

LEVELED BOOK • R

# Wildlife Rescue



Written by  
Kira Freed

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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 seems to be **orphaned**? What if you find a rabbit that seems unable to hop or a raccoon that is walking strangely?

Many people don't know what to do, or not to do, when they find wildlife that may be in danger. But some people with special training know just what to do. They know

to leave the raccoon alone because it is probably sick. 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 **rehabilitators**, or “rehabbers.” Rehabilitate means “to make healthy again.” Wildlife rehabbers **rescue** wild animals and care for the animals as they heal. After the animals recover, or get better, 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 sicknesses 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 often as people move into **habitats** where once only wild animals lived. When land is used for farming, houses, and businesses, the homes and food sources of wild animals are destroyed. As people move into wild areas, animals are more likely to be orphaned, injured, or killed. People and their activities cause most wildlife injuries.

## Common Causes of Injury

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

## 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 rescuers can quickly find it when they arrive. Putting a box or laundry basket over a small animal will protect it from other animals until help comes.



A Florida state wildlife worker examines a panther kitten.

### 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 a lot of 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.

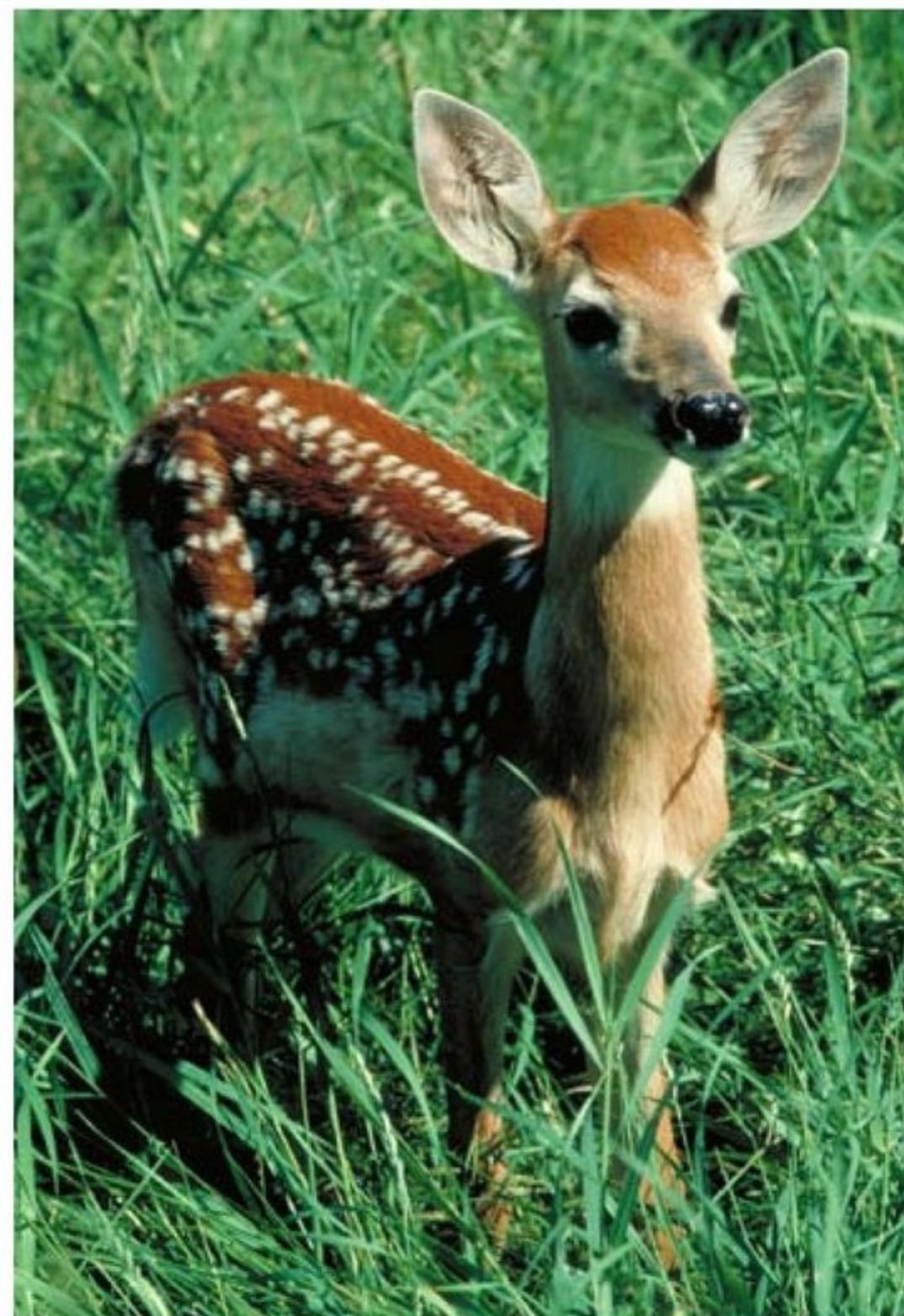
### *... for People*

- 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 young bird hopping on the ground may not be orphaned. It might just be learning how to fly. Baby birds often hop around as they practice moving before they fly. Their parents usually watch them from somewhere nearby, 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 chances to survive.

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. Just because you love animals doesn't mean you can take care of a wild animal. 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 trained to help, 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 to get the best 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, they get a checkup and first aid. If the animals have broken bones or diseases, doctors must treat those conditions first. Newly rescued animals are put in their own cages and kept separate from other animals so they don't make others sick. Rehabbers keep detailed notes about each animal so they can tell if the animal is getting better.

Most wild animals are scared of people, and being away from home is stressful. Too much stress can kill a wild animal. Rehabbers try to protect animals from stress and from too much **contact** with people.

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.



Rehabbers try to keep noise levels low and cover cages with towels so that animals don't see the people around them. Rehabbers 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 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 humans. Otherwise, the babies will grow up thinking they are human and will seek out humans instead of their own kind. Birds that have imprinted on humans may become dangerous in the wild. They may seek attention from a hiker who doesn't know that the birds are used to human contact. The hiker or the bird might 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 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 animals sick or prevent them from growing normally. For example, the cow’s milk sold in grocery stores is very harmful to many baby animals and can kill them.

