This baby gray fox was found in a pipe on a farm. It will be placed with an adult fox before it is released into the wild.

A rescued raccoon washes its food at a rehab center as it would in the wild.

Wildlife rehabber Lisa Bates works with a nearly blind hawk.
Introduction

A baby bird hops along the ground, and its parents can’t be seen. What do you do if you find a baby bird that appears to be orphaned? What if you find a rabbit that can’t seem to hop, or a raccoon swaying from side to side as it walks?

Many people do not know what to do, or what not to do, when they find wildlife that may be in danger. Some people know just what to do. They know to leave the raccoon alone, as it is probably sick. They know whether they can help the rabbit and then return it to the wild. They can also look at the baby bird and know what care to give, if any. These people can teach you how to help, too.

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Who to Call?

If you see a wild animal in trouble, let an adult know right away. If you cannot find an adult you trust, look in the phone book under “Wildlife Rescue” or “Animal Rescue.”

Topsy, a 3-month-old female great horned owl, was rescued after she fell out of her nest during a windstorm. She is healing from neck and back injuries.
Wildlife Rehabilitators

People who help sick, injured, or orphaned wildlife are called wildlife rehabilitators, or rehabbers. Rehabilitate means to restore, or bring back, to good health. Wildlife rehabbers rescue wild animals and care for them as they heal. Whenever they can, rehabbers place the animals back into the wild when they recover, or get better.

These wildlife rehabbers have special training in caring for, feeding, and housing wild animals. Many can treat wild animals for sicknesses and injuries, too. They also know how to handle wildlife safely to keep from hurting the animals and themselves.

Rehabber Lisa treats Tripod, a young javelina who was hit by a car.

The work of rehabbers is important as more people move into places where wild animals live. When land is used for farming, houses, and businesses, the homes and foods of wild animals are destroyed. As people invade wildlife habitats, it is more likely that animals will be orphaned, injured, or killed. People and their activities cause the majority of wildlife injuries.

Common Causes of Injury

- Hit by cars or other vehicles
- Hitting other objects, such as windows
- Poisoning
- Illegal hunting
- Litter and pollution
- Attacks by other animals
Some wildlife rehabbers work with a variety of mammals, birds, and reptiles. Others work with just one group of animals, such as owls, bats, or ocean animals. Wildlife rehabbers often care for urban wildlife, or animals that live in cities and towns, such as some squirrels, raccoons, and foxes. Some brave rehabbers work with dangerous animals such as bears, mountain lions, and bobcats.

How do people become wildlife rehabbers? Many start as volunteers who learn from people with special wildlife training. They learn to care for animals in the homes and backyards of rehabbers, as well as at wildlife centers.

Volunteers do not get paid for their work, but most rehabbers do not get paid either. Often rehabbers spend their own money to buy food, medicine, and shelters for the animals in their care. People help wild animals because they care about our wildlife and they want them to get healthy.
Rescue

How do you know whether an animal needs to be rescued? Kids should always follow these two rules: 1 do not touch the animal 2 call an adult right away. Adults can help by calling a wildlife rehabber who is trained in wildlife rescue.

Kids can help by watching from a safe place to see where an animal hides. Rescuers will be able to find the animal when they arrive. Putting a box or laundry basket over an injured small animal will protect it from predators until help comes.

SAFETY FIRST

. . . for Animals

• Animals may be injured or die from being held wrong when they are hurt and frightened.
• Animals may be injured or die if kept in the wrong kind of cage. For example, wild birds may break bones or damage feathers when trying to escape from wire cages.
• Human scent on a baby animal may cause its parents not to care for it. This is truer for mammals than for birds because mammals have a better sense of smell.

. . . for People

• Injured wild animals may be frightened because they are in pain. They may bite, kick, scratch, peck, or stab to try to defend themselves. They don’t know that people are trying to help.
• Wild animals may have diseases that can be passed on to humans and pets. Bats, coyotes, raccoons, foxes, and skunks are more likely than other wild animals to carry rabies, a deadly disease that all warm-blooded animals, including humans, can catch. Anyone who may have been exposed to rabies must be treated right away.

Watch Out!

