



The New York State Wildlife Rehabilitation Council (NYSWRC) is a not-for-profit membership organization dedicated to the education of wildlife rehabilitators, improvement of the field of wildlife rehabilitations, and the protection and preservation of the environment.

This, the Council's mission statement, is the purpose of the oldest state wildlife rehabilitation organization in the country.

Our history is a story of the commitment and dedication of a diverse group of people including interested beginners, home rehabilitators, experienced wildlife professionals, veterinarians, and many more.

Over the years, NYSWRC has grown and matured far beyond the dreams of its founding members in 1977 – President Mary Forness and a visionary group of rehabilitators who originated the Council and hosted the first seminar in 1980. In 1986 there were 358 licenses; by 1989 there were 437; in 1992 that number was up to 648. Today there are over 1500 licensees and assistant members.

Since the beginning and with subsequent boards of directors, new goals were set, and met. For example, the first Department of Environmental Conservation Guide was launched, the first Veterinarian Award was given, and the Special Skills seminars were developed.

Today, the Council provides conferences and specialized training sessions, a newsletter, supplies through conference vendors, and educational materials. Various brochures and publications have been produced for both public and rehabilitator education. NYSWRC presents the finest speakers in the nation on a wide range of topics. Over the past many years the seminar grew to be a 3-day conference and has featured a minimum of 1000 topics, and presentations by hundreds of speakers from across the nation. In addition,

NYSWRC strives to keep its members informed on any number of environmental and legislative issues of concern to wildlife, and it diligently works to maintain relationships with the various concerned agencies that affect wildlife.

Each year the Council's members handle over 20,000 animals, with 50% of those successfully returned to the wild.

From a once fledgling organization, NYSWRC has grown to be one of the most well-known and well-respected rehabilitation organizations in the nation. Yet there is still a staggering amount of work to do – education, advocacy, support, and caring for thousands of needy wild animals. We are passionate and dedicated about what we do in our profession of wildlife rehabilitation. As we move forward, we will continue to uphold the hallmark that was set in the beginning by our founders – to provide the best possible leadership for the rehabilitators of New York State and to ultimately make the world a better place for our wildlife, planet, and mankind.



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1980 The first Seminar was held in conjunction with Cornell University's Laboratory of Ornithology. First publication of the membership newsletter, Release.

1986 The first examination to obtain a rehabilitation permit was given by the Department of Conservation.

1987 The Council was granted NY 501c-3 status.

1988 "The Veterinarian and Distressed Wildlife" brochure was published, co-produced with the NYS Veterinary Medical Society and the NYS College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University

1989 Bill 11-0919 was signed; the first instance of legal recognition of the wildlife rehabilitation field.

1990 Ten Regional Oil Spill Training Sessions were conducted in conjunction with the DEC's Return-A-Gift program.

1991 The Best of Release was published. A two year, three part study was completed in conjunction with the Human Resources Dimensions Unit at Cornell University.



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1992 The first Department of Environmental Conservation's Study Guide was produced with input from NYSWRC. The Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the NYS Veterinary Medical Society to improve wildlife care.

1997 The first Veterinarian of the Year Award was given to Dr. Michael Bonda. A statewide teleconference was provided at six NYS locations for the first Rabies Vector Species Training Class.

1998 The Northeast Seminar and Wildlife Rehabilitation Conference was held with the participants of six states (New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, Pennsylvania, and Maine) to celebrate the Council's 20th anniversary. The first Public Service Announcement was produced.

2000 The Council launched its website with the links to the Department of Environmental Conservation and other reliable sites. The Animal Basics Class (ABC) was added to the Annual Seminar's repertoire.

2003 The Council awarded its first Lifetime Achievement Award to Kay McKeever of Canada, a rehabilitator known around the world for her work with owls.

2004 Walter Crawford, World Bird Sanctuary, was recognized by the Council for his many contributions to rehabilitation. The Advisory Board Council was created to help chart the course for the NYSWRC.

2005 NYSWRC offers the Emergency Animal Rescue Services training at the Annual Conference. Creation of a professional press package.

2011 Recognized for 15 years of hosting the Rabies Vector Species Certification course during the annual NYSWRC Conference.

2014 Reconstruction of the website began and development of a social media platform.

2015 Anniversary of 35 years of the Release publication

2016 On behalf of the organizations membership, NYSWRC takes on the new license restrictions to the wildlife rehabilitation license. NYSWRC organizes and hosts the Tri-State Oil Spill Workshop.

2017 NYSWRC incorporates online registration for the annual conference and has record numbers for registration.



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