



## Wildlife Rehabilitators and Wildlife Rehabilitation

Wildlife rehabilitation involves caring for injured, ill, displaced, and orphaned wild animals—from bats to wolves to eagles to woodpeckers—with the goal of releasing physically fit and psychologically sound animals back into their natural habitat. Each animal is examined, diagnosed, and treated through a program of veterinary care, hospital care, feeding, medicating, physical therapy, exercising, and prerelease conditioning.

For rehabilitation to be deemed successful, released animals must be able to truly function as wild animals. This includes being able to recognize and obtain the appropriate foods, select mates of their own species and reproduce, and show the appropriate fear of potential dangers (people, cars, dogs, etc.). To accomplish this, releases are planned for appropriate weather, season, habitat, and location.

Some animals brought into wildlife rehabilitation centers in Washington, of course, are not releasable. Some of these animals can provide valuable research information and some are suitable as educational aids; others may need to be euthanized.

Some people advocate for “letting nature take its course,” indicating that injured, ill, and orphaned wild animals should be allowed to meet their natural fate. However, records indicate that the majority of distressed animals handled by rehabilitators are suffering not because of “natural” occurrences, but because of human intervention. Some of these are accidental, some are intentional, and many are preventable—such as those by vehicles, mowers, pets, high-voltage wires, firearms, traps, poisons, and oil spills.

Trained rehabilitators that are permitted through Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, are a link in the network of people and agencies working with wildlife. Some are involved in research, captive propagation, and reintroduction projects. Many are involved in public education, exposing both children and adults to biological facts, ecological concepts, and a responsible attitude toward all living things.

Because most rehabilitators are swamped with injured and orphaned animals during spring and summer months, they sometimes cannot take in animals for care. Many wild animals found by the public do not need to be rescued. The public can help by always consulting a rehabilitator, delaying intervention if possible, and working toward a solution that does not necessitate the handling of the animal.

Wildlife rehabilitation is a profession that is licensed by the state of Washington. Most rehabilitators, however, are volunteers and pay any expenses out of their own pockets. Typically, their capability (both financial and timewise) is limited and the demand is great, given all the calls from the public for assistance. Your regional wildlife office keeps a list of rehabilitators and can tell you which ones serve your area, or you can look under “Animals” or “Wildlife” in your phone directory.

**Note:** Per WAC 232-12-275, it is unlawful to possess wildlife for the purpose of rehabilitation without first obtaining a valid Washington State “Wildlife Rehabilitation Permit.”

### Additional Information

International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council

[www.iwrc-online.org](http://www.iwrc-online.org)

PAWS Wildlife: Washington Wildlife Rehabilitators

<http://www.paws.org/wildlife/rehabilitators/>

National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association

<http://www.nwrawildlife.org/home.asp>

Wildlife Rehabilitation Information Directory

[www.tc.umn.edu/~devo0028/](http://www.tc.umn.edu/~devo0028/)

Adapted from “Living with Wildlife in the Pacific Northwest” (see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living.htm>)

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