Wildlife
Capture and Transport
Manual

With emphasis on species of Pennsylvania and surrounding regions

By Peggy Sue Hentz

General Editor………………………………..Morrie Katz, CLU, ChFC

Red Creek Wildlife Center
300 Moon Hill Drive
Schuylkill Haven, PA 17972

Phone: (570) 739-4393
www.redcreekwildlifecenter.com
redcreek@losch.net

© 2004
Contents

4...Introduction
   What Is Rehabilitation?
6...Safety
7...Laws
8...Preparedness
   Proper Clothing
   Field Kit
9...Gloves
   Eye Protection
   Transport Containers
10...Cardboard Boxes
    Airline Carriers
11...Storage Tubs
    Live traps and cages
12...Nets
    Blankets
    Catch Poles
13...Receiving Calls
15...Situational Planning
18...True Emergencies
    Adult Animals
19...Box Turtles
20...Baby Wildlife
21...Common Baby Wildlife Calls
    Cotontails
22...Fawns
    Squirrels
23...Opossums
24...Assist and Release
25...Capture Techniques
    Box Over Method
    Nets
26...Blankets
    Catch Poles
27...Gloves
    Hand Capturing Wildlife
28...Pursuit
29...Rabies
31...Critical Care
    Alleviating Life Threatening Conditions
    Airway
    Breathing
    Bleeding
    Blood Feathers
32...Physical Examination
    General Appearance
33...Neurological
    The Head
    Eyes / Mouth
34...Ears / Nostrils / Nares
    Cere
35...Weight
36...Dehydration
37...Body
    Abdomen / Wings / Legs
38...Field Sheet
39...First Aid
    Tar and Glue Traps
40...Hypothermia
    Hyperthermia
    Eye Lubrication
41...Containment
    Birds
    Mammals
42...Transport Considerations
43...Reporting and Record Keeping
44...Capture and Transport Report
45...Public Relations
46...Baby Bird Identification
48...Raptor Identification Key – Hawks
50...Raptor Identification Key – Owls
51...Resources
73...Educational Materials
54...Please Don't Feed the Waterfowl!
55...Cats vs. Wildlife
57...Raising Wildlife at Home/Wildlife as Pets
59...Wildlife Facts and Fables
60...Pheasants vs. Great Horned Owl
61...Imprinting
INTRODUCTION

An animal that is sick, injured or orphaned is already experiencing a great deal of stress. It may be suffering from dehydration, starvation, blood loss and injury. It will probably be in moderate to severe pain. It will definitely be fearful.

To minimize further stress on the animal, the capture and transport specialist must be prepared, both physically and mentally, and have a plan of action as well as all the necessary equipment. Proper training is the key and it is for this reason that this manual is written. By gaining a basic knowledge in animal behavior, learning the proper techniques of capture, restraint, handling and transport as well as emergency supportive care, the capture and transport specialist can offer a distressed wild animal a second chance.

Because of the unpredictable nature of wildlife and the endless possibilities of injury in our modern day society, no book or course can cover every situation you will encounter. Each situation is unique and the guidelines offered in this manual will need to be modified to adapt to different situations. Common sense will play a large role in deciding the necessary steps to take in any given situation. Applying good common sense comes from knowledge, training and experience.

Just as an ambulance rescues people and transports individuals to the hospital, as a capture and transport specialist, your main objective is to recover the animal and transport it to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator or their associated veterinarian in the safest most expedient way possible. You will find, however, your job will also include public relations and public education.

When responding to a call, you become the expert on the scene. The amount of time you spend familiarizing yourself with local wildlife identification and behavior, the better equipped you will be as an ambassador for wildlife and the agencies that serve wildlife. Studying local wildlife habits will also help you determine what’s best for the animal in a given situation and prevent unnecessary captivity of animal. Your local rehabilitator is also a great resource for information, and keeping in close communication during a wildlife emergency can help you through a crisis.

This manual is not intended as your sole education before responding to wildlife calls. Handling and medical techniques are skills gained through instruction and practice, building your self confidence. You need to work directly with a rehabilitator or wildlife veterinarian to gain practical experience in the methods we outline.

WHAT IS REHABILITATION

Many people who report wildlife in distress care about the animal and its welfare. Many times they will ask what will happen to the animal and if they can help or find out about its outcome. They will want to know that the animal is being cared for humanely by a knowledgeable, trained staff and that it will be given the best chance for survival. Understanding what wildlife rehabilitation is will help you
ease that person’s concerns and educate him or her to the needs of rehabilitators.

Wildlife rehabilitation is a network of individuals and organizations caring for injured, sick and orphaned wild animals with the goal of releasing these animals back into their natural habitat. Wildlife rehabilitators have demonstrated a proficient knowledge of wildlife by passing both written and oral examinations, have met certain housing standards for species they are permitted to treat, attend continuing education classes and work with a licensed veterinarian. Through rehabilitation, the animal is given the benefits of proper nutrition and husbandry as well as modern medical care including fluid and drug therapy, diagnostics, x-ray and surgery. For animals that cannot survive in the wild or are beyond the ability to recover, rehabilitation offers a painless end to their suffering.

You will occasionally hear negative feedback as to the need or effectiveness of rehabilitation with comments such as “save a rabbit, starve a fox” or that we should not interfere with nature. This is a matter of personal perspective and the capture and transport specialist should not argue with the public or try to persuade someone to agree with your point of view. It is, however, important to understand the value of rehabilitation and its effectiveness.

The majority of animals received by rehabilitators are not in trouble do to natural occurrences. Many have received direct injuries through accidental or intentional interference from humans such as being hit by cars or lawn mowers, flying into windows or being shot illegally. Many suffer from the destruction of habitat such as having a nest destroyed when a tree is cut down or the spraying of poisons.

It is true that saving one animal’s life will not likely have an impact on the overall population or health of a species, but individual animals do need to be addressed when the public becomes involved. When a person finds an injured animal, especially a baby animal, that creature becomes the center of their world for a short time. People will do what they believe is right, and if not offered an alternative, will take that animal home and care for it themselves.

Individuals who possess wildlife endanger not only the health and well-being of the animal, but are risking their own health, as well as the health of their family and pets. In addition to the physical injury a wild animal can inflict, wildlife carry diseases and parasites that can infect humans and domestic animals. Additionally, animals that have been humanized pose a great threat to the people they encounter.

By offering an alternative, Wildlife Rehabilitation is also a public service which provides the public with a humane, legal way of dealing with the wildlife in need that they encounter. As a capture and transport specialist, you are the first step in the process of returning an animal to its natural habitat as well as protecting the public health.
SAFETY
The first three things a *capture and transport specialist* must consider is safety, safety, safety.

THE SAFETY of the animal
THE SAFETY of the public
And YOUR SAFETY!

*Primum non nocere*
FIRST, DO NO HARM
DO NOT make a situation worse through carelessness.

From the moment you receive a call, your mind should be on safety first. From instructing a caller how to handle the situation safely as not to injure himself or the animal, to transporting that animal safely to the rehabilitator or veterinarian your prime concern is safety. Do not take short cuts. Do not take chances. Professional arrogance is often reason experienced people get injured. If this one thing is forgotten, then your efforts will not be as effective as they could be and, quite frankly, could end in disaster.
LAWS

All migratory birds are protected under the “Federal Migratory Bird Act” which is governed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Mammals and non-migratory species such as pheasant are protected under State laws. Each State is different.

If your State has regulations governing wildlife rehabilitation, you need to familiarize yourself with those laws and the regulations that govern your capture and transport activities.

Remember: Professionalism is achieved by acting “INSIDE THE LAW.” The laws are there to protect the public, the animals and you.

Pennsylvania Regulations on Wildlife Capture and Transport

Section 147.305

(a) Issuance of wildlife capture and transport permits will be limited to the number authorized by the permit class of the sponsoring rehabilitator.

(b) Qualifications are as follows:

(1) The applicant shall be sponsored by a wildlife rehabilitation permittee.

(2) The applicant shall successfully pass a written examination administered by the Bureau of Law Enforcement.

(3) The applicant shall successfully pass an oral examination/interview which will be conducted by members if the Council.

(c) Permit conditions are as follows:

(1) A permittee may capture and transport injured or displaced wildlife when necessary.

(2) Wildlife shall be immediately transported to the sponsoring permittee or to the nearest properly permitted wildlife rehabilitator.

(3) Wildlife may not be captured or transported by a permittee outside of the area serviced by the sponsoring permittee except when advance permission from the wildlife rehabilitator has been obtained.
# PREPAREDNESS

## Wear proper clothing
- Boots
- Long canvas pants or jeans
- Long sleeve shirt (to protect from briars)

## Field kit
- 1 pair of Kevlar or welders gloves
- 1 pair lightweight leather gloves
- Rubber, latex or vinyl gloves
- Eye protection
- Pillow case
- 1 large long handled net (such as a salmon net)
- 1 small-mesh net for birds
- 1 blanket
- 1 towel
- Transport Carrier/Box
- Hawk hood or sock
- Note pad and pen or other type of record keeping

## Also excellent to have on hand
- Binoculars
- Baby wipes
- Plastic grocery bags
- Cell phone
- Multi-tool
- Flashlight
- ______________
- ______________
- ______________
- ______________
- ______________
- ______________

## First Aid supplies
- Heat source (hot-water bottle, hand-warmer in a sock)
- Eye ointment (without steroids)
- Mineral or vegetable oil and paint brush or PAM cooking spray
- Rubber, latex or vinyl gloves
- ______________
- ______________
- ______________
- ______________
- ______________
- ______________
- ______________
- ______________
A person can spend a lot of money on professional capture equipment and stock up their vehicle like a virtual “animal ambulance,” but that isn’t necessary. Many rescues can be effectively achieved with a minimal amount of equipment and the necessary equipment need not take up a lot of room.

**INSPECT YOUR EQUIPMENT!!** You don’t want to discover a ripped seam in your glove or a tear in a net when an animal gets through it. Check your equipment regularly to make sure it is in working condition. Replace or repair anything broken or unsafe.

**Your person safety should be your first consideration.**

**Gloves** are the most important investment you can make in equipment. It's important to select the best gloves that your budget will allow. The two main functions of animal protection gloves are penetration protection and crushing protection. In most wildlife situations, penetration is the key danger resulting from raptor's talons or bites from squirrels or raccoons. Penetration protection is usually achieved by using gloves made of appropriate materials such as elk hide (the most penetration resistant leather in the world) or Kevlar (used in bulletproof vests).

Basic welder’s gloves will work in many situations but may not protect you from larger raptors with powerful gripping feet such as the Great Horned Owl. The lower teeth of a woodchuck or squirrel are extremely long and these animals have a tendency not to let go. One choice that works very well on a low budget is welder gloves that have a thick sheepskin lining. We have used these quite effectively on the largest of raptors and raccoons.

**Eye Protection** is extremely important when working with birds such as Heron or Loons. These birds have a long pointed beak and a long neck that can reach much farther then you realize! They have deadly aim and often stab directly for the eyes.

Although incapacitated, this Blue Heron is still dangerous
**Transport Containers** come in a variety of styles and sizes from a plain cardboard box to airline carriers. It is best to have an assortment to manage different situations.

The container you use must:
- keep the animal from escaping
- be of the correct size (slightly larger than the animal is best)
- Have good ventilation
- Not allow the animal to see out

**Cardboard boxes** may not look very professional but they are an excellent choice for birds and baby mammals. They are convenient because they cost nothing and can be disposed of immediately. There is no need to clean them and you don’t have to worry about cross-contamination between animals. You can nest several sizes of boxes together so you have the proper size for the animal you are working with. Heavy cardboard boxes such as computer boxes will hold the largest of birds but may not be strong enough to contain a large mammal such as an adult raccoon. A squirrel may chew its way out of a cardboard or plastic box in just a few minutes.