Rescued animals must be fed natural foods so 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 get used to eating human food or do not learn to find their own food, they may starve in the wild.



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

## 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 place that has plenty of food, water, and shelter. They also make sure that the place is safe from human contact.

Rehabbers must make sure the animal is healthy enough before releasing it. They make sure that it can run, climb, or fly without problems. They also make sure the animal is able to see, hear, and find food. The animal needs to know how to avoid animals that want to eat it and how to 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. The animal shares this cage with other animals of the same kind. Once outdoors, the animal can get used to the weather and to less contact with people. After some time outdoors at the rehabilitation center, the animal is ready for release.

Some young animals, especially orphans, are released slowly. Rehabbers put a pen in a safe place in the wild with the door left open so that the animal can return to it. Rehabbers provide food for the animal until it is clear that the animal can find food for itself. Wild animals rescued as adults are released much faster than young animals that never had to live on their own in nature. If possible, animals are released near where they were found.



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

About half the animals at rehabilitation centers are too sick or too badly injured to ever go back into the wild. Many animals have lost limbs, beaks, wings, or eyesight. A bird with a wing that did not heal well, 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 survive in the wild or at a center, rehabbers have to make a hard decision. If the animal is in pain, a quick, painless killing is sometimes the best way to end that animal's suffering.

This adult female great horned owl is not a silent flyer because of a wing injury. The noise she makes while flying warns the animals she needs to hunt for food, so she can never be released.





This predatory bird helps to teach children about animals in their area.

## Conclusion

Rehabbers often use animals that cannot go back to the wild to help teach people to respect wildlife. Children and adults learn about wildlife that live in their area. They also learn 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 might give a wild animal the opportunity to grow up and live a free and healthy life.

## Glossary

<b>contact</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	connection, such as through sight, sound, or touch (p. 11)
<b>equipment</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	tools used in work or play (p. 10)
<b>habitats</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the natural environments of plants or animals (p. 6)
<b>injured</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	hurt or harmed (p. 5)
<b>orphaned</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	caused to have no parents (p. 4)
<b>rehabilitators</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	people who work with sick or injured wildlife to help them become healthy again (p. 5)
<b>rescue</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to save from danger (p. 5)

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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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