

NORTH CAROLINA GUIDELINES FOR WILDLIFE REHABILITATORS

Division of Wildlife Management

Due to the sensitive nature of rehabilitating animals, it is important for the public to understand the special requirements and responsibilities associated with this type of activity. Please review the following paragraphs before proceeding with completion of the Rehabilitation Permit application.

What is wildlife rehabilitation? Wildlife rehabilitation is the volunteer practice of providing assistance to injured or orphaned wild animals to help them reach a level of health that would allow their return to their natural habitat. Care required can range from hourly feedings of orphaned animals, to veterinary treatment of sick or injured animals. Time and financial requirements for volunteer wildlife rehabilitators can be very demanding, especially in spring when large numbers of animals people mistake as being "orphaned" are found by the public.

Is wildlife rehabilitation necessary to prevent the loss or extinction of our native wildlife? With the exception of possibly endangered or very rare species, wildlife rehabilitation is not required to maintain the status of our native wildlife populations. Most species of wildlife have evolved ways of compensating for very high annual mortality. For example, in species like rabbits, eighty to eighty-five percent of the population will die and be replaced each year even in stable or growing populations. Interference by humans to save any one individual will do little for the population one way or the other.

If wildlife rehabilitation is not required to maintain the status of our native wildlife populations, then why is it needed? Wildlife rehabilitation serves mostly to meet the needs of our human society, not the needs of wildlife populations. Humans feel empathy with sick and injured animals and naturally want to help. There is no harm in helping in many cases, but those involved first should remember that the object of rehabilitation is the relief of suffering of an individual animal. One should always ask if the stress and pain of rehabilitation is the most humane action for that animal. Keep in mind that saving the individual, in most cases, will have no effect on wildlife populations. If these facts are kept in mind, wildlife rehabilitation can be a rewarding pastime for some people and can successfully return some individual animals that would have otherwise died back to the wild.

Is there a risk in becoming a wildlife rehabilitator? Besides the obvious chance of being bitten or scratched, there are many diseases that can be transmitted from wildlife to humans. While these types of diseases are seldom encountered by the general public, wildlife rehabilitators having intimate contact with living animals put themselves at greater risk. Any wildlife rehabilitator should acquaint themselves with these diseases and understand the risk before applying for a permit. For more information about the disease risk you should contact your doctor or the local health department. Wildlife Commission employees will not advise you on human health issues.

Permit Requirements

What is required to become a wildlife rehabilitator in North Carolina? A North Carolina Wildlife Rehabilitation Permit is required to possess native wild birds and animals for the purpose of rehabilitation and release to the wild. In addition, a permit is required from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for the rehabilitation of migratory birds (most species of birds are classified as migratory). To be considered eligible to receive a Wildlife Rehabilitation Permit, an applicant must exhibit the resources, knowledge, and ability to provide adequate care for the animals.

North Carolina Permit Requirements

1. Permits are issued in the name of an individual(s) at a specific location. Other volunteers may assist at the licensed location under the supervision of the permittee.
2. Applicants should have adequate space to limit human to animal contact.
3. Permits will not be issued to persons under the age of 18; although they may provide assistance to permitted rehabilitators at the licensed location.
4. Applicants must certify on the application their training, knowledge, and experience in the care and rehabilitation of wildlife. (Wildlife rehabilitation workshops, veterinary assistant training, or experience as a wildlife rehabilitation assistant are examples of creditable activities.)
5. Applicants must certify on the application that they possess proper facilities for confinement of the animals, or that they have the ability to construct/acquire necessary caging prior to inspection. Caging requirements must be compliant with 15A NCAC 10H.0302(b)
6. Applicants must certify on the application the types of animals with which they are experienced and for which they are capable of providing rehabilitation (songbirds, raptors, small mammals, and reptiles).
7. Click here for a Rehabilitation application, or write to:

Wildlife Rehabilitation
NC Wildlife Resources Commission
1707 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1707
(919) 707-0391

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Permits

In addition to the North Carolina Wildlife Rehabilitation Permit, a Federal Special Purpose Rehabilitation Permit is required from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for the rehabilitation of migratory birds (most species of birds are classified as migratory). Applications and requirements for the Federal permit may be obtained from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Permits Section
P.O. Box 49208
Atlanta, GA 30359
(404) 679-7070

What records must be kept by wildlife rehabilitators? Rehabilitators must keep records on every animal possessed for rehabilitation purposes. These records should include the date of acquisition of the animal, species of animal, source of the acquisition, diagnosis of the problem, final disposition of the animal, and date of final disposition. Records must be maintained for at least three (3) years and must be made available for inspection to any Officer of the Wildlife Resources Commission and/or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, upon request. Records must be submitted quarterly on provided report form.

Which species of animal(s) can be possessed for rehabilitation and which are prohibited? Individuals with North Carolina permits are authorized to possess all native species of wildlife, except black bear, deer, fox, coyote, raccoon, skunk, and bats. Special authorization is required for the rehabilitation of any endangered or threatened species. No rehabilitators are allowed to possess or rehabilitate black bear in North Carolina and only permitted fawn rehabilitators are allowed to rehabilitate deer fawns. (The Wildlife Resources Commission operates its own facility [closed to the public] for the rehabilitation of black bear cubs.) Fox, coyote, raccoon, skunk and bats are prohibited due to the potential for human exposure to rabies. Violation of these restrictions is justification for revocation of a rehabilitator's permit.

How long can an animal be held for rehabilitation purposes? Wildlife should be held no longer than 90 days before release. This amount of time generally proves adequate for rehabilitation and release during more optimum times of the year. Any wildlife held over this 90 day period must be authorized by permit from the Wildlife Resources Commission and/or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

What if the animal is not suitable for release to the wild? Wildlife Rehabilitation Permits are not issued for the purpose of establishing "homes" for permanently injured or crippled animals that cannot survive in the wild. One of the most difficult decisions rehabilitators face is the fact that many of the animals received will not be suitable for release to the wild and must be euthanized. With very limited exceptions, animals that can only survive by amputation of an appendage, or that are so badly injured that they will never be releasable, should be immediately euthanized. Prolonging the animal's stress and suffering, and condemning them to a diminished quality of life in captivity is not an act of mercy.

There are limited exceptions that justify the retention of some species of wild animals in captivity. They include the retention of endangered or threatened species that are suitable for use in viable captive-breeding programs and for bona-fide educational or research programs. Retention of non-releasable wild animals for any reason must be specifically authorized by a North Carolina (and USFWS for migratory birds) permit. Non-releasable, educational-use permits will not be issued when wildlife becomes imprinted or human-dependent while in the care of the rehabilitator. Written authorization is required prior to the transfer of any non-releasable wildlife to other persons or organizations. This prohibition does **not** preclude rehabilitators from taking wildlife to licensed veterinarians for treatment or surgery, nor does it preclude transferring a potentially releasable animal to a more experienced/qualified rehabilitator.

For technical information, please contact:

National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association
2625 Clearwater Rd. Suite 110
St. Cloud, MN 56301
Tele: 320-230-9920.
Email: nwra@cloudnet.com.
Internet: <http://www.nwrawildlife.org>

The International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council
PO Box 3197
Eugene, OR 97403
Tele: (866) 871-1869
Email: office@theiwrc.org
Internet: <http://www.theiwrc.org>

For permit information, please contact:

Wildlife Rehabilitation
N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission
1707 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1707
(919) 707-0391.
Go to www.ncwildlife.org to download application package