**Airline carriers** are good for both large birds and mammals. They are stronger than cardboard and mammals are less likely to chew through them. Many come apart easily for cleaning and several different sizes can be nested together, unassembled, to save storage space.

The newest type of pet carrier on the market is the fold-down crate. These come in various sizes are hinged to fold into themselves for compact storage. We were excited about these when they first came out. They are rather inexpensive, strong and smart looking. After several months of working with them we’ve found that this feature, although convenient for storage, makes them more difficult to clean than conventional crates. This is important when transporting raptors, whose mutes can become cement-like very quickly.
My favorite is the Rubbermaid latch **storage tubs**. They are virtually indestructible, escape proof, easy to clean and can contain just about every bird and mammal. Make sure you put plenty of air holes for ventilation in the upper half of the container. We drilled ours with a ¾ inch drill bit.

**Live Traps** are the best choice for mammals that may escape from other containers. Rodents, such as squirrels and woodchucks, will chew through most paper and plastic materials. Large mammals, such as adult raccoons, may be too powerful to contain in any but the strongest of airline carriers.

Having a set of two live traps will cover most mammal transports and they can be nested together for easy storage. All traps should have one spring loaded door, not the 2 door gravity type.

Your basic live trap should be the largest size (approx. 30” x 12” x 12”) that is designed for raccoons and feral cats. Make sure it is the strongest you can afford.

Your second trap should be of the smaller variety (approx.18”x5 x5”) designed for squirrels. Make sure the wire is ½ inch by 1 inch or with a ½ inch grid. Many traps of this size have a 1 inch grid which can be dangerous to a squirrel that will attempt to push its nose through the wire, tearing the flesh above the nose.

Live traps are not only useful for transport but can be used as they were intended, as a live trap, making them quite versatile.
Nets are quite versatile and come in a variety of styles and sizes from long-handled salmon nets, to small butterfly nets, to expensive professional animal control nets. Make sure the mesh pocket is deep enough to allow you to trap the animal once it is in the net.

Small butterfly nets can be found in the toy department of most large department stores and sell for under five dollars. They have a fine mesh net which does not damage feathers and the net is deep enough to work with. Small minnow nets with a fine mesh serve the same purpose. They are a little more expensive, under ten dollars, but you may find you already have one with your fishing gear.

Salmon nets with a long handle are useful when you have to reach for an animal or retrieve it from water. A good quality, five foot net can be purchased at most discount department stores for around twelve dollars.

You can make a nice toss net very cheaply by fastening a 4’x4’ minnow net to a child’s hula hoop. The hoops come in a variety of sizes and can be dropped down over an animal. Make sure to remove any rattling beads that may be in the hoop before attaching the net. Remove the staples at the seam of the hoop and dump out the beads. The hoop can be hot-glued back together when finished.

Blankets:

Keep one or two blankets with your rescue equipment for covering larger animals and birds. Select a blanket that is thick enough so the animal cannot tear through it, but thin enough so that you can get a grip on the animal. Using wool type blankets with a tight weave will prevent entanglement problems. Always wash blankets between each use to prevent the spread of disease and parasites.

Catch Poles:

A catch poles is a lightweight, usually aluminum, sliding tube with a plastic-covered wire cable for the loop, and a cable locking system to prevent accidental release of the animal. The best size is between 3 and 5 feet long. A shorter one will not be an efficient extension of the arms and a longer one will be too clumsy to handle effectively.
RECEIVING CALLS

If you work directly with a rehabilitator or wildlife hospital, most of your calls will be directly from the rehabilitator requesting that you pick up an animal. Some rehabilitators will have a person "on call" each day and you may have a specific time or day each week or each month that you are on duty.

If your call comes directly from the rehabilitator, much of the groundwork will have already been done. You will be given details of the situation, the finder’s information and any known medical information on the animal. The rehabilitator will have already given instructions to the finder and will alert you to any possible, known problems. Writing the instructions down during the call will prevent any confusion later on. Follow the rehabilitator’s instructions and alert them if there are any new developments or problems.

If however, your call comes directly from the person finding the animal, you must collect all the necessary information.

**Remember: Good public relations starts at the time of the initial call.**

Speak slowly and clearly. The caller will often be upset and possibly a bit anxious. They have probably made several phone calls before reaching you and feel that everyone is just referring them to someone else. They are surely concerned about the animal and its welfare or they wouldn’t be making an effort to get it help. A steady, reassuring voice is often all a caller needs to calm down.

Identify yourself and your organization. Assure the caller that you are willing to help and that the animal will get the best of care. Write down the necessary information and repeat it back to the caller for accuracy.

1. Obtain the name, address, and phone number of the client.
   This will be helpful if the client becomes a problem because he wants to keep the animal. If you have caller ID, also record that number if different from the one the caller gives you.

2. Attempt to obtain the species and age of the animal.
   This will be helpful in deciding what size transport box to take and whether help may be necessary.

3. Find out what the problem is.
   Is the animal injured?
   Does the person know how it got injured?
   Is the animal sick or believed orphaned?

Getting as much information about the situation will help you determine if a rescue is truly needed. Many times, especially in the case of baby animals, the caller only needs to know that everything is okay. We have often educated people over the phone and instructed them to leave an animal alone or return it to the nest.
4. Determine if the animal is in captivity or still free.
   a. If free, try to have the client capture it. Make absolutely sure to inform the person of any possible danger involved and how they can protect themselves.

   If the client is unwilling or unable to affect the capture, ask to have someone monitor the animal at all times or as often as possible (from a distance) so that its whereabouts is known when you arrive. Also ask them to police the animal, so no one else from the public picks it up before you get there.

   b. If captive, ask the client to place the animal in a cardboard box and place it in a dark, warm, quiet spot. Instruct them not to offer any food or water to the animal and not to attempt first aid but to just leave it alone. You can also ask the caller if they would be willing to transport the animal directly to the rehabilitator.

5. Report into the rehabilitator and inform him/her that you might be in route with an injured animal.

6. Carry the address and phone number with you when you go on the call.

   This is where a cell phone is really handy, should you not be able to find the address or location.

7. Travel safely and obey all traffic laws. The animal will not be helped if you have an accident and never get there or if you are delayed for a traffic violation.
SITUATIONAL PLANNING

Forget about the “Kamikaze Style” of animal capture where the person rushes in with reckless abandon as is often seen on television today. Such high action scenes are probably well planned out before the camera starts rolling and the drama is for ratings, not conservation.

Talk to any bystanders and find out if they know what happened. Sometimes the accident was witnessed or someone knows the history of this particular animal.

Take a step back and review the situation carefully. You are not expected to run down a check list and consider each option separately but the following outline is a reminder of the types of things you should be looking for and must consider. With practice and a little experience, you will be able to quickly scan a situation and pick out hazards that the untrained person would never see.

1. Is your intervention necessary? What is the condition of the animal?
   a. Does it have normal mobility?
      i. Can it escape from you?
      ii. Can it fly? Run? Swim?
   b. Is it injured? In pain? In shock?
      i. What type of handling is necessary to prevent further injury, stress and discomfort?

2. What is the surrounding area like?
   a. Does the animal have a route of escape?
      i. Thick ground cover that you may not be able to maneuver?
      ii. Water where a duck or goose could escape?
   b. Can the escape route be eliminated?
      i. Bystanders can help cut off escape routes
      ii. Can you herd the animal into a corner?
         1. Utilize fences, yards, buildings
   c. Is there a hazard area to avoid, where the animal could be injured further?
      i. A nearby yard with dogs
      ii. A road with traffic
      iii. A lake where an animal or non-waterfowl bird could drown?

3. Do you have the necessary equipment and help to subdue the animal safely?
   a. Do you know how strong a 60 pound fawn is?
   b. How far can that heron strike with his beak?
   c. Did you know a Canada goose could give you a mild concussion?

4. Do you need to call for assistance?
   a. Wildlife rehabilitator
   b. Other capture and transport specialists
   c. Local law enforcement
   d. Wildlife Conservation Officers
As you scan the area, take a look at the animal before approaching it. In some cases binoculars can be used to examine the animal before entering its danger zone. Taking a short time to scan the situation and examine the animal before approaching eliminates surprises and unnecessary injury to you, the bystanders and the animal.

Once you have surveyed the situation, it is you, with the guidance of the rehabilitator, who must decide on the proper action to take. You ultimately have three choices:

1. You can leave the animal alone
   a. If the animal is not in trouble, don’t interfere.
      i. Sometimes young animals are seen without the parents. The juvenile animal may seem to be struggling, but this is often part of its normal development.
      ii. Often animals are seen acting in unusual ways that may also be quite natural. A duck that appears to be injured and has crawled under a bush to hide, may be sitting on eggs.

2. You can assist the animal and release it immediately.
   a. Baby birds sometimes just need to be placed back in the nest.
   b. Nests that have fallen can be repaired or re-hung.
   c. Fledgling birds sometimes need to be moved to avoid dangers such as dogs and cats.

If an animal is trapped but not injured, you may be able to just help the animal get on its way. Animals trapped in fishing line, nets or fences sometimes need only be rescued from entanglement.

A few water birds such as Grebes and Loons cannot walk on land and can get “grounded.” Placing one of these birds in a local pond or river may be all the rescuing they need.

Before releasing such an animal, be sure to thoroughly examine it for injury. You can release the animal in a confined area, such as a fenced yard, to make sure the animal has normal mobility. If the animal seems impaired, it can be recaptured more easily if confined.

BE SURE TO ALERT HOMEOWNERS TO WHAT YOU ARE DOING AND ASK PERMISSION BEFORE TRESPASSING.

3. Capture the animal for transport to the rehabilitator or wildlife veterinarian.
Once you have determined what the situation is and have decided on a plan of action, talk to the bystanders and let them know what you are planning on doing and why. Utilize their help if their safety is insured and give complete and thorough instructions.

As a final note:
Don’t allow a bystander to pressure you into a certain action. If you are not sure what action to take or feel that you cannot conduct a rescue alone, you can call the rehabilitator, a wildlife veterinarian or the governing wildlife agency for advice or instructions. As a capture and transport specialist, you are part of a team. Use that team to its fullest.

NOTES
## TRUE EMERGENCIES

### Adult Animals

The following signs are considered true emergencies with adult animals and birds:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bleeding</td>
<td>Was in a dog or cat's mouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unconsciousness</td>
<td>Drainage from eyes or nose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abnormal use or position of limb(s)</td>
<td>Behaving abnormally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odd head position</td>
<td>Cold and lethargic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggots</td>
<td>Inability to escape</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bleeding** is an immediate, life threatening condition. If possible, every effort should be made to stop the bleeding at the scene. See the “Critical Care” section for “bleeding” on page 31.

**Unconsciousness** is an obvious emergency needing immediate medical attention. Always use caution, even when handling an unconscious animal. They can recover quite suddenly and some animals, such as opossums, will feign death when threatened or stressed. Remember, even a seemingly incapacitated animal can be potentially dangerous.

**Abnormal use or position of limb(s)** may indicate a fracture. Paralysis can be a sign of trauma or illness.

**Odd head position** can be the sign of a head or spinal trauma or disease.

**Maggots** and fly eggs may or may not accompany an open wound. Maggot eggs on fur or feathers look like cream or yellowish, fuzzy dandruff. This is a sure sign that the animal is in serious trouble. If left untreated, maggots will eat into wet tissue or openings in the skin, causing infection and literally “eat the animal alive.”