If you see any of these clues, stay away! They are clues that the animal may be sick—and dangerous.
• a bat on the ground
• a wild animal that appears to be tame
• an animal with excess drool, or what appears to be foam around its mouth
• an animal that can’t move
• an animal that looks extremely angry
• a nocturnal animal (one that is normally active at night) that is active during the day—especially a raccoon, skunk, opossum, fox, or bat

Animal rescuer and helper with an injured dog
Many baby animals are taken from their homes when they aren’t in danger. A baby bird hopping on the ground may not be orphaned—it might be a **fledgling**, a young bird learning how to fly. Fledglings often hop on the ground to practice moving before they fly. Their parents often watch them, but you may not be able to see the parents.

People sometimes rescue baby rabbits, seals, and fawns that aren’t in trouble. It’s normal for these babies to rest quietly on a beach or in the grass while their mothers eat nearby. Only people trained in the natural ways of these animals know whether or not the babies need human help. If they don’t, taking them from their mother hurts their chance to survive. Unless baby animals are wounded, they do not need to be rescued.

Many people wrongly believe they are helping wild animals by taking them home. Don’t confuse loving wildlife with being able to take care of these animals. Much more training is needed to care for wild animals than to care for dogs and cats. Besides, taking home wild animals is against the law.

If you were injured in an accident, would you want just anyone taking you home and caring for you? No, you would want someone trained to help, such as a doctor or nurse. You also would want a clean place that has the right tools and medicine to help you. Wild animals, like you, should get the best care.

Do You Know?

Spring is the busiest time of year for wildlife rescue because wild animals give birth in the spring. Babies are weaker and often can’t survive on their own. A baby animal may become orphaned if a car hits its mother, or if a hunter or predator kills its parents.
Rehabilitation

When animals are brought to a rehabilitation center, the first step is to give them a check-up and first aid. Newly rescued animals are quarantined, or put in their own cages, so other animals are not exposed to their sickness. Rehabbers keep notes about each animal so they can tell if the animal is getting better, when to give it medicine, and when to feed it.

Animals that come to rehabilitation centers have different problems. If they have broken bones or diseases, veterinarians must treat them first. Then the animals can go to the rehabilitation center to get better.

Animals may need one place for healing and another for recovery. For example, a hawk with a broken wing might need a small, dark cage where it can stay calm while it starts to heal. After the broken bone has healed, an outdoor area called a flight cage will allow the bird to exercise and practice flying.

Young, injured animals often need more care so they can heal. As they become stronger, they may be placed with an adult animal to help them. Adult animals show them how to act and how to hunt for food.

Baby animals need special care because they need to stay warm. Rehabbers may put them in an incubator to keep them warm, or they may place hot water bottles, heating pads, or light bulbs in their cages.

Igor, a black vulture, was fed birdseed instead of the meat he needed for good health. His bones became fragile and broke during his rescue.
Most wild animals are frightened of humans, and being away from home is stressful. Too much stress can kill a wild animal. Workers at rehabilitation centers try to protect animals from too much contact with humans. They try to keep noise levels low, and they cover cages with towels. They also don’t stare at the animals since in the wild this is a signal that an animal is being hunted.

A puppet serves as a substitute mother so that this young condor doesn’t get too used to humans.

**Imprinting**

Baby animals imprint on their mothers at an early age; a baby duck learns that it is a duck by watching its mother every day. Wildlife rehabbers take special care not to let baby birds imprint on humans; otherwise the babies will grow up thinking they are human and will seek out humans instead of their own kind. Raptors, or birds of prey, and other birds that have imprinted on humans may become dangerous in the wild. They may seek attention from a hiker who doesn’t know they are used to human contact. The hiker or the bird could get hurt in the meeting. It is best if wild animals learn to fear humans.

Wildlife rehabbers must feed the animals foods that are similar to their natural foods. Some foods can make the animals sick. They won’t grow normally. For example, cow’s milk sold in grocery stores is extremely harmful to many baby animals and can kill them.

Rescued animals must be fed natural foods so that later they can survive in the wild. This is most important for orphaned animals that have grown up in a rehabilitation center. If they develop a taste for human food or do not learn to find their own food, they could starve in the wild.

