

Help for Injured Wildlife

Caring Rehab Gives Them a Second Chance

by Sandra Murphy



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Seeing lost, injured or orphaned animals is heartbreaking, but unless a wild animal is in immediate danger from prey or traffic, it's best to wait and observe. Mothers forage for food and return to the babies intermittently. If in doubt, call a wildlife rehabber for advice.

"Rehabilitators are trained, tested, licensed, take continuing education courses and file annual reports. All care provided must meet government standards," explains wildlife rehabilitator Regina Whitman, of Queen Creek, Arizona, via her Desert Cry Wildlife website. She rehabs rabbits, squirrels, raccoons, skunks, baby javelina and coyote pups.

The Dan & Dianne May Wildlife Rehabilitation Center at Lee's-McRae College, in Banner Elk, North Carolina, is the only college program in the U.S. that allows students to work hands-on with veterinarians in the rehab center. "We see native species of reptiles, raptors, songbirds and mammals like eastern gray squirrels," says Jenna Glaski, a program

senior mentor. "When fawns and bobcats are orphaned, it's usually because the mother has been hit by a car or shot."

In the Georgetown area, South Carolina Coastal Animal Rescue and Educational Sanctuary (SC-CARES) rehabbers care for injured wildlife and other animals. Miss Belle—a doe that was trapped in fencing and temporarily paralyzed trying to get free—received physical therapy and is expected to make a full recovery.

Founded in 2004 by Kevin Barton and Linda Schrader, the Wildlife Center of Venice, serves Sarasota and Charlotte counties. Its five acres offers hutches, barns, habitats for squirrels and raccoons, an aviary and a pond for waterfowl. In 2015, volunteers rescued eight striped skunks. Because these mammals are slow and have poor eyesight, wide roads are especially hazardous as they move through diminishing habitat. Skunks eat insects, grubs, rodents, moles and snakes.

Paul and Gloria Halesworth specialize in hummingbirds at Wild

Wing Rehab Hummers & Songbirds, in Ahwatukee, Arizona. "Hummingbird babies require a special formula we import from Europe. A body temperature of 105 degrees causes casual rescuers to think they're overheated. They pant like dogs if too hot; otherwise, they're okay," Paul says. If a nest is found on the ground, reattach it in a tree. "Duct tape works," he notes. "Mom will find them." Released birds are taken to the Desert Botanical Garden, in Phoenix.

Rehabbing owls costs significantly more, up to \$800 from hatchling to release. The Halesworths refer owls to another rehabber that annually cares for about 500 owls.

In Fort Gratiot, Michigan, Back 2 the Wild Rehab rescues all kinds of wild animals. In February, two geese were stuck in a frozen river. Firefighters freed the birds and rehabbers checked them for frostbite. One goose died, but the other was released after the next storm passed through.

The Snowdon Wildlife Sanctuary, near McCall, Idaho, accepts orphaned bear cubs. Tapping into three decades of research reported by program supervisor Jeff Rohlman, they are vetted and put into a two-acre enclosure to learn to live in the wild until they are old enough for release. Most arrive undernourished and dehydrated; if separated from their mother, they don't know how to feed themselves or when to hibernate.

Dreamcatcher Wild Horse & Burro Sanctuary, in Ravendale, California,

doesn't release rehabbed guests—it provides a lifetime home to roam 1,000 acres in family packs to find their own food and water. Public lands are leased to ranchers for grazing, compelling competition for food between livestock and wild animals, so this is a safer option; the sanctuary also advocates protection of resident mountain lions, badgers, coyotes, hawks and eagles.

Barry and Maureen Genzlinger, founders of the Vermont Bat Center, in Milton, have rescued and released more than 125 bats since Barry became a licensed bat rehabilitator for the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department in 2013. "We have one bat that lost 95 percent of the skin on a wing," he says. "After three months, most of it has grown back. In two more months, it should be fine, just in time to hibernate." Bats can eat up to 1,000 mosquitoes in an hour.

While some are considered a nuisance, each rescued animal has a place in the overall eco-system. Following the good Samaritan rule allows casual rescuers to keep an animal only long enough to safely transport it to a rehabilitator. Rescue operations always need volunteers to donate time or money to help the cause.

For creatures, staying with a healing friend can help but there's no place like home.

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