**Dogs, and especially cats**, carry bacteria in their mouths that are highly infectious to wild animals, especially birds and rabbits. If the animal was attacked or carried by a pet it will need a regimen of antibiotics to prevent infection.

**Drainage from eyes or nose** is an indication of illness that needs medical attention. Even if the illness is not contagious or immediately life-threatening, it will impede an animal’s ability to hunt or escape predation.

**Animals behaving abnormally** need to be handled with extreme caution. Rabid animals will often act friendly, as will animals imprinted on humans. Both situations present a great risk to you and anyone assisting you. See the sections on “Rabies” (page 29) and on “imprinting” (page 60).

**Cold and lethargic** animals are suffering from hypothermia. They are usually in shock and if not treated immediately, may die suddenly. See the section on “hypothermia” (page 40.)

**Inability to escape** is usually the first sign that an animal is in trouble. Any healthy ADULT animal will not allow itself to be handled or captured.
A Note on the Eastern Box Turtle

The Eastern Box Turtle population has dropped considerably over the past few decades. Research has found that box turtles may not have the ability to attract a mate through lures such as vocalizations, scents or behavior but breeding is preceded by turtles in the same area seeing each other. Since mating is characterized by one turtle accidentally bumping into another, population density is very important. The sparser the population, the less chance there is for an accidental meeting and the less chance of a successful breeding. The situation spirals downward from there.

It is also believed that adult box turtles do not survive long outside their normal, personal range. Evidence suggests that a box turtle that is moved too great a distance will not survive the next winter. It seems that one of the factors contributing to the decline of the Eastern Box Turtle may be well meaning people moving turtles to a “better” location for the turtle’s safety.

As a capture and transport specialist, you are in a unique position to help an entire species by saving one animal. Since population density is important to the survival of the species, each individual animal is important.

Wildlife rehabilitators have made great progress in saving injured and sick box turtles. New methods of shell repair have been very successful and the turtles respond well to antibiotic therapy and treatment for parasites.

Healthy animals that are in a dangerous area such as on a highway can be moved short walking distances for their safety. Make sure to relocate the turtle in the direction it was headed, or it may retrace its steps back to where you picked it up.

Wear rubber or latex gloves when handling box turtles. This not only protects you from bacterial infections, there is evidence that respiratory diseases can be transmitted from humans to turtles.

Examine turtles for bleeding, cracked shells, maggots and parasites. Also examine its eyes and nostrils for any discharge or swelling. Any of these signs are life threatening for the turtle.

When rescuing a Box Turtle for rehabilitation, it is extremely important that you document exactly where it came from so it can be returned to the exact area where it was found.

To prevent cross contamination between turtles, use a cardboard box that can be disposed of easily for transporting turtles. If a plastic pet carrier is used, disinfect with a solution of 10 parts water to 1 part bleach and rinse thoroughly. Don’t forget to wear rubber gloves for your and the animal’s safety and wash your hands with an anti-bacterial soap before eating, drinking or smoking.
Baby Wildlife

With adult animals, it’s often easy to tell if they are in distress or not. If they can easily escape capture, they probably don’t need your help. It is often not as easy to determine whether a baby animal needs your help, or simply needs to be left alone to be whisked away by a parent or just moved to a safer place. No one can raise a wild baby better than the parent, so great care must be taken in deciding whether or not to interfere in that life.

**Signs that a baby is in need of rescuing**

- Injury
- Drainage from eyes or nose
- Cold to the touch and lethargic
- Distress calls
- Dehydration
- Excessive parasites such as fleas/ticks
- Was in a dog or cat's mouth
- Maggots or fly eggs

Baby animals in distress have similar signs as adults except for their inability to escape. The same signs in a baby animal though, will be more acute and life threatening.

Staying hidden is one method of protection from predators and most babies are born and raised around us undetected. A loudly chirring litter of raccoons or a screaming baby squirrel is a sure sign that something is wrong and the babies are hungry. A baby duckling or goose found alone, frantically walking around peeping is in serious trouble.

Examining a baby animal can often help you determine if it is in distress. Look for signs that the baby may have been injured such as bruises, bleeding or broken bones. Feel its body temperature and make sure it is warm, not hot. If it was injured or has suffered from extreme temperatures, then the situation is an emergency. Check to see if the baby is dehydrated and carefully inspect the baby for fly eggs. All of these are life threatening conditions that need immediate attention.

Does the baby appear normal and healthy? Is its “being alone” the only problem? It is normal to find a healthy baby with no sign of the parents. They may be out searching for food or even watching from a distance. Some animals do not utilize dens or nests and babies can be found out in the open.

For example:

Vultures do not build nests and babies are often on the open, bare floor of caverns and abandoned farm buildings such as silos.

Mourning doves often nest on the ground under a low bush. Unlike other songbirds, the parents do not feed them often, but may only visit them for feeding several times each day.

Great horned owl babies are often found on low branches, logs or even on the ground.
Knowing how to identify a wild baby and what its normal nesting behavior is comes with study and experience. It is vital that you familiarize yourself with common species in your area and learn what is, and is not, normal. There are numerous publications and websites to learn about local wildlife. See the recommended list of references in the appendix.

**Common Baby Wildlife Calls**

**Cottontails**

Cottontail nests are often found by children and pets. Others are discovered after an accident such as when mowing the lawn. Calls often come from people simply worried that they have not seen the mother since discovering the nest, fearing she has abandoned it.

A mother rabbit will not reject her young if the nest was disturbed or the babies touched. Many baby wild animals have no body odor so predators cannot smell them. The mother doesn’t want to place her odor at the nest so she only feeds 2 or 3 times during the night and only for short periods of time. She is often never seen.

If the babies appear healthy, place a piece of yarn over the nest in an "X" before evening. Have someone check the nest the next morning to see if it has been moved.

Cottontails are independent when only 5 - 6 inches long, or about the size of a tennis ball when sitting. They are eating vegetation and are fully weaned at this age but cannot outrun predators. They will sit motionless and try using camouflage to hide. A person can often walk right up to them and pick them up. Move babies such as these to a safe place away from people and pets. Placing the baby under a pine tree will mask your odor on them, camouflaging them even more.

**Signs of a problem:**

Flies around the nest are an indication that there are one or more dead babies or there is blood in the nest.

A mower accident will often wound or kill one or two babies, while the others are untouched. The blood from the injured bunnies will attract flies and the nest should be rescued.

Any bunny that was in a dog or cat’s mouth should be treated with antibiotics.
Fawns

People often find fawns and think they have been orphaned or abandoned. The fawn will be seen day after day, in the exact same place, alone. They are cute and hard to resist and people won’t leave them alone.

Just like the cottontails, fawns have no body odor so predators cannot smell them. The mother doesn’t want to place her odor in the area so she only visits for short periods, often during the night.

Unless the fawn is injured or obviously weak and lethargic, leave it alone and educate the finders to do the same.

Signs of a problem:

- Obvious injury or weak and lethargic
- The fawn is found with the dead mother or the mother is known dead
- Maggots or fly eggs on the fur or flies humming about the fawn

Squirrels

Squirrel nests are often destroyed when a tree is cut down. This may or may not be an emergency. Given the opportunity, the mother will sometimes retrieve an uninjured baby and carry it to a new location, but she will not come near if people are mulling around. An uninjured baby squirrel can be placed in a box near the tree and watched for a short time from a distance, preferably through a window from indoors.

Signs of a problem:

- Injury such as broken limbs
- Bleeding, bruising and “crustiness” around the nostrils (a sign of a concussion needing medical treatment)
- Screaming babies on the ground or clinging to trees
- Maggots or fly eggs on the fur or in the ears
Opossums

When born, opossums are still embryonic and only the size of a pencil’s eraser. They crawl into the mother's pouch and remain there for about 2 months. After leaving the pouch, they hitch a ride on mother’s back, staying with her until 6 or more inches long without the tail.

Often, mother opossums are killed on the road, but the babies remain alive, sometimes uninjured, in the pouch or scattered about on the roadway.

Sometimes the baby simply falls off the mother. She may keep going, unknowingly abandoning it.

These are true emergencies, for a baby opossum cannot survive on its own. When hungry, an opossum will make a repeated sneezing type sound. It does not have a cold, it is hungry.

Conclusion

As stated previously, sometime the only one the animal needs rescuing from is the person who found it. Educating the finder on normal animal behavior is the best way to handle such situations. Instruct the finder to leave the animal alone and to keep pets and children out of the area and why it is important to do so. If available, give the person literature about that species or situation or promise to mail them literature. You may find the handouts accompanying this manual helpful.

Some people find it very difficult, and the temptation to “just check on it” is too strong. It is natural for a person to want to nurture and care for something. You will often hear a person say things like: “I’m a real animal lover.” When faced with this personality type, explain that there is a difference between “selfish” and “unselfish” love. One satisfies the person’s needs, the other satisfies the animal’s needs.

Sometimes it is useful to enlist the help of the person to police the animal, giving them the task of keeping others away.

As a last result, you can play the “legal” card: “This animal is protected under state and/or federal law and interfering with it is illegal.”

DO NOT take matters into your own hands. If a person blatantly ignores the laws, report this to a wildlife conservation officer or local law enforcement.
Assist and Release

Animals that have fallen into drains or window wells can be freed and released. Visually inspect the animal to assure that it is unharmed. Nocturnal animals such as opossums and skunks often get trapped and will just curl up and go to sleep. Placing a board or draping a blanket into the hole will allow the animal to climb out after dark when animal feels safe.

If a baby bird has fallen from its nest and it is not injured, finding the nest and returning the bird is all the help it needs. Examine the baby and make sure it is healthy before returning a baby wild animal to its nest.

Fallen nests can be replaced by placing the nest in a kitchen colander or basket and re-hung in the tree. Improvise as much as possible making sure the nestling is safe from the elements such as rain and direct sun. The baby bird’s calls will alert the parents to its whereabouts and they will continue to feed it. It is a fallacy that parent animals will reject the young if it was touched.

Most songbirds leave the nest before learning to fly. They are usually fully-feathered but may appear to have a shorter tail. Siblings may wander about, scattering in different directions while the parents continue to find, follow and care for them. This stage can last for several hours to a day or so, and in the case of Great Horned Owls, weeks. Once the fledglings learn to fly, the parents gather them together and begin teaching them the survival skills they will need to know such as finding food.

People often find fledgling birds temporarily stranded in a yard or on a porch and think they need help. Unable to fly, they become prey to pet dogs and cats.

This is a very important transition time for these birds and should not be interrupted. Birds brought into rehab during this time have a poor chance of survival. They are old enough to know that people are not their parents and resist being hand fed, yet they haven’t learned to feed themselves. Force feeding places them under additional stress.

If uninjured, stranded fledglings can be moved to a safer location nearby. Moving it to a nearby tree limb or herding it to a safer area may be all the “rescuing” it needs.
CAPTURE TECHNIQUES

Every scenario is different and you will have to determine what is best for each situation you encounter. Having a variety of equipment available, and knowing how to use it properly, will expand your options.

*Again, safety is the number one consideration in everything you do.*

Never use bare hands
Never under-estimate an animal’s abilities

**The Box-Over Method:**
The safest way to capture an animal is the box-over method. Place a box over the animal and slide a piece of cardboard, board or the lid under the box. Tape or tie them together and transport.

Be creative. Any suitable container can be used. Plastic storage tubs, even garbage cans can be used with this method. Make sure to allow for ventilation.

