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Wildlife Rescue



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Written by
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Wildlife Rescue



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Tucson Wildlife Center

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Who to Call?

If you see a wild animal in trouble, let an adult know right away. If you cannot find an adult you trust, look in the phone book under "Wildlife Rescue" or "Animal Rescue."

Introduction

A baby bird hops along the ground, and its parents are nowhere in sight. What should you do if you find a baby bird that appears to be **orphaned**? What if you find a rabbit that seems unable to hop or a raccoon swaying from side to side as it walks?

Many people don't know what actions to take, or not to take, when they find wildlife that may be in danger.

However, people with special training in caring for wildlife know just what to do. They know to leave the raccoon alone because it is probably sick, and they know whether they can help the rabbit and then return it to the wild. They can also look at the baby bird and know what care to give, if any. These people can teach you how to help, too.



Topsy, a three-month-old female great horned owl, was rescued after she fell out of her nest during a windstorm. She is healing from neck and back injuries.

Wildlife Rehabilitators

People who help sick, injured, or orphaned wildlife are called *wildlife rehabilitators*, or “rehabbers.” *Rehabilitate* means “to restore, or bring back, to good health.” Wildlife rehabbers rescue wild animals and care for them as they heal. After the animals recover, rehabbers return them to the wild whenever possible.

Wildlife rehabbers have special training in caring for, feeding, and housing wild animals. Many can treat wild animals for illnesses and injuries, too. They also know how to handle wildlife safely without hurting the animals or themselves.



Animal caretakers treat a sea turtle for injuries to its right flipper.



Rehabber Lisa treats Tripod, a young javelina who was hit by a car.

The work of rehabbers is needed more frequently as people move into places where wild animals live. When land is used for farming, houses, and businesses, the homes and food sources of wild animals are destroyed. As people invade wildlife **habitats**, animals are more likely to be orphaned, injured, or killed. People and their activities cause the majority of wildlife injuries.

Common Causes of Injury

- Hit by cars or other vehicles such as windows
- Litter and pollution
- Hitting other objects, such as windows
- Poisoning
- Attacks by other animals
- Illegal hunting
- Attacks by other animals

Some wildlife rehabbers work with a variety of mammals, birds, and reptiles. Others focus on just one group of animals, such as owls, bats, or ocean animals. Wildlife rehabbers often care for **urban** wildlife—animals that live in cities or towns, such as squirrels, raccoons, and foxes. Some brave rehabbers work with dangerous animals such as bears, mountain lions, and bobcats.



A Florida state wildlife worker examines a panther kitten.

How do people become wildlife rehabbers? Many start as **volunteers** who learn from those who have special wildlife training. They learn to care for animals in the homes and backyards of rehabbers, as well as at wildlife centers. Volunteers do not get paid for their work, but most rehabbers do not get paid, either. Rehabbers often spend their own money to buy food, medicine, and shelters for the animals in their

care. People help wild animals because they care about wildlife and want the animals to get healthy. Rehabbers also recognize that proper care of wild animals promotes healthy habitats and prevents illness and injury to people as well.



A volunteer holds a baby red-tailed hawk while a rehabber takes off a bandage. The hawk broke a leg when it fell out of its nest.

Rescue

How do you know whether an animal needs to be rescued? You should always follow these two rules: 1) *do not touch the animal*, and 2) *call an adult right away*. Adults can help by calling a wildlife rehabber who is trained in wildlife rescue.

You can help by watching from a safe place to see where an animal hides so that rescuers can quickly find the animal when they arrive. Putting a box or laundry basket over an injured small animal will protect it from **predators** until help arrives.



An animal rescuer gives water to a koala he saved from a fire.

Watch Out!

If you see any of these animal behaviors, stay away! They are clues that the animal may be sick—and dangerous.

- a bat on the ground
- a wild animal that appears to be tame
- an animal with excess drool, or what appears to be foam around its mouth
- an animal that can't move
- an animal that looks extremely angry
- a nocturnal animal (one that is normally active at night) that is active during the day—especially a raccoon, skunk, opossum, fox, or bat

SAFETY FIRST

... for Animals

- Animals may be injured or die from being held wrong when they are hurt and frightened.
- Animals may be injured or die if kept in the wrong kind of cage. For example, wild birds may break bones or damage feathers when trying to escape from wire cages.
- Human scent on a baby animal may cause its parents not to care for it. This is truer for mammals than for birds because mammals have a better sense of smell.

... for People

- Injured wild animals may be frightened because they are in pain. They may bite, kick, scratch, peck, or stab to try to defend themselves. They don't know that people are trying to help.
- Wild animals may have diseases that can be passed on to humans and pets. Bats, coyotes, raccoons, foxes, and skunks are more likely than other wild animals to carry rabies, a deadly disease that all warm-blooded animals, including humans, can catch. Anyone who may have been exposed to rabies must be treated right away.

