



# **ESTABLISHMENT STANDARDS FOR WILDLIFE REHABILITATION**

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Helping animals through welfare science



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# INTRODUCTION

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In 1994, the RSPCA issued the original Standards for Wildlife Rehabilitation to its Inspectors. In the 15 years that have elapsed since then, wildlife rehabilitation in the UK has changed. In 1994, about half the animal rescues carried out by the RSPCA's own Inspectorate involve wildlife; in 2008 this was still the case with over 62,000 wild animals collected or rescued, but the methods for treating them are very different.

The Establishment Standards of Wildlife Rehabilitation have been prepared to complement the Wildlife Rehabilitation Establishments form. It provides advice and guidance so that the owners and/or managers of establishments used by the RSPCA can complete the form in their own time. This then ensures that the Society has a complete and up-to-date record of the establishment and the facilities available.

Sick, injured or orphaned wildlife demand careful and skilled attention if they are ever to be rehabilitated back to the wild. When a wild animal in need of treatment is held by the RSPCA, it is important that it receives the best possible care. The RSPCA's own Wildlife Centres are developing species-based protocols using their experience and the results of research they have completed. These protocols are now available to other RSPCA establishments and we aim to make them available to external rehabilitators in due course - should they wish to take them on board.

It should be emphasised that in the Society's view, most of these Standards, with the possible exception of some of the facilities needed for specialist species, can be met with relatively modest, low-cost facilities and equipment. This does require that the facilities are operated in conjunction with high quality animal management systems based on a good understanding of the needs of wild animal species. Good husbandry and management are the key to successful treatment, and to provide the best care and treatment for wildlife casualties, there needs to be advances in techniques, practices and facilities. This is particularly important in light of changes in legislation with the advent of the new Animal Welfare Act 2006.

It goes without saying that any new developments should, where at all possible, comply with these Standards. Additionally, where improvements to existing centres are being implemented, the Standards may assist in an improved overall design. Even where facilities are not due for structural development careful consideration of the Standards may, with even a slight change in a practice, help to improve the welfare of the wild animals in care and improve their chances of survival following release.

We would hope that anyone handling wildlife would accept that these are general standards, and implement them as far as they are able. The RSPCA species protocols provide detail as to the husbandry and management of each species. Consideration of the special needs of wild, as opposed to domesticated animals can make all the difference between success or failure in their rehabilitation and eventual return to the wild.

Please read these Standards which have been compiled with the help of many people within and outside the RSPCA, including the Society's Inspectorate, veterinary surgeons, wildlife experts and rehabilitators.

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# ESTABLISHMENT STANDARDS FOR WILDLIFE REHABILITATION

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## 1. ESTABLISHMENT DETAILS

Please complete the establishment's address (with postcode) and contact numbers here. For the emergency telephone number, please give a number that can be used to contact a member of staff/volunteer out of hours, if you are happy for us to do this. Please inform us if these details change at any time.

## 2. CONTACT DETAILS

Please provide details of the main contact at the establishment, noting if you are the owner or manager. An email address would be advantageous to us for contacting you in the future. Please inform us if these details change at any time, by contacting us at [wildlife@rspca.org.uk](mailto:wildlife@rspca.org.uk) or by post to Wildlife Dept, RSPCA HQ, Wilberforce Way, Southwater, West Sussex, RH13 9RS.

## 3. RSPCA POLICIES

### Provision for animal welfare

These standards are a guide for the owners and managers of a wildlife centre that might be used by the RSPCA for the treatment and boarding of casualty wild animals. They are designed to complement the Wildlife Rehabilitation Establishments form. When considering an establishment for use, the RSPCA will look to see if all aspects of care and treatment, in terms of the provisions of the Animal Welfare Act (2006), are met. These provisions relate to the animal(s) needs, namely;

- a) *need for a suitable environment;*
- b) *need for a suitable diet;*
- c) *need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns;*
- d) *need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals;*
- e) *need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.*

These guidelines have been written with these provisions in mind and the relevant provisions are marked at the end of each paragraph, e.g. (a, e).

### RSPCA policy on euthanasia of wildlife casualties

#### 9.8 Euthanasia

Where wild animals have to be euthanased, either because they are unable to survive in the wild or because their suffering is severe and not readily treatable, this should be done according to current RSPCA guidelines. Noise and human proximity usually cause fear in wild animals. As a general principle, therefore, the handling of wild animals should be kept to an absolute minimum.

