Wildlife First Aid in the Field

For Wildlife Capture and Transport Volunteers

This session covers the topics of extended first aid "in the field." Only necessary action should be taken to immediately save a life or help prevent the animal from becoming further injured during transport.

The suggested products in the sections are not professional care products typically used by wildlife rehabilitators. Since this instruction assumes that the person giving this emergency care does not have professional products on hand, I have tried to suggest products that can be easily obtained in grocery and pet stores. This is not a recommendation that these products are what's best for any given animal, but only an emergency replacement in the absence of professional products.

I must emphasize that every effort should be made to transport the animal to the rehabilitator immediately upon capture. The initial care is best administered in the rehabilitation facility with all the necessary equipment and properly trained staff.

Guidelines

The actions you take should remain within these guidelines:

- What you and the rehabilitator have agreed to
- What you have been trained to administer
- Must not endanger you, any bystanders, or the animal
- Must be of immediate necessity
- Must not increase the animal's stress

STRESS IN WILDLIFE

Stop, back off a minute - DO NO HARM!

- What did the animal just experience?
- Sudden pain and suffering
- Inability to survive (short or long-term)
- Approached and captured by predators
- Inability to escape
- Car ride (foreign sights, sounds, and smells)
- Again handled by a predator
- New sights, sounds, and smells
- All of this while continuing pain and debilitation

Most animals admitted are suffering some dehydration. Dehydration causes sensitivity and pain throughout the body. Handling a dehydrated animal can cause further suffering.

Cursory Examination

A field examination is not a thorough workup to diagnose and treat every problem.

Your goals are:

- Correct any immediate life-threatening conditions
- Determine if the animal is truly in need of care
- Stabilize as needed so that its condition doesn't deteriorate during transport

Again, as always, your safety, and that of the animal, is your primary concern. When performing an examination, it is essential to work quickly and efficiently to avoid unnecessary additional stress.

- Quickly glance over the animal check for IMMEDIATE LIFE-THREATENING CONDITIONS
- Gently move to your container
- Supply….. WARM - DARK - QUIET