Many baby animals are wrongly taken from their homes when they aren't in danger. A baby bird hopping on the ground may not be orphaned—it might be a **fledgling**, a young bird learning how to fly. Fledglings often hop on the ground to practice moving before they fly. Their parents usually watch them from a distance, but you may not be able to see the parents.

People sometimes rescue baby rabbits, seals, and fawns that aren't in trouble. It's normal for these babies to rest quietly on a beach or in the grass while their mothers eat nearby. Only people trained in the natural ways of these animals know whether the babies need human help. If they don't, taking them from their mother hurts their chance of survival.



Unless baby animals are wounded, they do not need to be rescued.

Many people wrongly believe they are helping wild animals by taking them home. Don't confuse loving wildlife with being able to take care of these animals. Much more training is needed to care for wild animals than to care for dogs and cats. Besides, taking home wild animals is against the law.

If you were injured in an accident, would you want just anyone taking you home and caring for you? No, you would want someone who was a trained professional, such as a doctor or nurse. You would also want a clean place that has the right

equipment and medicine to help you. Like you, wild animals deserve the best available care.



Veterinarians examine a red panda.

Do You Know?

Spring is the busiest time of year for wildlife rescue because wild animals give birth in the spring. Babies are weaker and often can't survive on their own. A baby animal may become orphaned if a car hits its mother or if a hunter or predator kills its parents.

Rehabilitation

When animals are brought to a rehabilitation center, the first step is to give them a checkup and first aid. Newly rescued animals are **quarantined**, or put in their own cages, so other animals do not get sick from contact with them. Rehabbers keep detailed notes about each animal so they can tell if the animal is getting better, when to give it medicine, and when to feed it.

Animals that come to rehabilitation centers can have a variety of problems. If they have broken bones or diseases, **veterinarians** must treat those problems first. Afterward, the animals can go to the rehabilitation center to get better.

Igor, a black vulture, was fed birdseed instead of the meat he needed for good health. His bones became fragile and broke during his rescue.



Baby animals need special care because they need to stay warm. Rehabbers may put them in an **incubator** to keep them warm, or the rehabbers may place hot-water bottles, heating pads, or lightbulbs in the baby animals' cages.



Rehabilitated birds practice flying in a flight cage until they have healed enough to be released.

with a broken wing might need a small, dark cage where it can stay calm while it starts to heal. After the broken bone has healed, an outdoor area called a *flight cage* will allow the bird to exercise and relearn how to fly.

Young, injured animals often need more care so they can heal. As they become stronger, they may be placed with an adult animal to help them. Adult animals show them useful animal behaviors and how to hunt for food.

Animals may need to heal in one place and recover in another. For example, a hawk

Most wild animals are frightened of people, and being away from home is stressful. Too much stress can kill a wild animal. Workers at rehabilitation centers try to protect animals from too much contact with people. They try to keep noise levels low, and they cover cages with towels. They also avoid staring at the animals because, in the wild, staring is a signal that an animal is being hunted.

A puppet serves as a substitute mother so that this young condor doesn't get too used to humans.



Imprinting

Baby animals imprint on their mothers at an early age; a baby duck learns that it is a duck by watching its mother every day. Wildlife rehabbers take special care not to let baby birds imprint on people; otherwise, the babies will grow up thinking they are human and will seek out humans instead of their own kind. Raptors, or birds of prey, and other birds that have imprinted on people may become dangerous in the wild. They may seek attention from a hiker who doesn't know they are used to human contact. The hiker or the bird could get hurt in the meeting. For this reason, the birds often cannot go back to the wild.



A volunteer feeds a mouse to an adult red-tailed hawk that is almost completely blind.

Do You Know?

Meat-eating animals at rehabilitation centers need to eat meat so that they heal and grow strong. Wildlife rehabbers pick up animals recently hit by cars or trucks along roads, called *roadkill*, to use as animal food. They also keep freezers full of "mouse-cicles"—frozen mice that they use as food. To save money, some centers raise quail, mice, rats, and rabbits as animal food.

Wildlife rehabbers must feed each animal foods that are similar to its natural foods. Some foods can make the animals sick or interfere with their normal growth. For example, the cow's milk sold in grocery stores is extremely harmful to many baby animals and can kill them.

Rescued animals must be fed natural foods so that they can survive in the wild later on. Natural foods are most important for orphaned animals that have grown up in a rehabilitation center. If they develop a taste for human food or do not learn to find their own food, they may starve in the wild.