*Taken from the RSPCA Policies on Animal Welfare, 2006.*

All centres used by the RSPCA to care for and rehabilitate wild animals will be asked to adhere to this policy (e).

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Animals that are unlikely to be released or those who will have, as judged by a veterinary surgeon (or other person responsible for that animal), an unacceptable quality of life after treatment, must be humanely destroyed without excessive delay to avoid prolonging suffering. Exceptions to this principle may occasionally arise<sup>1</sup> (e).

Humane destruction must be carried out using methods acceptable to the RSPCA, by a vet or other suitably competent and authorised person (e).

RSPCA policy on wildlife rehabilitation:

9.9 Wildlife Rehabilitation

The RSPCA believes that in most instances wild animals should only be held and treated in hospitals and rescue centres where it is believed that there is a good chance that they will be successfully rehabilitated back into the wild. Where an animal is expected not to survive, or to remain permanently disabled or otherwise unfit for life in the wild, then it should be euthanased as soon as possible to avoid further suffering. Exceptions to this policy may be considered where the quality of life of the animal in a captive or semi-captive environment can be assured.

The remedial treatment of wild animals should involve as little stress as possible; it should be borne in mind that contact with humans is itself distressing for most untamed wild animals. Transport and treatment should therefore seek to minimise pain and distress to conscious animals, and techniques of general tranquillisation, analgesia and anaesthesia should be applied wherever possible. Distressing sensory stimulation through noise, sight, smell or touch should be kept to a minimum.

The RSPCA believes that casualty wild animals should only be treated by those operating to acceptable standards of treatment and care, and would welcome the introduction of an independent licensing scheme to ensure that proper standards are applied at all wildlife treatment centres.

The Society supports the alleviation of the suffering of wild animals even when such suffering is caused naturally, except where this will create greater suffering.

*Taken from the RSPCA Policies on Animal Welfare, 2006.*

All centres used by the RSPCA to care for and rehabilitate wild animals will be asked to adhere to this policy (e).

The ultimate aim of your rehabilitation centre must be to release casualties back to the wild; if this is not possible you should take action to prevent further suffering and this must be a priority. The casualty's potential for release and survival in the wild must be assessed at the earliest opportunity (b, c).

All animals must be given the opportunity to express normal behaviour in preparation for their release. Environmental enrichment is recognised as an important tool in achieving this goal, i.e. providing suitable substrates and hiding food so animals can forage, rather than eating from a bowl. (c, d).

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<sup>1</sup> The RSPCA accepts that many bat care workers will keep non-releasable bats in captivity for education purposes. Although the RSPCA does not agree with this practice, it accepts that such animals may have a role to play and would wish to view any accommodation where permanent captives are held as part of its establishment visit.

#### 4. ESTABLISHMENT POLICIES

##### General principles

Where possible, you should not use a wildlife rehabilitation facility to board or house domestic animals. Wild animals will be stressed while in captivity and this stress is increased by the presence of domestic animals such as dogs and cats (a, d, e).

If you are looking to develop or redevelop any wildlife facility, you must review your current working conditions and ask yourself the following:

- do you wish to provide first aid and treatment or provide for long-term rehabilitation as well, as the facilities required differ for the two activities;
- do you have the necessary skills amongst their staff to ensure the proper care for the animals admitted;
- do you have adequate space for the facilities required;
- do you have the necessary funds to set up such an establishment with adequate facilities;
- do you have the necessary planning consents etc.

Wildlife casualties that are to be released should not be on display to the general public. When the public are admitted (on occasions such as open days and other fundraising events) people should be guided away from sensitive areas and animals undergoing rehabilitation must not be handled (a, e). Note that if you are open to the public for more than 7 days a year you may need a zoo licence.

Particular note must be taken of the overall security of the centre and if vulnerable or valuable species are kept then secure facilities may have to be installed (a).

##### Record keeping

You should use a recognised method of recording all admissions and this should be available for scrutiny. All recorded data should be kept in a way that allows information to be retrieved quickly and we would recommend a computerised system be used. If you are charging the RSPCA for rehabilitating wild animals, a report summarising what happened to each animal should be submitted along with any invoices.