Advantages:
- Safest method for the person because you never handle the animal
- Least stressful method for the animal because it was never “touched”
- Effective for most species of birds and mammals
- Good method for active animals too dangerous to examine
- Once under the box, the animal cannot escape

Disadvantages:
- Difficult to add padding material after the animal is contained
- Difficult in bushes, weeds or high grass

**Nets:**
If you need to reach for an animal, a net may be the answer. Matching the net to the animal is extremely important. Fine netting is best for birds to reduce the chance of feather damage. Waterfowl are more easily retrieved from water with a large salmon net having a long pole.

Advantages:
- It gives the person extra reach
- Safety for the handler because the animal is restrained without being touched
- Effective for most species of birds and mammals
- The animal can be examined while being restrained in the net
- Best method for water retrieval

Disadvantages:
- Animals can become entangled in the net
- If an animal grasps or bites the net, it may be difficult to loosen
- Feathers can be damaged in larger mesh nets
Blankets:
Blankets are an all-around useful tool for larger animals and birds offering both you and the animal protection. They are extremely useful for injured fawns that might not fit into a carrier. The animal can be covered completely before picking it up and slowly unwrapped for examination.

Always wash blankets between each use to prevent the spread of disease and parasites.

Advantages:
- Helps calm the animal by providing a dark cover
- Adds extra protection for the handler
- Safety for the handler because the animal is restrained before being touched
- Effective for larger species of birds and mammals

Catch Poles

Catch poles were originally developed for domestic animal control such as with dogs and cats. They have limited use with wildlife and cannot be used for birds or small animals. They are indispensable however for retrieving dangerous, larger animals like raccoons out of tight places such as cages.

Catch poles offer maximum protection for the handler because the animal is controlled from a distance, but when used incorrectly, can injure the animal. Make sure to have the loop enclose both the head and one forelimb behind the elbow of the animal to prevent strangulation. Support the body with your free arm and use the catch pole to control the animal's head. This will help prevent spinal injury should the animal thrash about. Use the pole to guide an animal in or out of a container and never, ever lift the animal with the pole.

Advantages:
- It gives the person extra reach
- Safety for the handler because the animal is restrained without being touched
- Effective for large mammals
- The animal can be examined while still being restrained in the noose

Disadvantages:
- Cannot be used on birds or small animals
- Animals can become severely injured
- It can be very difficult to position the noose on the animal properly
Gloves:
No matter what other equipment you use to capture an animal, always use gloves for added protection.

Hand Capturing Raptors
Raptors offer an additional challenge to capture because they use both their feet and beaks for protection. The beaks are curved and sharp, designed for tearing flesh. A bite from a raptor can inflict a severe wound, yet the feet and talons are their primary weapons. The talons of a Great Horned Owl are about an inch long and the estimated power of their grip is from 500 to 1500 pounds per square inch. Even a small raptor such as an American Kestrel or Screech Owl can inflict an open, painful wound and the smaller raptors seem to make up for their lack of size with tenacity.

Although they can fight fiercely, even when injured, raptors must be handled carefully to prevent further injury. Every precaution must be taken to avoid feather damage through handling, since feathers must be in top condition for them to survive once released.

Covering a raptor with a blanket will quiet them quickly. Hawks especially become calm in the dark. This can prevent escape while minimizing further damage, giving you a chance to get better grip on the bird.

A severely injured raptor, or one that is in shock, may lay face down, allowing you to pick it up. With the bird face down and its head away from you, place your hands about half way down the back on each side of the bird to control the wings. Slide your fingers down under the bird until you feel the legs, keeping you thumbs above to hold the wings. Push the legs back toward the tail, grasping the body, wings, tail and legs in one grip. Picking the bird up in this manner also allows you to place the bird feet down and facing away from you in the holding box.
Most times, the bird will try to flee or fight you. After attempting to flee and failing, or after being cornered, a raptor will turn and face you. It may puff out its feathers, appearing large and fierce, in an attempt to scare you away. It may vocalize, click its beak or make other gestures to back you down. It will then roll back on its tail exposing its feet (its primary weapons) toward you.

Remember, no matter how fierce the bird is acting, it is extremely frightened and fighting for its life. The capture method you choose should minimize his fear. If you cannot use a blanket or box because of the terrain or location, then you will need to grab the bird. One method is to allow the bird to grab your gloved hand and then you grab its legs from behind, between the fingers of your other hand. Getting one finger between its legs will help keep the bird from twisting. If the bird releases its hold on you, you can then support the chest with your free hand.

This last method does have many drawbacks and should only used as a last resort. You cannot grab a bird in this manner if there is a chance of a leg or hip injury. Holding a bird this way also does not control its wings, which will flap frantically, probably in your face (another good reason to be wearing your goggles).

Pursuit

Animals that are difficult to approach can often be chased to an enclosed area such as a fenced yard, barn or barnyard. Bystanders can help direct an animal to a confined location, trapping the animal.

On the other hand, pursuing an animal that is fleeing from you is not always a good idea. It is highly unlikely that you will be able to outrun the animal and you could be seriously injured if you trip or fall. Bystanders will think that you have lost control of the situation, damaging your professional image.

As a capture and transport specialist you must "outhink" the animal so that you can capture it before it has a chance to escape. This is why surveying the area and having a capture plan is so important.

If an animal has escaped and it is obvious that capture attempts will be futile, STOP! If the animal can't be captured, it may not need help. Give the finder your number or the rehabilitator's number with instructions to call if the animal is seen again and is approachable. A later attempt can always be made.
Rabies

What is Rabies? Rabies is a fatal disease caused by a virus that attacks the central nervous system of warm blooded animals. All mammals can get rabies including pets, livestock and man. Most commonly affected animals are raccoons, skunks, foxes, woodchucks, coyotes, bats and the domestic cat.

The rabies virus travels slowly via the nervous system until it reaches the brain. In most species, the time from infection to onset of clinical signs is two to twelve weeks, but some animals and people have been known to carry the virus for up to a year. Once the virus reaches the brain and clinical signs appear, the animal dies within a week to ten days. This is also the time that the virus reaches the salivary glands and can infect others through a bite. The virus is only transmissible during this last stage of the disease and once this last stage is reached, rabies is always fatal.

Rabies is most commonly contracted through a bite wound from an infected animal in the last stage of the disease, but can also be transmitted when the saliva or brain tissue of an infected animal comes in contact with an open cut or mucous membranes such as the eyes.

Clinical signs in wild animals can vary greatly and should not be used to judge whether an animal is rabid or not. Some common signs are changes in normal behavior, unnatural friendliness or aggression, foaming at the mouth, blindness and paralysis. Some animals have merely died with no previous signs.

To protect yourself and the public, extra precautions must be taken with RVS, Rabies Vector Species, (raccoons, skunks, foxes, woodchucks, coyotes, bats). Even if rabies is not suspected, the person who found the animal and any bystanders must be questioned carefully. You need to be absolutely sure that no one has had a possible exposure to the rabies virus through a bite, scratch or from saliva contacting broken skin. It is imperative that you get everyone’s contact information, addresses and phone numbers, so that each one can be questioned again if the animal should prove rabid.

If someone has had a possible exposure, instruct that person to seek medical advice from their doctor. Do not give medical advice yourself. Contact the wildlife rehabilitator for further instruction such as transporting the animal to the rehab center. The rehabilitator will contact the Department of Health and take the steps necessary to have the animal tested for rabies.

You also need to ask if any pets were exposed to the animal. If a pet dog or cat was exposed, instruct the owner to seek veterinary advice.
How you handle RVS will affect your own health and the survival of the animal you are trying to save. If you are bitten or scratched, the result may be that the animal is destroyed and tested. Using one of the “no touch” methods such as the box over method or netting, minimizes your chance of exposure ensuring your health and the life of the animal.

**What to do if you think you have been infected?**

1. Take the situation seriously but do not panic. Treatment is successful if started early.
2. Capture the animal and keep it secure.
3. Thoroughly scrub the wound with soap and water and apply iodine or alcohol.
4. Contact your physician about wound treatment
5. Contact your rehabilitator, local health department or state game commission to obtain information on how to get the animal tested for rabies.
Critical Care

A quick glance can easily determine if there are immediate life threatening conditions that need to be addressed before transport. Quickly view the bird or mammal and see if the animal can breathe or is bleeding. These conditions must be corrected or the animal may die before reaching the rehabilitation facility.

When handling the animal, your safety is your primary concern. Do not do anything that will endanger your safety.

**Alleviate Life-Threatening conditions**

Follow the A-B-C's.

- **Airway**
- **Breathing**
- **Cardiovascular** (heartbeat and severe bleeding)

**Is the animal breathing?**

1. If the animal has an obstructed airway, attempt to remove the obstruction.
   A. Heimlich maneuver.
      1. Hold small animal upright or put a large animal on its side. Apply force/pressure with fingers or fist just below the sternum in an upward motion (toward the head) quickly five times. Repeat as necessary
   B. Remove any visible obstructions
      1. Do NOT put your fingers into the mouth of an animal.
      2. If animal is unconscious and you can see the foreign object in the throat, attempt to remove.
      3. BE CAREFUL to not push the obstruction down further.
   2. Discharge can be wiped out of the mouth or nostrils with a swab or suctioned with an eyedropper.
   3. Reposition the head so the airway is open
   4. Any “sucking” wounds (punctures that have entered the airway or respiratory system) can be sealed with an airtight bandage such as using plastic wrap and gauze taped tightly to the area.

**Is the animal bleeding?**

1. Apply direct pressure with a gauze pad to any bleeding wound(s)
   A. Do not remove the cloth.
   B. If blood soaks the material, add another layer on top.
   C. A bandage may be wrapped around the cloth and taped in place.

2. **Blood Feathers** are new, growing feathers that still have a blood supply in the vein. If broken or torn, these feathers will bleed profusely.
   A. Follow the feather back toward the bird to where it attaches.
   B. Grasp the base of that feather tightly with a hemostat, tweezers or your fingers and pull straight out, removing the feather
   C. Apply direct pressure to area where the feather was removed from to stop new bleeding.
Physical Examination

In most situations, it will be obvious whether or not the animal is in need of help. In these cases, your responsibility is to transport the animal directly to the rehabilitator in a safe, timely manner. Further handling at this point, only places more stress on the animal and handling should be minimized.

On occasion, especially in the case of juvenile animals, the answer will not be readily apparent and you will need to perform a cursory examination to determine what the problem is, if any.

A cursory examination is not a thorough work up to determine every problem, but a quick examination to determine if the animal should be transported to the rehabilitator or released. Remember: your examination will undoubtedly stress the animal further, so handling must be kept to a minimum. If at any point during the examination you determine the animal is injured or in distress, stop the examination and transport it to the rehabilitator immediately.

Your goals are:

1. Determine if the animal is truly in need of care
2. Stabilize the patient so that it’s condition doesn’t deteriorate during transport

Again, as always, your safety, and that of the animal, are your primary concerns. When performing an examination, it is important to work quickly and efficiently to avoid unnecessary additional stress. Have everything you need ready.

We often hear people claim that an animal "knows" it is being helped. This may be romantic or wishful thinking. In reality, a seemingly "cooperative" animal is often extremely weak, in shock, and near death.

Use the chart at the end of this section. Start at the head and work your way down.

Overall Appearance

- What is the General Appearance of the animal?
- BAR: Bright Active and Responsive
- Depressed: Conscious but lacking response, slow or sluggish
- Unconscious
- Is the animal moving properly?
- Is it able to stand on all legs evenly?
- Is fur or feathers tattered, broken, sparse or soiled?

Some things will be obvious. Others will be more subtle and you will need to rely on your intuition. If you have spent time with the rehabilitator and taken the time to gain practical experience handling various species, your first impression will usually be pretty accurate.
Does it appear to have **Neurological** problems?

