

Minimum Basic Knowledge for Wildlife Rehabilitators

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REHABILITATORS ASSOCIATION
INTERNATIONAL WILDLIFE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

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INTRODUCTION

Certain basic knowledge is needed before one can be an effective wildlife rehabilitator. In many cases, documentation of knowledge and/or training is required to obtain permits necessary to allow wildlife rehabilitation activities. In any case, acquiring knowledge before acquiring animals enables the practitioner to provide better care for each animal.

Knowledge should be based on science and sound practice. Such knowledge can be acquired through a combination of academic instruction, on-the-job training, professional conferences and training seminars, and networking with colleagues. Much knowledge can be committed to memory, but the rehabilitator should have resources available at all times to access needed information.

Recommended Knowledge. General knowledge should be acquired regarding wildlife rehabilitation.

- What is involved, including knowledge, training, legal requirements, cost, time commitment, emotional involvement, dangers, and rewards
- Regulations affecting wildlife rehabilitation, including state/provincial and federal wildlife rehabilitation regulations, health ordinances, zoning laws, etc.
- Ethics of wildlife rehabilitation
- Sources of information, training, references, networking, products, and materials

- Self-care recognition and methods to minimize stress and prevent burnout

More specific knowledge should be acquired pertaining to the species to be rehabilitated.

- Basic identification, including different ages
- Natural history and behavior
- Identification and general assessment of common wildlife problems and conditions
- Working with orphans, including imprinting, taming, and habituation
- Safe capture and handling, including restraint, transport, hygiene, and human vaccinations
- Wildlife parasites and diseases, including zoonosis
- Basic anatomy, examination procedure, and first aid
- Working effectively with cooperating veterinarian
- Facilities, housing/caging, and habitat needs
- Release criteria, consideration, and conditioning
- Euthanasia criteria and methods, including safe and legal disposition of materials and carcasses

Public information and education is a recognized part of wildlife rehabilitation and involves different knowledge than hands-on animal care.

- Effective communication techniques for handling phone calls and distributing information
- Humane solutions regarding human-wildlife conflicts, including preventing future problems
- When applicable, preparing and presenting effective public educational programs

Acquiring Knowledge. Most wildlife rehabilitators acquire knowledge and training through a combination of reading, attending training seminars and conferences, volunteering or interning under the guidance of an experienced rehabilitator, and consulting with peers and mentors. College degrees rarely are available in wildlife rehabilitation and most schools do not offer classes in captive wildlife care. However, some colleges do offer classes in ornithology, mammalogy, animal behavior, ecology, and animal husbandry, and

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others offer courses for veterinary assistants and technicians. These college-level courses are not required, but may be starting points for wildlife rehabilitators to learn about animal nutrition, housing, handling, and general husbandry. Further study and experience then can assist in modifying and applying this basic knowledge to the care of wild animals undergoing rehabilitation for the purpose of release.

General knowledge about wildlife rehabilitation can be acquired best by:

- Reading *Principles of Wildlife Rehabilitation: The Essential Guide for Novice and Experienced Rehabilitators* (NWRA) and *Minimum Standards for Wildlife Rehabilitation* (NWRA/IWRC)
- Contacting the state/provincial wildlife agency office that governs wildlife rehabilitation activities for information on permit requirements, training, and nearby rehabilitators
- Contacting the US Fish & Wildlife Service for current information regarding federal permits required for avian and endangered species
- Visiting a rehabilitation center or an individually licensed rehabilitator to learn more about what is involved in the work of rehabilitating wildlife

Knowledge specific to wildlife rehabilitation is available mainly through national and state/provincial wildlife rehabilitation associations and through training programs offered by wildlife rehabilitation centers. Gathering information requires resourcefulness, persistence, a willingness to purchase material and attend seminars, and an ability to determine quality, dependable information from inaccurate information. Various seminars, conferences, books, and journals are available through:

- National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association <<http://www.NWRAwildlife.org>>
- International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council <<http://theIWRC.org>>
- More than 25 state and provincial wildlife rehabilitation associations (listings available on the NWRA website and in *Principles of Wildlife Rehabilitation*)
- Many wildlife rehabilitation centers and individually licensed rehabilitators accept volunteers and are willing to teach basic knowledge and skills. Locate these resources through wildlife rehabilitation association membership directories or by searching the NWRA *Training Opportunities in Wildlife Rehabilitation* on the NWRA Website for job opportunities (both volunteer and paid)

Knowledge regarding informing and educating the public about wildlife and wildlife issues is available through:

- Presentation at national and state/provincial wildlife rehabilitation conferences
- *Principles of Wildlife Rehabilitation*
- *Wildlife in Education: A Guide for the Care and Use of Program Animals* (NWRA)
- *Introduction to Wildlife Education Programming: Tips and Techniques for better Presentation* (NWRA)
- Positions listed in the *Training Opportunities in Wildlife Rehabilitation*
- National Association for Interpretation (NAI) <<http://www.interpnet.com>> and related state associations for environmental educators
- Conferences designed for naturalists and nature center educators

Acquiring the basic knowledge and an understanding of wildlife rehabilitation is a wise investment. It provides a sound basis for developing further knowledge and skills, and enables the rehabilitator to provide high quality care for wildlife. ^(NR)

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