about wild animals in need.

#### **Myth 3**

***Wildlife rehabilitation is a hobby.***

People choose when they spend time on a hobby. Wildlife rehabilitators do not have that option. Animals may arrive at any time of day. Once an animal is admitted for care, providing food, water, and medical care; cleaning cages; and doing other necessary tasks require time each day. The animal in rehabilitation depends on the caretaker. Wildlife rehabilitators cannot care for the animal only when it is convenient, nor can they leave for the weekend or travel without arranging for care from another licensed wildlife rehabilitator.

It is important that potential rehabilitators understand the expected high time demands before taking on home-based rehabilitation activities. The time commitments that are highly likely to be required need to be part of the decision to become a home-based wildlife rehabilitator *before* animals are admitted for care.

There are, however, several ways rehabilitators can work to manage their time, such as by reducing the numbers of animals in need (e.g., by public education, reducing conditions that harm wildlife), specializing in species, limiting numbers of animals admitted, collaborating with other rehabilitators to balance the numbers of animals, and utilizing trained volunteers. Examples of ways to be involved with animals other than rehabilitation are listed on page 9.

#### **Myth 4**

***Loving wildlife qualifies someone to be a rehabilitator.*** Effective wildlife rehabilitation includes compassion, but it also requires specialized knowledge, skill, facilities, permits, licenses, and more. Caring alone does not make a person a wildlife rehabilitator.

Another key requirement is *commitment*, since once a wild animal is admitted for rehabilitation, it is totally dependent on the rehabilitator. The commitment is to understand what each wild animal needs for a high quality of life even while confined in rehabilitation. The commitment means willingness to deal with some of the less pleasant aspects of wildlife rehabilitation, such as interacting with a demanding public; seeing traumatic injuries; removing parasites; and feeding live prey to predators. This requires becoming familiar with the natural history and particular needs of each species in order to provide appropriate food and water, medical care, caging, environment, and so forth.

It is also a commitment to keep the animal wild as it is prepared for release back to its native habitat. These animals are not pets. In some cases, this commitment involves considering euthanasia for an animal that cannot be released back to the wild. Such decisions about the life and death of an animal can be difficult and emotional, but they are necessary. These aspects reinforce the fact that wildlife rehabilitation is not a hobby, but the serious commitment of being responsible for the life of another creature.

In the case of the home-based rehabilitator, this commitment affects the family. The family may be asked to help with some tasks, such as preparing food, taking phone messages, doing loads of laundry used with wildlife — as well as taking on more household tasks when the rehabilitator is dedicating time to critical cases or frequent feedings. The family may have to change some activities, such as minimizing noise, staying out of certain rooms or the backyard, and delaying some scheduled activities. Some families consider such accommodations minor compared to the knowledge that wildlife is being helped. In other cases, home-based rehabilitation can result in tension and conflict within families.

Wildlife rehabilitation requires *funding* for food, supplies, caging, veterinary bills, utilities, transportation, insurance, resource materials, training programs, and more. Some of these items may be donated (which can involve a substantial time to solicit), but many require purchase. Donations tend to be unpredictable, so a means must be found to ensure that regular funding is available to cover rehabilitation costs.

The expenses vary by types and numbers of animals, but costs can add up quickly. For example, initial start-up can run from hundreds of dollars for small animals to thousands for mid- to large-size wildlife. Depending on the level of rehabilitation activities, ongoing operating expenses can quickly exceed a thousand dollars per year. Initial and ongoing expenses can be kept lower by rehabilitating just a few species and limiting the numbers of animals rehabilitated. Purchasing from suppliers offering reduced prices, buying supplies in bulk, and negotiating for free or reduced costs of services are some of the ways that rehabilitators manage costs.

#### **Myth 5**

***Experience with pets or “being good” with domestic animals qualifies people to be rehabilitators.*** Wildlife is very different from other animals. Wild animals have different handling requirements, diets, habitat and housing needs, diseases, and parasites. Wildlife is also stressed by humans, whereas domestic pets and livestock are not. Proper training in wildlife care is essential for the benefit of the wild animal and the safety of the caregiver.