**CNS: Central Nervous System:**
- Incoordination, Dizziness
- Jerky or Repeated movements
- Paralysis
- Convulsions or Seizures
- Head Tilt or unusual head position

Again, these signs can be obvious or subtle. Be aware that neurological indicators can be the result of both trauma and illness. If an animal was hit by a car or flew into a window, it could have sustained head and/or spinal injuries. Some bacterial infections and viruses, such as rabies, can cause similar neurological signs.

**The Head**

Check both **Eyes:**
- Shine a light in the eyes and see if the pupil shrinks to the light. If either remains wide, or doesn’t react, make a note of this.
- Are the eyes bleeding or is there blood welling up in the eyes?
- Do the pupils, iris or sclera (white of the eye) appear red or bloody?
- Is the membrane around the eye swollen or pasted shut?
- Are there lesions, nodules or growths around the eyes?
- Check for a palpebral reflex:
  - The palpebral reflex is the normal blinking reaction of the eye when touched. Is the reaction normal, slow or nonexistent?
- Check the shape of the eye itself
  - Are the eyes round and normal?
  - Does either eye appear “deflated?”
  - Are the eyes sunken? (a sign of dehydration)

Look inside the **Mouth:**
- Is there bleeding or blood present in the mouth?
- Are there lesions, nodules or growths inside the mouth or around the beak or lips?
- Is the bill cracked or broken?
- Are the teeth broken or out of line?
- What is the color of the gums, tongue and roof of the mouth?
  - Some raptors’ mouths are bluish/black and this is normal.
- Note the wetness.
  - Is the saliva stringy or sticky?
  - Is the mouth dry?
  - These are signs of varying degrees of dehydration
Check the **Ears:**

- Is there bleeding or blood present?
- Is there a discharge?
- Are there maggots in the ears?
  
  This is a life threatening-condition that must be remedied soon.

  Note: Some raptors have a large maggot-like parasite inside the ears that seems to cause no harm.

Examine the **Nostrils (Nares in birds):**

- Is there blood or a discharge? What color is the discharge?
- Is there trauma that would affect breathing?
- Are there sounds coming from the nostrils? (This could be a sign of congestion or discharge that you can’t see.)

In birds, look at the **Cere** (The fleshy are at the top of the beak)

![Image of a bird's cere](image)

The normal color of a hawk’s cere should be yellow or tan colored.

Green is a sign of dehydration.
**Weight**

Palpate the **Keel** (breast bone) in birds or feel the body structure for **Weight** in mammals:

- A bird’s keel should have a nice padding of muscle on both sides of the breast bone. The feel can vary from excessively pudgy (like a Thanksgiving turkey) to sharp and concave shaped on either side.
- Mammals should be felt by putting your hands on both sides of the body. The body should be well-muscled without being fat.

**Overweight**
- Although rarely seen, this happens and can be a sign that the animal was fed or kept by someone.

**Normal**
- Common in healthy animals that were recently injured in an accident.

**Slight Wasting**
- Muscles at the keel are flattened.
- Mammal's ribs are easily palpated.
- Also suspect dehydration.

**Moderate Wasting**
- Muscles at the keel are sunken.
- Mammal's ribs are visible.
- Animal is most likely dehydrated.

**Emaciated**
- The keel is sharp and concave with no muscle.
- Mammal's skeleton feels sharp especially at the joints and pelvis.
- Animal will also be severely dehydrated.
Dehydration

Check for Dehydration: If the bird has any type of trauma, old or new, or has been incapacitated for any amount of time, there will most definitely be some degree of dehydration.

- Test the Skin Turgor and document the time in seconds.

Use the following chart to estimate the degree of dehydration:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skin Turgor</th>
<th>Mouth</th>
<th>Eyes</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Seriousness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;1 second</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>History of fluid loss</td>
<td>&lt; 5%</td>
<td>Mild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 seconds</td>
<td>Dry Mucous Membranes</td>
<td>Normal to Dull</td>
<td></td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-5 seconds</td>
<td>Mucous Membranes are red, dry, tacky</td>
<td>Dull and Sunken Cataract-like appearance in pupils</td>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>Severe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+ seconds</td>
<td>Tongue dried and cracked</td>
<td>Sunken eyes might not be visible</td>
<td>Shock Skin Wrinkled</td>
<td>10 – 12%</td>
<td>Life Threatening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Return</td>
<td>Tongue white, dried and cracked</td>
<td>Sunken eyes might not be visible</td>
<td>Shock Skin Dry and Wrinkled</td>
<td>12 – 15%</td>
<td>Death Imminent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dehydration may be the only indication that something is wrong. The animal may have an injury or illness which is not readily apparent or may have been debilitated for some time.
Body

Palpate the **Abdomen:**

- Does it appear normal, distended, painful?
- Is the skin wrinkled?
- Is there obvious trauma such as bruising?

Examine the **Wings:**

- Does the bird hold both wings the same?
- Can it flap both wings equally?
- Palpate the wing starting at the body and working outward
- Do you feel swelling or heat?
- Is there a “crunching” feeling in the bones?
- Is there a piece of bone sticking out through the skin?
- Does the wing tip flop?

All of the above are signs of fracture.

Examine the **legs:**

- Can the animal put weight on all legs equally?
- Is there paralysis? Is it dragging one or both legs?
- Are the feet cold / hot?
- Palpate the legs starting at the body and working outward
- Do you feel swelling or heat?
- Is there a “crunching” feeling in the bones?
- Is there a piece of bone sticking out through the skin?

Again, these are signs of fracture.
# CAPTURE AND TRANSPORT FIELD SHEET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Handler</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Species</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Sex</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finder</th>
<th>Phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>List cause/accident/situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Healthy/Normal</th>
<th>Injury</th>
<th>Illness</th>
<th>True Orphan</th>
<th>Displaced</th>
<th>RVS?</th>
<th>Raccoon / Skunk / Fox / Woodchuck / Coyote / Bat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>List additional contacts/exposures on back of sheet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## General Appearance:
- **BAR**
- **Depressed**
- **Unconscious**
- **Comments**

## Bleeding:
- **Location**
- **Comments**

## Breathing:
- **Normal**
- **Labored**
- **Choking**
- **Noise**
- **Comments**

## Neuro:
- **CNS**
- **Convulsions**
- **Head Tilt**
- **Comments**

## Right Eye:
- **Dilated**
- **Blood**
- **Swelling**
- **Lesions**
- **Palpebral reflex:** Normal / Slow / None

## Left Eye:
- **Dilated**
- **Blood**
- **Swelling**
- **Lesions**
- **Palpebral reflex:** Normal / Slow / None

## Nares/Cere/Nose:
- **Blood**
- **Discharge**
- **Trauma**
- **Sounds**
- **Color of Cere**

## Mouth:
- **Blood**
- **Lesions**
- **Teeth/Bill**
- **Inside Color**

## Ears:
- **Blood**
- **Discharge**
- **Parasites**
- **Comments**

## Keel/Weight:
- **Over weight**
- **Normal**
- **Slight Wasting**
- **Moderate Wasting**
- **Emaciated**

## Dehydration:
- **Skin Turgor:** ______ seconds

## Abdomen:
- **Normal**
- **Distended**
- **Painful**
- **Wrinkled**
- **Trauma**
- **Comments:**

## Right Wing:
- **Normal**
- **Swelling**
- **Fracture**
- **Drooping**
- **Comments:**

## Left Wing:
- **Normal**
- **Swelling**
- **Fracture**
- **Drooping**
- **Comments:**

## Legs/Feet:
- **Normal**
- **Swelling**
- **Fracture**
- **Paralysis**
- **Cold**
- **Hot**
- **Comments:**

## Treatment:

## Comments:

### DISPOSITION

- **Left Alone**
- **Relocated**
- **Treat and Release**
- **Transported to:** _____________________________
First Aid

The primary goal of the capture and transport specialist is to transport the animal directly to the rehabilitator. By the time you have captured and secured the animal, the animal will be under such stress that the best thing may be to allow it to calm down in the transport container.

This is no time to show off your technical expertise in front of bystanders. Additional handling may endanger the animal’s life. Often applying first aid in the field only increases the animal’s stress while delaying proper treatment at the rehabilitation facility.

Follow these guidelines when considering applying first aid in the field.

First aid:

1. Must only consist of what you and the rehabilitator have agreed to
2. Must only consist of what you have been trained to administer
3. Must not endanger you, any bystanders or the animal
4. Must be absolutely necessary to prevent deterioration of the animal's condition during transport
5. Must not increase the animal’s stress resulting in deterioration from additional handling

Remember: Additional handling will only increase the animal’s stress level and the animal may die because you attempted to treat it.

Tars and Glue

One emergency that is best dealt with on site and should not wait for transport is when an animal has rolled in tar or is caught on a glue trap or fly strip. If left untreated, the animal's struggle will ensnare it further, exposing more of its skin to the substance and possibly blocking its airway. In an effort to clean itself, the animal may ingest some of the product, resulting in poisoning.

Tars and glues dissolved easily with light, non-toxic oils such as cooking, baby or mineral oils. PAM cooking spray also works well to coat tars and glue. Make sure that it is the vegetable or canola oil variety that does not contain alcohol. When removing tars or glues from an animal, it’s best to wear latex or rubber gloves so you keep the ensuing mess off your own skin.

Animals trapped on glue traps or fly paper can be removed by applying oil with a small paintbrush or by lightly spraying with PAM cooking spray. Slowly work the oil or spray between the animal and the glue paper until the animal is free.

Tar can be quickly coated by spraying or painting the oil on the tarred areas. It is not necessary to remove all of the tar and glue in the field. The oil will coat the fur or feathers, keeping the animal from becoming entangle further during transport.

Keep the animal from becoming chilled and transport immediately. Upon arrival at the rehabilitation facility, it will need to be cleaned of any remaining oil and possibly treated for poisoning.
Hypothermia

Lack of calories, shock and exposure can result in low body temperature. Many young animals are not self-regulating and cannot produce their own body heat. Signs of hypothermia include shivering, sluggishness, dull or slow response to stimuli, shallow breathing and coma. Infant animals may not show all the signs because of an undeveloped reflex response. Supplying supplemental heat can help stabilize the patient before it reaches the rehabilitation center or veterinarian.

**Warning: Do not warm any animal, especially a baby animal, exhibiting signs of dehydration. Doing so will only increase the effects of dehydration resulting in sudden shock or death.**

Supplemental heat in the field can be obtained by using instant hand warmers that are placed inside a sock, or a soda bottle or hot water bottle filled with warm (not hot) water. Allow the animal to snuggle up to the warmth, leaving it enough room to move away should it become too warm.

Hyperthermia

(Heat Stroke)

The reverse of Hypothermia is Hyperthermia, or over heating. Most times you will find that baby animals that have been exposed to the elements are cold and sluggish. Occasionally that infant animal will lie helplessly in the sun and actually bake. We have had people find cold animals and place them under heating lamps or on heating pads hoping to warm the animal before calling us, essentially cooking the animal. If the animal has been exposed to extreme heat and the body feels hot, it can be cooled to avoid organ and neurological damage.

- Over-heated animals should NOT be doused with cold water.
- Cover with cool, wet towels for transport to help bring body temperature down.
- Rubbing alcohol applied to the footpads can also help.

Eye Lubrication

Animals in shock or lacking response often lack a blinking reflex. If an animal is incapacitated with its eyes open or if injury or swelling prevents the eye from closing, the eyes must be protected to avoid drying. Protect the eyes by applying a sterile, non-steroidal eye cream or gel. Sterile saline solution can also be used but the effect will not last as long and will have to be repeated often.
Containment

If you are properly prepared, you will have an appropriate container to transport the animal. See page 8.