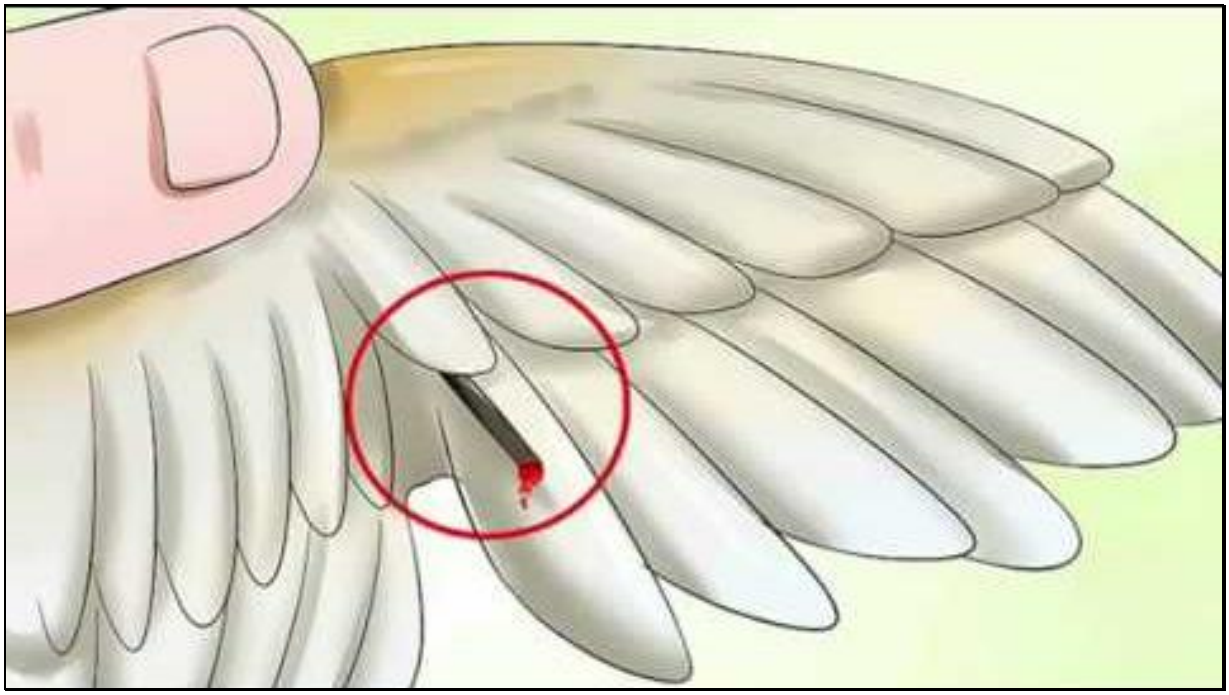
Life-Threatening Conditions

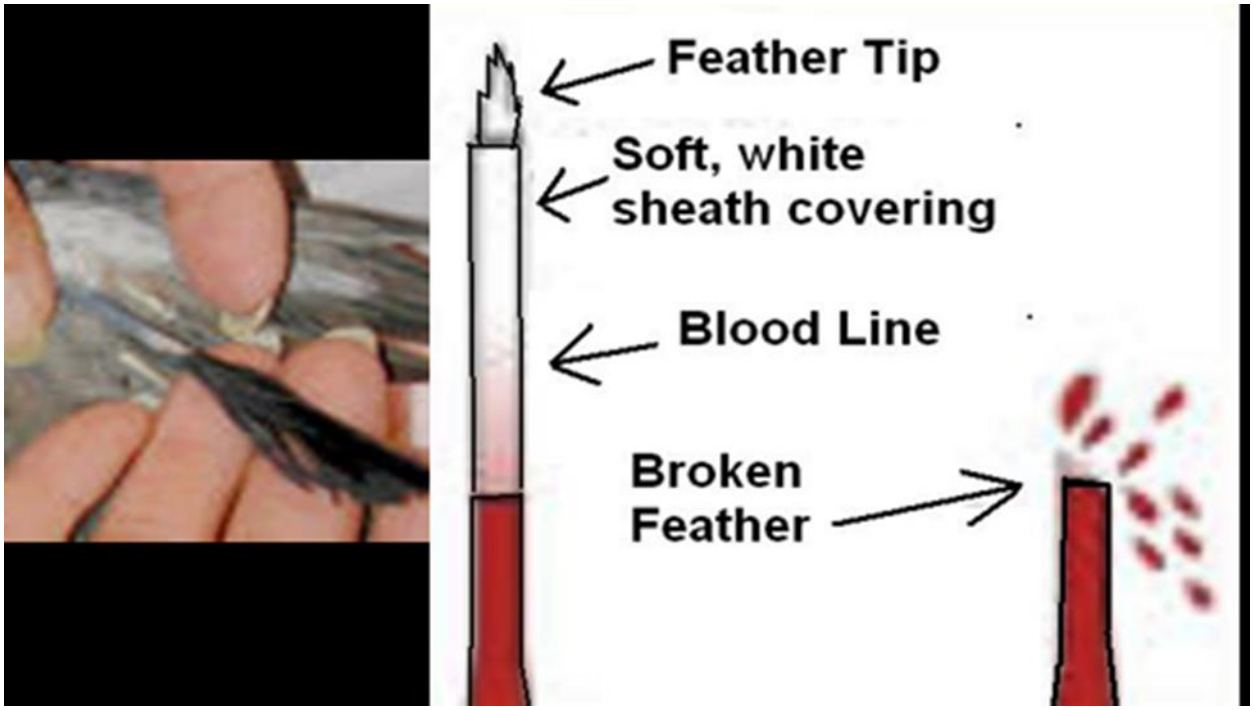
- Airway
  - Container over face
    - Containers can be removed once the animal is restrained.
    - Uninjured animals can be released in a nearby wooded area
    - Animals that appear compromised should be transported to a rehabilitator

- Glue traps involving the face
  - Animals stuck on glue boards and tape traps should not be removed in the field. Instead, cover exposed glue with tissues to prevent further entanglement.
  - However, if an animal's face is stuck to glue, use vegetable oil and a soft paintbrush to free the facial area so it can breathe. The face can then be protected with facial tissues. The entire animal can be removed in the same way if necessary.

- Ruptured Air Sacs
  - If the animal appears to be breathing without difficulty, transport immediately.
  - If the breathing is labored, create a small hole in the skin with a sterile needle. The pressure will dissipate on its own.

- Active Bleeding
    - Apply Pressure
    - Apply a pressure bandage if able
  - Broken Blood Feathers
    - Pull and apply pressure on the skin (only if actively bleeding)





Wound Care

NEVER USE

Detergents
Antiseptics
Hydrogen Peroxide

DO NOT SCRUB

Do NOT

Detergents or soap and water are damaging to wound tissue and very irritating. Never pour detergents into a wound.

Antiseptics can also be damaging. Anything strong enough to kill bacteria is also caustic enough to destroy tissue. The best way to deal with bacteria is to dilute and flush it away, not kill it.

Although Hydrogen Peroxide may be a good cleanser because its foaming action can lift debris, it tends to block the circulatory system to the wound. This can impede future healing. A 3% solution of Hydrogen Peroxide is excellent at removing blood and can be used to wash dried blood from your hands and equipment.

Also, do not scrub……irrigate instead.

Iodine solutions such as Betadine work well but must be diluted. Mix 1 part iodine with 10 or more parts sterile saline. One way we use this product is to put 1 ounce of Betadine in a 12-ounce saline bottle used for contact lenses. Ensure the saline is sterile and has no other properties, such as protein removal. You can also inject 1cc of iodine in a saline nasal sprayer. The nasal spray bottle is designed for spraying upward, so you must remove the tube inside the bottle so the solution can be expelled with the bottle inverted. This is an excellent method of applying a fine pressure stream to irrigate a wound. Label the bottle so as not to mistake its contents.