Release

When a rescued animal is ready to return to the wild, rehabbers must decide where to release it. The search for a good location begins long before an animal is ready for release. Rehabbers find a location that has plenty of food, water, and shelter, and make sure that the location is safe from human contact.

Rehabbers must make sure the animal is healthy enough before releasing it—that it can run, climb, or fly without any difficulty. They also make sure the animal is able to see, hear, find food, avoid predators, and be with other animals of its own kind.



This Tasmanian devil will be examined before it's released.

The first step in releasing an animal is moving it to an outdoor pen or cage with other animals of the same kind. Once outdoors, the animal can get used to the weather and to less-frequent contact with people. After some time outdoors at the rehabilitation center, the animal is ready for release.

Slow release is often used with young animals, especially orphans. Rehabbers put a pen in a safe place in the wild with the door left open so that the animal can return to it. They provide food for the animal until it is clear that the animal can find food for itself. Fast release is often used with wild animals that were rescued as adults. These animals already know how to live on their own in nature. They are taken to a release location, ideally near where they were found, and let go.



A wildlife rehabber has some company as she lets this bald eagle fly.

About half the animals at rehabilitation centers are too sick or too badly injured to ever be released back into the wild. Many animals have lost limbs, beaks, wings, or eyesight. A bird with an injured wing that does not heal properly, or with only one eye, would not be able to fly or hunt in the wild.

When it is clear that an animal will never be able to survive in the wild or at a rehabilitation center, rehabbers have to make a tough decision. If the animal is in pain, euthanasia—quick, painless killing—is sometimes the best way to end that animal's suffering.

This adult female great horned owl is not a quiet flyer because of a wing injury. The noise warns prey animals she hunts, so she can never be released.



Disaster Rescue

Human activities are not the only causes of wildlife injuries. Natural disasters, such as wildfires and hurricanes, hurt animals, too. Terri Crisp spends much of her time rescuing animals that are affected by natural disasters.



Terri Crisp with one of the animals she has rescued from earthquakes, fires, floods, hurricanes, oil spills, tornadoes, and other disasters

During a raging California wildfire in 1986, Terri rescued a Shetland pony by **coaxing** it into a car. She worked to save sea otters and loons in 1989 during the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in Alaska. In 1992, she worked to rescue hundreds of animals hurt by Hurricane Andrew. She started the organization Noah's Wish to train volunteers to rescue animals that are in danger because of natural disasters.

Incredibly, many wild animals knew to run inland before the 2004 Asian tsunami hit land. However, pets and farm animals did not fare so well. Many people in the areas hit by the tsunami depended on working farm animals. Large numbers of these animals were killed, and many others were injured or left in places without food when the tsunami struck. The Humane Society International and others help the animals, and the people who care for them, get their lives back on track.



A man carries his daughter and dog to safety after the tsunami in December 2004.

Conclusion

Rehabbers often use animals that cannot go back to the wild as **ambassadors** to help teach people to respect wildlife. Children and adults learn about wildlife that live in their area and about respecting the land so that wild animals can continue to find food and shelter.

Wildlife rehabbers do important work in caring for injured wild animals and returning many of them to the wild. You can help rehabbers' efforts by respecting wildlife and by calling a rehabber if you see an animal in trouble. One phone call could give a wild animal the opportunity to grow up and live a free and healthy life.



This bird of prey acts as an ambassador to teach children about animals in their area.

Glossary

ambassadors (n.)	representatives of a country, species, or cause (p. 22)
coaxing (v.)	convincing through gentle persuasion (p. 20)
fledgling (n.)	a young bird that is learning to fly (p. 11)
habitats (n.)	the natural environments of plants or animals (p. 6)
incubator (n.)	an enclosure in which a baby animal is placed to keep it warm (p. 14)
orphaned (adj.)	caused to have no parents (p. 4)
predators (n.)	animals that hunt and eat other animals (p. 9)
quarantined (v.)	isolated to prevent the spread of disease (p. 13)
urban (adj.)	near or in a city or town (p. 7)
veterinarians (n.)	doctors who treat animals other than humans for illnesses and injuries (p. 13)
volunteers (n.)	people who offer help or perform a service without being paid (p. 8)

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Explore More

On the Internet use www.google.com to find out more about topics presented in this book. Use terms from the text, or try searching for glossary or index words. Some searches to try: *wildlife rehabilitation*, *veterinarian*, or *Humane Society International*.

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Cover: This baby gray fox was found in a pipe on a farm. It will be placed with an adult fox before it is released into the wild.

Back cover: A rescued raccoon washes its food at a rehab center as it would in the wild.

Title page: Wildlife rehabber Lisa Bates works with a nearly blind hawk.

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