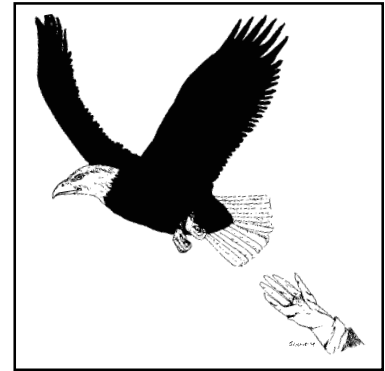
The majority of funds for home-based rehabilitators often come from the rehabilitators themselves, with limited donations from the public. To attract any sizable amount of contributions, it is necessary to file for

non-profit, tax exempt status, which itself takes time and money to achieve and maintain. Larger facilities may have more organized fund-raising programs to support their efforts. The government very rarely provides any financial contribution to wildlife rehabilitation.

Wildlife rehabilitators must have *adequate space and habitat, and meet government regulations* for the species rehabilitated. As mentioned in the section on rehabilitation facilities, it is critical that adequate space is available for wildlife separate from humans and domestic animals (including pets, exotics, and livestock). Most rehabilitators need to have both indoor and outdoor caging, unless arrangements are made with other rehabilitators and the appropriate wildlife agency allowing them to use facilities of other rehabilitators.

Rehabilitators must be familiar with and follow caging criteria set by state and federal wildlife rehabilitation regulations, zoning and animal control ordinances, health codes, and other restrictions (e.g., property and water regulations, home-owner covenants).

*Knowledge about and skill in working with wildlife* in a variety of situations are also key requirements. Rehabilitators must have a fundamental understanding of the natural history, behavior, and basic requirements of the wildlife species to be rehabilitated. Rehabilitators must be aware of common situations in order to anticipate, prevent, or minimize human-wildlife conflicts or other problems. They must be able to safely capture and handle a wild animal in distress, administer basic first aid and health care, provide proper nutrition and feeding methods, meet behavioral and environmental requirements, prevent zoonotic (transmittable to humans) and other disease exposures, and more. Some states and provinces require rehabilitation training and apprenticeships as a permit or license requirement. A few states require tests to ensure a minimum knowledge level.



Wildlife rehabilitation requires considerable study and training, but without this knowledge and skill, the rehabilitator can put the individual animal, wildlife populations, domestic animals, and humans at risk. Knowledge and skill are absolutely critical to achieve high quality care and prepare an animal for release back to the wild. Compassion alone is not enough.

#### **Myth 6**

*The government pays rehabilitators to care for wildlife.* Wildlife rehabilitators generally are unpaid volunteers who fund the expenses for their wildlife rehabilitation activities either from their own pockets or donations from the community. Government agencies rarely contribute to any rehabilitation activities, unless it is small amounts given for endangered species.

*Managing stress and risk* is yet another important aspect of wildlife rehabilitation. Responding to public questions on human-wildlife conflicts and working with animals in severe conditions can be difficult emotionally. Having to make tough decisions, such as euthanizing an animal, is never easy, but is occasionally required and can add more stress. There can be physical stress from strenuous work and a demanding schedule. Having to pursue multiple tasks with competing high priorities requires skilled time management, as well as making trade-offs, possibly sacrificing time with family and friends. As a caregiver, a rehabilitator must define and come to terms with his or her own personal limits – whether it is time, skills, finances, or whatever, for the benefit of both the rehabilitator and the animal.

There can be some risks to the rehabilitator's personal health and safety from animal bites and scratches, or from contracting zoonotic diseases carried by the animal or its external parasites (mites, ticks, fleas, etc.). Some people manage this by choosing not to work with more aggressive species, or species that are known to carry certain high-risk diseases. Personal legal risks could present themselves in the form of animal bites to others if rigorous safety and confinement protocols are not followed. All of these are manageable with proper training and attention.

*Veterinary support* is another key requirement, as many wild animals are admitted to rehabilitation severely injured or ill, and also mandatory for some rehabilitation permits. For most rehabilitators, this means that they must arrange for the services of a veterinarian.

A knowledgeable veterinarian willing to work with wildlife is essential. This can be challenging to find since most veterinarians have practices oriented toward domestic animals (pets or livestock). Working with wildlife is different and requires that veterinarians understand and accommodate the differences (such as handling, stress factors and levels, diets, emphasis on the goal of release back to the wild). The veterinarian

needs to be willing to work closely with the rehabilitator, since the rehabilitator will often be providing medical care to the animal under the veterinarian's supervision but at the rehabilitator's facility. The rehabilitator and veterinarian should work together to make decisions on releasability and euthanasia. Some veterinarians may donate services, but often rehabilitators are responsible for the cost of medications, treatments, and some services.

