

# WHAT IS WILDLIFE REHABILITATION?

## Facts and Myths



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**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 caregiving.



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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, provincial, and federal wildlife agencies.

**MYTH:** Anyone who finds an injured or orphaned animal can take it home and care for it, and everything will be wonderful.

**FACT:** Wildlife, especially injured or orphaned wildlife, requires specialized care to survive. Without such specialized diets, feeding, cages, and treatment, many of these animals suffer or die. Working with wildlife is a serious activity and requires possession of permits and licenses. Inappropriately released wildlife can result in problems for wild and human populations' alike.



Photo by Tobias Negele on Unsplash

**MYTH:** Wildlife rehabilitation is fun.

**FACT:** Wildlife rehabilitation can be interesting, stimulating, rewarding, and sometimes pleasant, but it is rarely fun. It is, however, physically demanding, emotionally stressful, and tough work that involves tasks ranging from cleaning wounds and scrubbing cages to making decisions about whether or not to euthanize an animal that is suffering and not expected to recover.



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**MYTH:** Wildlife rehabilitation is a hobby.

**FACT:** Wildlife rehabilitators do not have the option to choose when they spend time performing necessary tasks to care for the animal that has grown to depend upon them providing food, water, and medical care; cleaning cages; and other important tasks as necessary. In fact, when a rehabilitator is caring for animals and has to travel, they have to arrange for another rehabilitator to backfill their responsibility.

**MYTH:** Loving wildlife qualifies you to be a rehabilitator.

**FACT:** Compassion allows a wildlife rehabilitator to provide effective care; however, skill, specialized knowledge, facilities, permits, licenses, and more are REQUIRED.

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**MYTH:** Experience with pets or “being good” with domestic animals qualifies people to be rehabilitators.

**FACT:** Wildlife is very different from domestic 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.

**MYTH:** The government pays rehabilitators to care for wildlife.

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

**MYTH:** Wildlife likes to be cuddled and loved.

**FACT:** Most wild animals do not want to be in captivity. Wildlife is stressed by human contact, therefore, human contact, whether visual, auditory or physical must be minimized. Wild animals are NOT pets and should NOT be treated as such.

**MYTH:** Wildlife rehabilitation is a great activity for children.

**FACT:** One of the most important aspects of wildlife is its wildness. Wildlife does not want to be in captivity, handled or watched by humans, who are considered predators. These animals will bite, scratch, kick or do whatever is needed to escape; they may also transmit diseases and parasites, many of which are particularly dangerous to children.



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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 transport, educational programs, cage building, fundraising, 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 spend lots of time with pets. Still others may decide to dedicate their time to various environmental or political causes that help wildlife or other animals by protecting habitat or working on wildlife policy issues.

For more information, please visit [www.nyswrc.org](http://www.nyswrc.org)



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# Rehabilitation

NY STATE WILDLIFE REHABILITATION COUNCIL  
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