With birds, choose a container that is large enough to not damage feathers, yet small enough to prevent excessive movement.

Wild animals will feel more secure if they cannot see outside the container. This is easily achieved if using a box or storage tub. If you are using a plastic airline crate or a wire cage or live trap, it must be covered with a blanket to obstruct the animal’s view.

Supply ventilation. If using a cardboard box, place three or four pencil-sized holes near the top for ventilation.

Keep the animal from becoming chilled.

Birds

Give the bird something to hold on to. Place a baby blanket or t-shirts in the bottom of the container for the bird to grasp with its feet. Make sure whatever type of cloth you use cannot unravel and entangle the animal.

Attempt to pad the animal. Fill the container ¾ full with finely shredded newspaper. This will pad the animal on all sides keeping it from rolling or banging off the inside of the container. Blankets padding the sides of the box will serve the same purpose. Again - Make sure the cloth cannot unravel and entangle the animal.

Mammals

When packaging a mammal for transport, use the same considerations you would use for a bird. Make sure the animal can not see outside the container and has proper ventilation. Supply padding such as shredded newspaper or blankets.

The biggest danger with transporting a mammal is escape. Many mammals can chew their way out of a cardboard box or plastic crate in just a few minutes. Make sure the container used is secure enough to confine the animal.

Notes and Suggestions

Keep baby animals together to share body heat. One inventive way to transport baby opossums and squirrels is to place them together inside a pillowcase. Tie the pillowcase shut and place it inside the transport box.

Never lay an unconscious animal on its back. Lay an unconscious bird or mammal face down, slightly to the side.

In an emergency, be creative. We once had a police officer transport a Great Horned Owl which was stuffed down the sleeve of his coat.
Transport Considerations

You have examined the animal, obtained all the necessary information, alleviated immediate life-threatening conditions and secured the animal in the proper carrier. It’s now time to transport the animal. This sounds like the easy part and with a little common sense, it is.

Be safe traveling. Don’t allow excitement and adrenaline take over. Follow the speed limits and obey all the traffic laws. You can’t help the animal if it never gets to the rehabilitator.

If you haven’t already, call the rehabilitator and make sure they are there. You don’t want to leave a carefully handled animal just waiting in a box by the door.

Place the animal in the back seat of the car, preferably on the floor to prevent rolling. If the carrier is too big to fit on the floor, secure it with a seatbelt or by tying.

Don’t transport animals in the trunk or the open bed of a pickup.

Reduce stress by maintaining quiet.

  * Don’t play the radio.
  * Don’t beep the horn.
  * Avoid loud conversations.

Don’t smoke.
Reporting and Record Keeping

It is important to gather as much information as possible and get it down on paper right away. The rehabilitator must report to both state and federal authorities and the initial data comes from the capture and transport specialist.

Required data

1. Species (common name)  
   a. Age  
   b. Sex  
2. Record number (if any)  
3. Contact information of the finder  
   a. Name  
   b. Address  
   c. Phone number  
4. Date and time  
   a. Original call  
   b. Arrival at scene  
   c. Arrival at rehab center  
5. Location found  
   a. Address or intersection  
   b. Borough or township  
   c. County  
6. Description of the location  
   a. Farmland  
   b. Highway  
   c. Industrial  
   d. Urban  
7. Condition of victim at scene  
8. Possible cause of distress  
9. Disposition of victim  
   a. Deceased  
   b. Left alone  
   c. Released in safer area  
   d. Transported  
10. Care Given  
   a. Initial care  
   b. Continued care  
11. Helpful data

Reports should be held for access by the rehabilitator and/or any authorities who might require information.

If you are passing the victim to another transporter, a copy of your report should go along.

You may also wish to log your time and mileage. If your organization enjoys a tax exempt status, your time and mileage may be tax deductible.
# Capture and Transport Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date of call</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record number</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Species (common name)</td>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finder</td>
<td>Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location Found</td>
<td>County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Habitat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition / Injury</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disposition (circle)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Alone</td>
<td>Assist and Release</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transported</td>
<td>Deceased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transported to:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continued Care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Dates and Times

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Original call</td>
<td>Arrival at scene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arrival at rehab center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Public Relations

The Capture and Transport Specialist is in a unique position every day to help wildlife. Yes, you help individual animals in distress and are part of a network to aid those animals, but even more important is your contact with the public. Each contact is an opportunity to educate the public on wildlife related issues.

As a Capture and Transport Specialist, you are a professional, and professionalism should be maintained in everything you do. Public relations must be a part of every phase of the recovery. How the clients and bystanders see you is how they will perceive the organization and the people with whom you are working.

1. Know what you are doing. If you don't, neither you nor the client can be at ease.
   a. Study local animal identification and behavior.
   b. Keep in contact or volunteer with the rehabilitator, a valuable resource for educational opportunities.
2. Identify yourself and your organization.
3. Find the time to explain that you are a volunteer and all the staff of your organization are volunteers.
4. Explain the reason for the existence of the organization.
5. Listen to people involved. They are only concerned about the welfare of the animal.
6. Tell them all you can about the individual and species involved.
7. Tell the client what you are going to do for the animal and where it is going.
8. Assure them that the rehabilitator is knowledgeable and that a network of dedicated volunteers will do their utmost to rehabilitate the animal.
9. Remember every caller is a potential volunteer, a walking advertisement for the organization, and a possible contributor.
10. Always thank the caller for their concern and effort to help the animal.
11. Never reprimand the caller or they may not call you again.
12. Always have a copy of various educational material, a newsletter or information about the rehabilitation center to hand out to the client and any bystanders.

Identification

The ability to identify animals, especially birds, not only helps you determine what normal behavior is for the species, but is an important part of public education. The caller will want to know what species of animal they are helping and your knowledge will help insure him or her that the animal is in the hands of a professional.

The following section can help you to quickly identify several types of birds. Having a field guide on hand is also a useful identification tool.
# Identifying Baby Songbirds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Color inside of mouth</th>
<th>Flanges (lips)</th>
<th>Down</th>
<th>Skin color</th>
<th>Special Traits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bank Swallow</td>
<td>Pale Yellow</td>
<td>Pale Yellow</td>
<td>Pale Gray</td>
<td>pink</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barn Swallow</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Ivory</td>
<td>Head and back, long and sparse,</td>
<td>Gray</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black-capped Chickadee</td>
<td>Pale Yellow</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Gray</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Jay</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Grayish/Brown</td>
<td>Light brownish gray</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bluebird</td>
<td>Deep Yellow</td>
<td>Pale Yellow</td>
<td>Dark Gray, head, back and wings</td>
<td>Pink</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue-gray Gnatcatcher</td>
<td>Bright yellow</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Naked</td>
<td>2 dark spots on tongue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobolink</td>
<td>Yellowish</td>
<td>Cream</td>
<td>Buff</td>
<td>Pink</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brewer’s Blackbird</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>White Very small</td>
<td>Charcoal</td>
<td>Pinkish-Yellow</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown Thrasher</td>
<td>Creamy Yellow Orange toward</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Dark Gray</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>throat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardinal</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Cream</td>
<td>Charcoal</td>
<td>Orangish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catbird</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cedar Waxwing</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Creamy Yellow Small</td>
<td>Naked</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chimney Swift</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None at hatch Then spine quills</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chipping Sparrow</td>
<td>Pinkish Red</td>
<td>Pale Yellow</td>
<td>Dark Gray</td>
<td>Dark Red</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowbird</td>
<td>Deep Pink</td>
<td>Cream</td>
<td>Snow white and Long</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Bald face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crow</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>White Small</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Dark Ruddy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Kingbird</td>
<td>Orange-Yellow</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Orange-Yellow</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Phoebe</td>
<td>Orange-Red</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Dark Gray - Sparse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Sparrow</td>
<td>Bright Red</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Varying Grays</td>
<td>Orangish pink</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldfinch</td>
<td>Pinkish Red</td>
<td>Creamy Yellow</td>
<td>Pale Gray</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grackle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great-crested Flycatcher</td>
<td>Orange-Yellow</td>
<td>Cream</td>
<td>Pale Gray</td>
<td>Dark Flesht</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House Finch</td>
<td>Bright Red</td>
<td>White to pale Yellow</td>
<td>White and Very long</td>
<td>Pink</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House Sparrow</td>
<td>Pinkish Yellow</td>
<td>Pale Yellow Large</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Pink</td>
<td>Short chucky legs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House Wren</td>
<td>Pale Yellow</td>
<td>Ivory</td>
<td>Dark Gray</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>Color 1</td>
<td>Color 2</td>
<td>Color 3</td>
<td>Color 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hummingbird</td>
<td>Creamy Yellow</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigo Bunting</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Gray</td>
<td>Orangish Pink</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least Flycatcher</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Pale Yellow</td>
<td>Pale Gray</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meadowlark</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Ivory</td>
<td>Pale Gray and thick on head, back wings and thighs</td>
<td>Orange/red Down on thighs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mockingbird</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Dark Gray</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oriole</td>
<td>Pinkish Red</td>
<td>Ivory to Pale Yellow</td>
<td>White to light Gray and Long</td>
<td>Pinkish-Yellow Slate gray leg color</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ovenbird</td>
<td>Pink</td>
<td>Pale Yellow</td>
<td>Medium Gray</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple Martin</td>
<td>Pale Yellow</td>
<td>Pale Yellow</td>
<td>Naked</td>
<td>Pink</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red-eyed Vireo</td>
<td>Pale Yellow</td>
<td>Pale Cream</td>
<td>Pale Gray</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red winged Blackbird</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Whitish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Yellow / Large</td>
<td>Whitish to creamy gray on head, back and wings</td>
<td>Pinkish-Yellow</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose-breasted Grosbeak</td>
<td>reddish Orange</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Whitish on head</td>
<td>Orangeish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rough-winged Swallow</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Pale Gray</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rufous-sided Towhee</td>
<td>Pinkish Red</td>
<td>Pale Yellow</td>
<td>Dark Gray</td>
<td>Flesh White wing bars</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savannah Sparrow</td>
<td>Reddish Orange</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Grayish/Brown</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarlet Tanager</td>
<td>Reddish Orange</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Pale Gray</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scrub Jay</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Dark Ruddy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song Sparrow</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Bright Yellow</td>
<td>Dark Gray</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starling</td>
<td>Bright yellow</td>
<td>Yellow Very Large</td>
<td>Grayish white Long and thick on head, back and wings</td>
<td>Dark Gray</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swamp Sparrow</td>
<td>Reddish Orange</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Very Dark Brown</td>
<td>Pink</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tree Swallow</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Ivory</td>
<td>Whitish</td>
<td>Light pink</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vesper Sparrow</td>
<td>Deep Pink</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Gray</td>
<td>Flesh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warbling Vireo</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-breasted Nuthatch</td>
<td>Cream</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Pale Gray</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willow Flycatcher</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Deep Yellow</td>
<td>Pale Gray</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood Pewee</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Ivory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood Thrush</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Pale Yellow</td>
<td>Dark Gray</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow Warbler</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Cream</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellowthroat</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Dark Gray</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Raptor Identification (HAWKS)
Raptors have a sharp curved beak and long talons on powerful feet for their size.