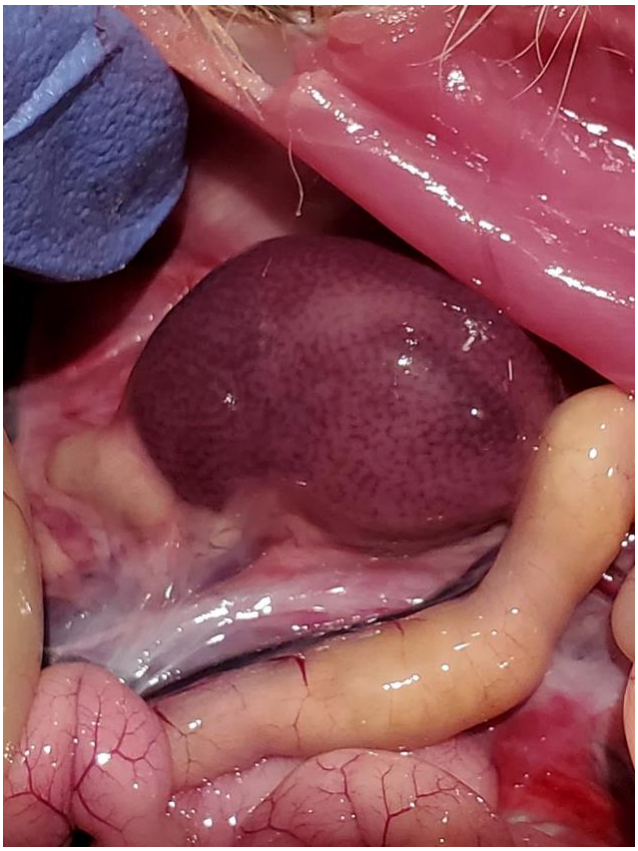
Types of Shock

- Cardiogenic (heart failure)
    - Causes:
        - Stress
        - Capture myopathy
    - Treatment:
        - Supply immediate stress-free environment

Avoiding Stress and Capture Myopathy

- Caused by
    - Prolonged or extreme pursuit
    - Restraint capture or transportation
    - Caused by humans. Not seen in the wild

Prolonged exertion increases lactic acid production causing metabolic acidosis. Damaged cells release myoglobin (which gives muscles its red color). Myoglobin is nephrotoxic (kills the kidney cells).



Death is often the result. It can happen quickly from cardiogenic shock, after several days later from renal failure, or can happen much later due to cardiac muscle damage.

Prevention is the key

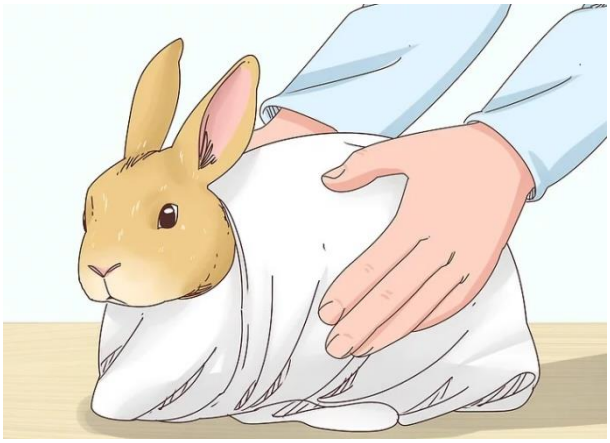
Species: Any animal is susceptible, but prey species, long legged species, wading birds.

Environment: High temps, high humidity, difficult footing, steep terrain.

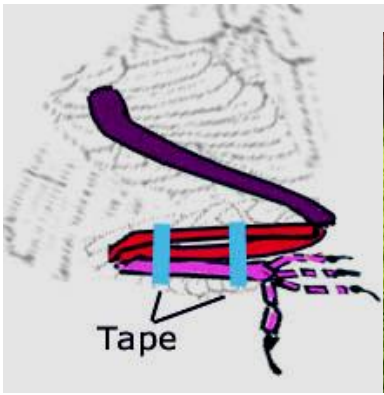
Capture related: High speed chase, prolonged restraint, unnatural positioning during restraint, prolonged transport, recurrent stress.

Packaging

- Animals that are unstable or “rolling” can be wrapped in a fleece blanket, sweatchirt or other non-fraying material.



- Birds with wing injuries can be inserted into a sweatshirt sleeve to stabilize the wing.
- Paper painter’s or masking tape can temporarily secure limbs and hold bandages in place.



- Do not remove embedded arrows. Arrows can be cut and the cut end taped with duct tape to prevent splitting or fraying to aid in containing the animal.

NO WATER and
DO NOT FEED

Except.....