Do You Know?

Meat-eating animals at rehabilitation centers need food to eat so they heal and grow strong. Wildlife rehabbers pick up animals recently hit by cars or trucks along roads, called roadkill, for animal food. They also have freezers full of “mouse-cicles” — frozen mice that they use as food. To save money, some centers raise quail, mice, rats, and rabbits as animal food.
Release

When a rescued animal is ready to return to the wild, rehabbers must decide where to release it. The search for a good location begins long before an animal is ready for release. Rehabbers find a location that has plenty of food, water, and shelter. They also make sure that the location is safe from human contact.

Rehabbers must make sure the animal is healthy enough before it is released. They make sure that it can run, climb, or fly easily. They also make sure the animal is able to see, hear, find food, stay away from predators, and be with other animals of its own kind.

The first step in releasing an animal is moving it to an outdoor pen or cage with other animals of the same kind. Once outdoors, the animal can get used to the weather and have less contact with humans. After some time outdoors at the rehabilitation center, the animal is ready to be released.

Some animals, especially orphans, are released slowly. A pen is put in a safe place in the wild with the door left open. Rehabbers provide food for the animal until it is certain that the animal can find food for itself. Fast release is often used with wilder animals rescued as adults. They are taken to a release location, ideally near where they were found, and let go.
About half of the animals at rehabilitation centers are too sick or too badly injured to ever be released. Many animals have lost a limb, beak, wing, or eye. A bird with an injured wing that does not heal properly, or with only one eye, would not be able to fly or hunt in the wild.

When it is known that an animal will never survive in the wild or at a center, rehabbers have to make tough decisions. If the animal is in pain, euthanasia—quick, painless killing—is sometimes the best way to end an animal’s suffering.

Human activities are not the only way wildlife get injured. Natural disasters, such as wildfires and hurricanes, hurt animals, too. Terri Crisp spends all of her time rescuing animals that are in danger from disasters.

During a raging California wildfire in 1986, Terri rescued a Shetland pony by getting it into a car. She worked to save sea otters and loons during the Exxon-Valdez oil spill of 1989 in Alaska. In 1992, she worked to rescue hundreds of animals hurt by Hurricane Andrew. She started an organization called Noah’s Wish that trains volunteers to rescue animals in danger from disasters.
Incredibly, many wild animals knew to run inland before the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 hit land. However, pets and farm animals did not do so well. Many people in the areas hit by the tsunami depended on working farm animals. Many of these animals were killed, and many others were injured or left in places without food. The Humane Society International has worked with others to help the animals, and the people who care for them, get their lives back on track.

Conclusion

Rehabbers often use animals that cannot go back to the wild as ambassadors to help teach people to respect wildlife. Children and adults learn about wildlife that live in their area. They also learn about respecting the land so that wild animals can continue to find food and shelter.

Wildlife rehabbers do important work in caring for injured wild animals and returning many of them to the wild. We can help rehabbers’ efforts by respecting wildlife and by calling a rehabber if we see an animal in trouble. One phone call could give a wild animal the opportunity to grow up and live free.
Glossary

ambassadors  representatives for a country, species, or cause (p. 22)

fledgling  a young bird that is learning to fly (p. 11)

habitats  places in nature where a plant or animal lives and grows (p. 6)

imprint  identify with from an early age (p. 15)

incubator  an enclosure in which a baby animal is placed to keep it warm (p. 14)

nocturnal  active at night (p. 9)

orphaned  caused to have no parents (p. 4)

predators  animals that hunt and eat other animals (p. 9)

quarantined  isolated to prevent the spread of disease (p. 13)

rehabbers  people who work with sick or injured wildlife to bring them back to good health (p. 5)

urban  near a city or town (p. 7)

veterinarians  doctors who treat animals other than humans for diseases and illnesses (p. 13)

volunteers  people who offer help or perform a service without being paid (p. 8)

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Explore More

On the Internet use www.google.com to find out more about topics presented in this book. Use terms from the text, or try searching for glossary or index words. Some searches to try: wildlife rehabilitation, veterinarian, or Humane Society International.