1. Does this bird have thick clubby feet?
   a. Yes, these feet are BIG and Thick (This is a Buteo. Go to #2)
   b. No, the feet and toes are slender (Go to #8)

2. Does this bird have a red tail?
   a. Yes (Go to #15)
   b. No (Go to #3)

3. Is this bird’s wingspan over 4 feet?
   a. Yes, the wingspan is over 4 feet (Go to #6)
   b. No, the wingspan is smaller (Go to #4)

4. Is the tail dark with 2 or 3 equally wide white bands?
   a. Yes (Go to #16)
   b. No (Go to #5)

5. Is the back brown flecked with white?
   a. Yes (Go to #17)
   b. No Re check questions 2, 3 and 4 (maybe wing should be considered longer)

6. Fluff the leg feather upward. Do the leg feathers grow all the way down to the feet? (Long feathers growing on the upper legs may fool you. Look to see if the feathers are actually growing on the ankle area.)
   a. Yes, the legs are completely growing with feathers, almost to the feet. (Go to #18)
   b. No, the ankle area is bare. (Go to #7)
   c. There is a soft covering of feathers on the feet and toes all the way down to the talons. (Go to #27)

7. Does this bird have mostly a white face with a brown horizontal stripe behind the eyes?
   a. Yes (Go to #19)
   b. No. (Go to #15)

8. Look at the bird’s head. Do the nostrils have “baffles” in them? Is there a notch on the side of it’s upper beak? Is there a skin patch ring around the eye?
   a. Yes this bird has all of these. This is a falcon. (Go to #9)
   b. No, this bird has none of these. (Go to #11)

9. Does this bird have malar stripes (thick black vertical lines on it’s face)?
   a. Yes, there are vertical lines on the face (Go to #10)
   b. No, there is a thin vertical line or none at all. (Go to #20)

10. Is this a blue jay sized bird?
    a. Yes. (Go to #21)
    b. No, this bird is much larger (crow sized). (Go to #22)
11. Check the BOTTOM of the bird’s feet. Are there “toe pads” (long fleshy nodules sticking out especially on the middle toe)?
   a. Yes. This is an accipiter (they only eat birds and are very nervous and high strung) (Go to # 13)
   b. No. (Go to # 14)
12. Does this bird have a ruff of feathers around the head and a white rump patch (on the lower back above it’s tail)?
   a. Yes. (Go to # 23)
   b. No, (Go to # 28)
13. Is this a large bird with a white eyebrow stripe?
   a. Yes (Go to # 24)
   b. No (Go to # 14)
14. Look at the head. Does it appear:
   a. Flat on top with a small eye? (Go to # 25)
   b. Small ping pong round head with a huge eye? (Go to # 26)
15. This is a Red Tailed Hawk. If the tail is not yet red, it is under 2 years old)
16. This is a Broad winged hawk.
17. This may be a Red Shouldered hawk. Not very common in Pennsylvania.
18. This is a roughed legged hawk (uncommon in this area).
19. This is an osprey. It eats fish. Its feet have a greenish/blue tint to them, are like sandpaper have a fourth toes that can go back or front. These are high stressed birds and need high humidity. If possible have transported to us for outdoor housing ASAP.
20. This is a Merlin Falcon (unusual in this area)
21. This is an American Kestrel. Very common in this area. The males have grey colored shoulders (top of wings) and the females shoulders are brown.
22. This may be a peregrine falcon. This bird must be reported to us right away. It is threatened or endangered and must be reported to the PGC.
23. This is a Northern Harrier. The females are rust colored and the males are grayish.
24. This is a Goshawk. These are high stressed birds and die easily from capture myopathy.
25. This is a cooper’s hawk. These are high stressed birds and die easily from capture myopathy.
26. This is a sharp shinned hawk. These are high stressed birds and die easily from capture myopathy.
27. This is an owl, not a hawk or falcon. To identify it, use the owl key.
28. If this is an EXTREMELY large bird it may be an eagle. If you are sure it is a Raptor, check the owl sheet to see if is an owl. Otherwise - Call the rehabilitator - I have No Clue and would like to see this thing.
Raptor Identification (OWLS)

Is this bird a RAPTOR? Raptors have a sharp curved beak and long talons on powerful feet for their size.

Is this bird an OWL?

1. What color are this bird’s eyes (iris)?
   a. Yellow go to # 3
   b. Brown go to # 2

2. Look at the bird’s coloring and face. Which description fits best?
   a. A light tan, slender bird with a white, heart shaped face. Go to # 8
   b. A medium/large brown bird with light barring. The head is round. The beak is yellow and heavily covered with fluffy feathers. Go to # 9

3. Does the bird have “horns” or feather tufts on the top of the head?
   a. Yes, there are feathered tufts on the top of the head Go to # 6
   b. No, the head is round and no sign of tufts or horns. Go to #4

4. What is the size of this bird?
   a. This bird is very large with a wingspan over 4 feet in length – go to # 10
   b. This is a medium to small bird with a wingspan under 4 feet in length – go to # 5

5. Which description best fits this bird?
   a. This is a small owl with a large, asymmetrical head that looks rather comical – go to # 11
   b. This is a medium, crow-sized bird – go to # 12

6. What is the size of this bird?
   a. This is a large brown owl with wingspan over 4 feet wide, and a white “collar” in the front of the neck. – go to # 13
   b. This bird’s wing span is under 4 feet wide – go to # 7

7. Where are the ear tufts located?
   a. The ear tufts are set extremely close together on the center of the top of the head. – go to # 14
   b. The ear tufts look like ears above the eyes – go to # 15

8. This is a Barn Owl.
9. This is a Barred Owl.
10. This is a Snowy Owl
11. This is a Saw-whet Owl, the smallest in Pennsylvania
12. This is the Short-eared Owl. This owl is a threatened species in Pennsylvania.
13. This is a Great Horned Owl.
14. This is a Long Eared Owl
15. This is a Screech Owl.
Resources

Pennsylvania Game Notes
Download free publications from the Pennsylvania Game Commission on Pennsylvania Wildlife
http://www.pgc.state.pa.us/wildlife/notes/index.asp

PAWR
Pennsylvania Association of Wildlife Rehabilitators
Locate a Rehabilitator in Pennsylvania
http://pawr.com

Red Creek Wildlife Center
Educational Material
http://redcreekwildlifecenter.com

NWRA
National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association
http://www.nwrawildlife.org/home.asp

IWRC
The International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council
http://www.iwrc-online.org/

Wildlife Rehabilitation Information
http://wildliferehabber.com/
Was this manual useful to you?

If you feel this manual on “Wildlife Capture and Transport” was useful and you would like to learn more, we have a companion manual on critical care available online. “Wildlife Critical Care - The First 24 hours” outlines first aid and temporary care techniques to help stabilize the wild patient until it can reach the rehabilitation facility.

“Wildlife Critical Care - The First 24 hours” outlines and illustrates the following procedures:
- Treating Dehydration including subcutaneous Injection and oral fluids
- Wound Care
- Stabilizing Fractures
- Compound Fractures
- Wing Fractures including fractures of the Humerus, Radius, Ulna and Carpal and wing droop
- Avian Leg Fractures
- Splinting and taping
- How to apply a Body Wrap and a “Figure Of Eight” Bandage
- Leg Fractures in Mammals
- Fractures in Juvenile Mammals
- Dexamethasone
- Hypothermia
- Hyperthermia
- Eye Lubrication
- Tar and Glue Traps

Including charts and diagrams

- Avian Wing and Leg Anatomy
- Mammalian Skeletal Anatomy
- How to Read a Syringe
- Average Weights of Common Birds
- Average Weights of Common Mammals

“Wildlife Critical Care - The First 24 hours” is available for download in PDF format by visiting www.redcreekwildlifecenter.com/wcc/. All proceeds support the rehabilitation programs at Red Creek Wildlife Center.
Educational Materials

The following material covers many common topics and questions about wildlife and wildlife rehabilitation. These are included in this manual as reference for you and can also be found on the accompanying CD that came with this manual. The files on the CD are formatted to be printed as public handouts. Keeping a supply on hand will assist you in your public relation efforts.

If you do not have the CD, the same handout files can be downloaded at http://redcreekwildlifecenter.com/handouts. We will be adding more educational materials periodically, so check the website for updates and additions.

Please Don't Feed the Waterfowl!

Cats vs. Wildlife
Wildlife

Raising Wildlife at Home and Wildlife as Pets

Facts and Fables
"But I heard somewhere that:"

Pheasants and the Great Horned Owl

Imprinting
Please Don't Feed the Waterfowl!

Red Creek Wildlife Center often receives calls from property owners and municipalities regarding the destruction and mess caused by large numbers of ducks and Canada geese. The main cause of this situation is very simply: PEOPLE FEEDING WATERFOWL!

Most people that feed waterfowl do so because they love animals and enjoy the interaction. They do not realize the danger in which they are actually placing the animals.

Nature balances itself very well. A particular habitat has only enough food for a certain number of animals. Once that food supply is gone, the animals will move to a new habitat. If left to nature, ducks and geese will eat the food supply in an area BEFORE the area becomes so contaminated with feces that it becomes unhealthy. Once the animals have left, the earth cleans itself through enzymes and micro activity and a new food supply grows. The newly rejuvenated habitat can once again support wildlife and the animals return, starting the cycle all over again.

The number of eggs laid by a pair of ducks or geese is in direct proportion to the amount of food available. When food is artificially added to an area by people feeding wildlife, the birds will over-populate an area very quickly. They also will remain in the area longer, contaminating the environment, making it unhealthy for people as well as wildlife.

Another good reason to avoid feeding geese is for their own protection - to ensure they retain their fear of humans. You may not pose a threat to their survival, but if they do not fear ALL humans, they are bound to run into an unfriendly one sooner or later.

Another reason to refrain from feeding geese is that the foods commonly used, such as bread and french fries, are nutritionally inadequate and cause serious, potentially deadly impactions of the crop. Geese don't know when to stop eating, and the large quantity and the low quality of food combines to create disastrous results. Young birds often develop nutrition deficiencies resulting in crippling deformities. Most of the time they die or have to be euthanized because by the time we receive them the damage is irreversible.
Cats vs. Wildlife

How many cats are there in the United States?
The estimated number of pet cats in urban and rural regions of the United States has grown from 30 million in 1970 to 60 million in 1990. These estimates include only those cats that people claim to “own” as pets, not cats that are semi-wild or free-ranging. Nationwide, approximately 30% of households have cats. In rural areas where free-ranging cats are usually not regarded as pets, approximately 60% of households have cats. The combined total of pets and free-ranging cats in the U.S. is probably more than 100 million.

What effects do domestic cats have on wildlife?
Although rural cats take the greatest toll, even urban house pets take live prey when allowed outside. Small mammals make up approximately 70% of these cats’ prey while birds make up about 20%. The remaining 10% is a variety of other animals. Observation of free-ranging domestic cats shows that some individuals can kill over 1000 wild animals per year. Some of the data on kills suggests that free-ranging cats living in small towns kill an average of 14 wild animals each per year. Nationwide, rural cats probably kill over a billion small mammals and hundreds of millions of birds each year. Urban and suburban cats add to this toll. Some of these kills are house mice, rats and other species considered pests, but many are native songbirds and mammals whose populations are already stressed by other factors, such as habitat destruction and pesticide pollution.

Worldwide, cats may have been involved in the extinction of more bird species than any other cause, except habitat destruction. Cats are contributing to the endangerment of populations of birds such as Least Terns, Piping Plovers and Loggerhead Shrikes. In Florida, Marsh Rabbits in Key West have been threatened by predation from domestic cats. Cats introduced by people living on the barrier islands of Florida’s coast have depleted several unique species of mice and Woodrats to near extinction.

The effect on native predators
Not only do cats prey on many small mammals and birds, but they can outnumber and compete with native predators. Domestic cats eat many of the same animals that native predators do. When present in large numbers, cats can reduce the availability of prey for native predators, such as hawks. Free-ranging domestic cats may also transmit new diseases to wild animals. Domestic cats have spread feline leukemia virus to Mountain Lions and may have recently infected the endangered Florida Panther with feline panleukopenia (feline distemper) and an immune deficiency disease. These diseases may pose a serious threat to this rare species. Some free-ranging domestic cats also carry several diseases that are easily transmitted to humans, including rabies and toxoplasmosis.