**Myth 7**

***Wildlife likes to be cuddled and loved.*** Most wild animals, especially those aware of their surroundings, do not want to be in captivity. Wildlife is stressed by human contact. Human contact, whether visual, auditory, or physical, must be minimized. Wildlife should not be cuddled, petted, or handled unnecessarily. Wild animals are not pets and should not be treated as such.

***Wildlife rehabilitation licenses or permits*** are required to work with most native species, since wildlife is a natural resource and considered the property of the collective people of a state. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service requires federal rehabilitation permits to work with migratory bird species, marine mammals, and species listed under the Endangered Species Act. With very few exceptions, wildlife agencies require wildlife rehabilitation permits or licenses to rehabilitate wildlife. Contact information for federal and state agencies on wildlife rehabilitation regulations and requirements can be found on page 10.

In Canada, permits are required from most provincial governments. The Canadian Wildlife Service requires a federal permit to rehabilitate migratory birds or endangered species.

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*Congratulations for reading this far! With this brief understanding, let us now suggest ways to learn more about wildlife rehabilitation, either as a part-time volunteer or full-fledged permitted or licensed wildlife rehabilitator.*

***Ways To Learn About Wildlife Rehabilitation***

People can learn about wildlife rehabilitation in a variety of ways. There are training programs, seminars, and conferences offered on rehabilitation techniques and many relevant subjects, such as the natural history of wildlife, anatomy and physiology, nutrition and diets, first aid and trauma care, capture and handling, cage design and construction, working with the public, humane solutions for human-wildlife conflicts, and much more. Such programs may be offered by wildlife rehabilitators, rehabilitation facilities, associations such as state groups, the National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association (NWRA), the International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council (IWRC), veterinarians, wildlife professionals, state and provincial wildlife agencies, or other knowledgeable parties. While some training may be available locally, special arrangements or travel to seminars and conferences to acquire additional or specialized knowledge may be necessary.

**Myth 8**

***Wildlife rehabilitation is a great activity for children.*** One of the important aspects of wildlife is its wildness. Wildlife does not want to be in captivity, handled, or watched by humans, who are considered predators. They will bite, scratch, kick, or do whatever is needed to escape. These animals also may transmit diseases and parasites, many of which are particularly dangerous to children. In addition, too much attention by humans can stress the animal and cause unintended consequences, such as the animal's death. There are many ways other than rehabilitation to help children learn about nature.

There are a variety of publications relevant to wildlife rehabilitation. Some of these publications are specifically focused on wildlife rehabilitation, such as the *Principles of Wildlife Rehabilitation* (NWRA), *Skills Seminar 1AB - Manual* (IWRC), and books by various rehabilitation facilities. There are professional journals, such as *The Journal of Wildlife Rehabilitation* (IWRC), and the *NWRA Quarterly Journal* (NWRA). In addition, a variety of rehabilitation facilities and associations produce newsletters (for example, the New York State Wildlife Rehabilitation Council, Ontario Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Network) and resource lists. Other publications and internet sites on wildlife rehabilitation are also available.



Membership in these organizations provides an excellent opportunity for communicating with rehabilitators and others on subjects of mutual interest. People interested in learning more about wildlife rehabilitation are encouraged to become members. Membership information is available on page 10.

Most people find that it is necessary to supplement classroom training, conferences, and publications with volunteering for a rehabilitator or working some sort of apprenticeship under the supervision of an experienced, permitted or licensed wildlife rehabilitator. This allows the person to observe various procedures and techniques, receive coaching on his or her personal actions, and gradually build personal skills while minimizing risks to the animals or people. Federal and state regulations may require some time in an apprenticeship role before granting a full rehabilitation permit or license.

### ***Ways To Become a Wildlife Rehabilitator***

One of the most common ways people become wildlife rehabilitators is to begin by volunteering for an experienced, permitted wildlife rehabilitator or rehabilitation facility. This allows the person to assess whether he or she finds satisfaction in wildlife rehabilitation activities and is a reasonable match for the required duties.

Some people will decide that wildlife rehabilitation is exactly what they want to do and that they have adequate time and resources. They will expand their knowledge of rehabilitation through reading, attending training programs and conferences, and trying to learn more from all knowledgeable sources. They will enlist the help of a sponsor or mentor. They will develop strong communications with rehabilitators and veterinarians. They will work to meet the criteria for a wildlife rehabilitation permit or license and obtain them.

### ***Other Ways To Help Animals or the Environment***

There are many valuable ways to help animals without having to become a permitted or licensed wildlife rehabilitator. Some people may want to volunteer to help rehabilitators with particular tasks, such as cage-building, transport, educational programs, fund-raising, or special projects. Others may want more direct contact with animals and can volunteer to work with domestic pets for rescue groups or local animal shelters. Those groups often want people to handle, cuddle, and socialize pets. Still others may decide to dedicate their time to various environmental or political causes that help wildlife or other animals by such activities as protecting habitat or working on wildlife policy issues.

*By now you're aware that becoming a wildlife rehabilitator presents many challenges and opportunities. It can be very stimulating and rewarding. Here are some ideas about how to begin.*

### ***Getting Started***

- Learn more about the specifics of wildlife rehabilitation by reading, attending training, and talking with experienced wildlife rehabilitators.
- Volunteer for a wildlife rehabilitator or rehabilitation facility. Find out what is involved and if you like the work.
- Discuss with your family the degree to which you want to be involved and what that might mean.
- Contact your state or provincial and federal wildlife agencies. Become familiar with relevant regulations and the application process. Investigate local laws and ordinances, such as zoning, health.
- Identify and develop a cooperative relationship with a veterinarian knowledgeable about and willing to work with wildlife.
- Identify and contact other rehabilitators in your region. Enlist the help of an experienced rehabilitator as a trainer, mentor, or sponsor.
- Obtain supplies. Acquire and build cages. Prepare facilities.
- Apply for and obtain the appropriate state and federal licenses and permits.
- When you and your facility are ready, start small by rehabilitating a limited numbers of species and animals. Build up gradually.

### ***Permit and License Requirements***

License requirements vary by state or province and local areas. Contact your state or provincial wildlife agency and obtain the specifics for your area. Information for federal licenses can be obtained by contacting the responsible federal agency, such as the US Fish and Wildlife Service - Migratory Bird Permit Office or the Canadian Wildlife Service.

***Thank you for your interest!***

Many people appreciate and care about wildlife, both wild populations and individual animals. Some decide that they want to become personally involved helping wildlife that has been injured, orphaned, displaced, or distressed. We hope that through this booklet, we have provided an overview of the joys and rewards that can come from working with nature's wild creatures. We have also described the requirements, challenges, work, and commitment involved in accomplishing this goal. It is not easy, but it is rewarding!

If you are interested in helping wild animals in need, we urge you to contact a wildlife rehabilitator or wildlife rehabilitation organization for more information. Some people may decide to volunteer a few hours per week for a wildlife rehabilitator or other wildlife cause. A few may decide to work towards a full wildlife rehabilitation permit or license. Whichever you decide, we appreciate your interest in and efforts for wildlife.

Thank you for reading this booklet. We hope to involve you soon in our efforts to provide help to nature's wonderful wild creatures.

## **Wildlife Response, Inc.**

is Hampton Roads oldest continuing Wildlife Rehabilitation organization dedicated to helping Virginia's native wildlife. Wildlife Response's mission is to rehabilitate injured and orphaned wildlife, educate the public in matters pertaining to wildlife, and offer up to date training to licensed wildlife rehabilitators. If you are interested in becoming a WRI member, please contact us at:

**Wildlife Response, Inc.**  
PO Box 2904  
Chesapeake, VA 23327  
757-543-7000



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*More information on wildlife rehabilitation is available from*

International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council (IWRC)  
4437 Central Place, Suite B-4, Suisun, CA 94585  
707-864-1761  
[www.iwrc-online.org](http://www.iwrc-online.org)

National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association (NWRA)  
14 North 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, St. Cloud, MN 56303-4766  
320-259-4086  
[www.nwrawildlife.org](http://www.nwrawildlife.org)