Because many cats are protected and fed by humans, their population is not checked by the natural occurrences such as disease, predation and scarcity of wild game.
The effect on cats

The average life span of an indoor house cat is 15 to 20 years. A free roaming domestic cat can expect to live only 4 years. This is due to disease, injuries and infection resulting from fights with wild animals and other cats, gunshots and automobiles. Domestic cats are also one of the favored foods of the Eastern Coyote and the Great Horned Owl. Keeping a cat indoors not only protects local wildlife, but the cat and (as you will see) the people with whom the cat comes in contact.

The effect on people

Rabies is a virus that attacks the central nervous system of warm blooded animals, including humans. Once it reaches the final symptomatic stage, it is 100% fatal. Cats are one of the most common carriers of rabies and many rural cats are not vaccinated. Because of their close association with people and other domestic animals, cats pose a greater risk of transmitting rabies to humans and other pets than do wild rabies vector species such as Raccoons, Skunk, Fox, Woodchucks, Coyotes and Bats.

How you can help

Pet cats:

- Keep only as many pets as you can control and care for
- Keep domestic cats indoors
- Spay and neuter all cats
- Vaccinate all cats regularly
- Place birdfeeders away from areas where cats can hide and stalk birds
- Leash train your cat for outdoor exercise

Farmers that need barnyard cats for rodent control:

- Keep only as many cats as needed to control rodent populations
- Spay and neuter all cats
- Spayed female cats are more likely to stay close to farm buildings
- Vaccinate all cats regularly
- Place owl boxes near barns to attract natural predators
Raising Wildlife at Home and Wildlife as Pets

*But I Love this Animal*

or

*But I Want to Raise It*

or

*It would be a great experience for the children*

(and other excuses)

*Please, Please, Please....... do not even think about keeping this wild creature!*

Wildlife Diseases and Parasites

Wild animals often carry parasites and diseases that can infect you, your children and your pets. Handling wild babies enough to provide the care that they need can be extremely dangerous. Rabies and raccoon roundworm are just two examples of life-threatening conditions carried by wildlife.

**Rabies** is a fatal disease cause by a virus that attacks the central nervous system of warm blooded animals. Rabies is most commonly contracted through a bite wound from an infected animal in the last stage of the disease, but can also be transmitted when the saliva or brain tissue of an infected animal comes in contact with an open cut or mucous membranes such as the mouth and eyes. Handling any animal continuously can expose you to this deadly virus.

The time from infection to onset of clinical signs is two to twelve weeks, but some animals and people have been known to carry the virus for up to a year. The virus is only transmissible during the last stage of the disease and clinical signs usually follow within a week to ten days. The last stage is always fatal.

**Baylisascaris (Bay-liss-ass-kuh-rihs)** (Raccoon Roundworm) can cause skin irritations and eye and brain damage in humans and domestic pets (such as dogs and cats) resulting in blindness and even death.

**Wildlife Rehabilitators** treat the animals for parasites such as Baylisascaris, aiding in the animals overall health. They are also trained to recognize and treat diseases that can harm humans and are vaccinated against the rabies virus.

**Tame Wildlife**

Wildlife raised around or with domestic animals and humans will loose their natural fear of other pets and people. Wild animals raised alone become "imprinted" on humans. They will not recognize their own kind and will never breed. They are never quite wild and never quite tame, being caught in a limbo that offers nothing except frustration, rejection and confusion.

When a wild animal escapes, its "tame" behavior is often feared as rabies and the animal is destroyed.

Because **Wildlife Rehabilitators** get large numbers of animals, we can keep them together, helping them to grow up wild.
The Laws
All wildlife animals are protected under state or federal laws or both. In most states, it is illegal to possess a wild animal - even if you are trying to help it.

Death
The constant stress of captivity will weaken the animal’s immune system, resulting in disease and often death. If you want to teach your children about wildlife by caring for those baby bunnies or that nest of birds, most likely the only lesson they will learn is about suffering and death.

Wild animals need special experienced care. They require specific needs for nutrition, medical attention and housing.

When you are tempted to take home a wild animal for a pet, ask yourself these questions:

- Is what I am doing legal?
- Am I willing to risk the health, and possibly the life, of myself and my family and my pets?
- Am I properly trained in the care of this species of animal?
- Can I obtain veterinary care for this animal? (Veterinarians will not treat illegal wildlife)
- Am I willing to risk killing the animal because I may not truly know how to care for it?
- Am I willing to change my lifestyle to conform to the animal's natural and unalterable behavior?

If you cannot truthfully answer "yes" to each question, do not attempt to keep a wild animal as a pet. Call a Licensed Wildlife Rehabilitator NOW!!!
Wildlife
Facts and Fables
"But I heard somewhere that:"

Fable: *If you touch a baby bird or baby bunny, the mother will reject or kill it.*
Fact: Mothers will not reject their young but many baby wild animals have no body odor and predators cannot smell them. If you handle a wild baby, you put your smell on it and a predator may detect it, get curious, and find the baby and eat it.

Fable: *I found a baby rabbit nest and the mother hasn't come back.*
Fact: Mom usually only feeds 2 or 3 times during the night and only for short periods of time. She built the nest, delivered the litter and has been caring for them without being observed. She will continue to do so. If you are not sure, take a piece of yarn and make an "X" over the nest before evening. Check the nest the next morning to see if it has been moved.

Fable: *My cat is de-clawed and wears a bell. She cannot injure wildlife.*
Fact: Cats can hunt successfully without claws but cannot defend themselves against attack from larger animals so they should never be left outside. An infant bird or mammal cannot flee from the cat, even if it hears the bell.

Fable: *A baby deer alone in the woods is probably orphaned.*
Fact: The mother doe does not stay near her baby very long so her smell does not attract predators. But she is nearby and watching, even if you don't see her. Please leave it alone.

Fable: *I haven't seen the mother dove come to her nest for hours. She has probably been killed.*
Fact: A mother dove will leave and eat seeds, then sit and digest her food, which becomes a liquid in her crop (throat). She will then return and feed this liquid to her babies, which they drink from her crop. The whole process takes some time so she only needs to feed them 3 or 4 times each day.

Fable: *This spring, I found a large owl with bumps on its head and it cannot fly. It probably has a head injury and needs help.*
Fact: This is most likely a fledgling Great Horned Owl. It leaves the nest before it can fly and the parents follow and care for it. The owl is fine and doesn't need your help. But BEWARE. This bird, although very young, is quite capable of inflicting severe injury to you or your pets with its long sharp talons.

Fable: *If you see a night predator (such as a fox) out during the daytime, it is rabid.*
Fact: Not always. If a mother has babies in the den she may be hunting. Animals also can be routed from their den accidentally. You should never approach any wildlife, though, especially if its behavior is uncharacteristic.

Fable: *An animal carries rabies for 10 days then dies.*
Fact: Animals and humans can carry rabies for up to over 1 year. The disease becomes active and transmissible when the virus enters the brain and saliva. This stage lasts approximately a week to ten days. Once rabies reaches this final stage, it is always fatal.

Fable: *You must be bitten or scratched to get rabies.*
Fact: Rabies is most commonly contracted through a bite wound from an infected animal in the last stage of the disease, but can also be transmitted through infected saliva or brain tissue coming in contact with an open cut or a mucous membrane such as the eyes, nose and mouth.
Pheasants and the Great Horned Owl

A decline in some game species, especially the Ring Necked Pheasant, has prompted many people to advocate hunting and bounties on the Great Horned Owl. Several studies done on the feeding habits of this predator indicate the Owl’s impact on pheasant populations is minimal, and perhaps beneficial.

Owls eat whole animals and regurgitate non-digested food particles (bone, hair, etc.) in the form of a pellet. A study conducted by Hawk Mountain on 2134 pellets in 17 counties resulted in the following statistics of the Great Horned Owl’s diet:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPECIES</th>
<th>% OF DIET</th>
<th>SPECIES</th>
<th>% OF DIET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Norway Rat</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Short Tailed Shrew</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-Footed Mouse</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>Striped Skunk</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Cottontail</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>Muskrat</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opossum</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>Eastern Chipmunk</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Jay</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Meadow Vole</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ring Necked Pheasant</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Hairy Woodpecker</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Squirrel</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Long Tailed Weasel</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruffed Grouse</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>Mallard</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pigeon</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Woodchuck</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Flicker</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Unidentified</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Statistics on total counts, region and importance of prey species by body mass were also compiled and are available at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary)

Great Horned Owls regularly prey upon rats, weasels, opossums and skunks, animals known to destroy pheasant nests and eat the eggs. Since Great Horned Owls are one of the only predators of the skunk (which has the second highest incidence of rabies among native wildlife in Pennsylvania) it seems the Great Horned Owl may be quite beneficial to both Pheasant and Man.

Many factors must be considered in connection with Pheasant population decline. Destruction of suitable habitat is a major factor as farming practices change and housing increasingly replaces farmland. Pesticides, disease, starvation and road kills must also be weighed.

Great Horned Owls are magnificent creatures deserving of our awe and respect. If you have never seen a live owl up close, invite a wildlife rehabilitator to come give a talk for your school, club or group, and learn more about these majestic raptors.
Imprinting

Most mammals and birds recognize their own species through a process called imprinting. When an animal is very young and its eyes begin to focus, it looks at who is caring for it, nurturing, feeding and protecting it. From this individual it gets a mental picture of who it is. This picture (or imprint) stays with the animal its entire life and once formed, can not be changed.

Exactly when this happens depends on the species. Ducks and geese, for instance, imprint almost immediately, and this “picture” is reinforced the first couple weeks of their lives. A Great Horned Owl’s eyes begin to focus at about two weeks of age. Imprinting takes place shortly thereafter. Mammals’ eyes open and focus at various stages of their development.

This imprint not only gives an animal its identity, but it also serves to help it choose a mate later in life. This is why a Blue Bird doesn’t attempt to mate with a Blue Jay, or a Crow with a Sea Gull. The wrong species doesn’t match that imprint. You can say an animal is looking for a mate “JUST LIKE MOM.”

Most of the time this works quite well: geese raise geese, crows raise crows, and deer raise deer. But when a person hand-raises a wild animal, that animal can grow up believing it is a person. It will seek out people when it wants company, is injured, hungry, scared and when it’s time to mate.

It is a very miserable life for an animal that is imprinted on humans. It faces a life of frustration and rejection. Just think what it would be like if you were physically incompatible with everyone you were attracted to.

Even if the animal is past the age of imprinting and “learns” to accept humans, without others of its species with which to interact, it never learns the proper etiquette of behaving around other animals. An animal that doesn’t use the proper body language and behavior will be rejected by other members of its own species.

Wildlife Rehabilitators deal with the problems of imprinting the animals under their care in numerous ways.

Using surrogates:
Wildlife rehabilitators often have a selection of non-releasable adult animals that can serve as foster parents for orphaned babies. The babies grow up with a natural parent, learning proper behavior and the skills they will need to survive.

Strength in numbers:
Because Wildlife rehabilitators receive large numbers of animals from the surrounding area, baby animals don’t have to grow up alone. They are placed with other babies of their species who are in the same situation. Together they grow and bond and learn to interact. Once old enough to be released, they are released together as a family unit.

A network of rehabilitators:
Wildlife Rehabilitators maintain a network of members. If a rehabilitator receives a single baby, it can be placed with another rehabilitator who has others of that species.