Any database should record the following as a minimum (Table 1). However, we would encourage you to collect more information such as; reason for admission; age (adult, juvenile, etc.); sex (where known); site found; finder; identification marks (including ring, tattoo, collar, etc.); treatment; site of release; post release monitoring; post release recovery; and cause of death if known as this can help improve our understanding of rehabilitating wildlife. Centres are also encouraged to submit their records to the British Wildlife Rehabilitation Council (BWRC).

Table 1. Minimum details required (see Appendix IV).

Species	Incident no.	Arrival date	Result			
			Date	Pts	died	Released*

A record of each animal's progress should be maintained. This should identify where the animal was kept (a system is required to identify the enclosures), what treatment it has received and how its recovery had progressed. This should be readily available to anybody working at the establishment. (e). Where possible the cause of death should be established and recorded and any casualty dying in questionable circumstances should be the subject of a veterinary *post mortem*.

### Responsibilities under the Animal Welfare Act

Liability for a welfare offence under the Animal Welfare Act will attach to the person or people responsible for the care of the animal. Depending on the circumstances, this could include staff members responsible for animal care and those in charge of management or administration of the centre. Taking the following steps would seem likely to help rehabilitators avoid liability:

- adopting standards for the care of different kinds of animals and following good practice guidelines;
- using care plans for all animals that come into the establishment and receiving veterinary advice on these where appropriate;
- keeping records of standards, good practice guidelines, care plans and veterinary advice and treatment received;
- keep records and, if required, provide reports regarding the welfare of animals in the care of the rehabilitator.

### Staff

The operation of the centre must be under the direction of an appropriately trained (see Training) and/or experienced person (a-e). They must ensure that there are enough trained members of staff and volunteers to provide adequate care for the animals in care.

Staff and volunteers must comply with any health and safety requirements that are operating at the centre and be aware of any emergency procedures, e.g. fire (a-e). (*There are legal requirements that cover all health and safety matters.*)

Staff and volunteers must have adequate knowledge of the procedures in place in the event of an animal escaping. Particular note should be made in the event of the escape of a hazardous animal (a-e).

### Training

As manager of a rehabilitation centre, we would expect you to offer your staff and volunteers the opportunity to attend any recognised courses, training schemes or conferences which will help them develop their skills and knowledge. Schemes, such as the Government sponsored National Vocational Qualifications in Animal Care are to be recommended. It should also be noted that many animal care courses and veterinary nursing qualifications now include modules on wildlife rehabilitation which have been prepared in conjunction with the BWRC.

You are encouraged to join the BWRC's mailing list so you can receive the quarterly newsletter, *The Rehabilitator*. Previous editions can also be found at <http://www.bwrc.org.uk/>. A library should also be available at the centre which staff and/or volunteers can use for animal identification or to learn more about ecology, behaviour, treatment, etc. The BWRC also runs workshops and conferences in wildlife care and rehabilitation. These events allow rehabilitators to learn about new techniques or research that is relevant to them and to meet with other rehabilitators from around the country. We would recommend that you, or someone from your centre, attend.

The International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council also holds courses and conferences in the US. Some courses are also available on-line. More information can be found at <http://www.iwrc-online.org/>

You and your staff are also encouraged to attend courses on other aspects of wildlife, such as those held by the Field Studies Council (<http://www.field-studies-council.org/>) or The Mammal Society (<http://www.mammal.org/>).



### Legislation

A summary of the legislation relevant to wildlife rehabilitation is listed in Appendix II. This is just a brief summary. We expect all rehabilitators to be aware of the legislation pertinent to wildlife rehabilitation – the RSPCA is willing to advise where necessary.

Some aspects of wildlife rehabilitation require you to have a licence. For instance, you need a licence to keep grey squirrels (under the Destructive Animals Import Act 1932 and subsequent orders) and a licence to release them as well (under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981). Such licences can be general licences, such as WML GL30, licence to release certain Schedule 9 species (barn owl and white tailed eagle) or WML GL09 and WML GL10, licence to keep certain wild birds for the purposes of rehabilitation. More information is available from (*see Appendix II*)

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/conservation/wildlife-management/licensing/genlicences.htm>

The RSPCA will not condone any illegal activity. This includes, for instance, the release of any individual animal of a species as defined by Section 14 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) (e.g. grey squirrel), unless it is under licence issued by Natural England or similar.

### Good practice

The duty to ensure an animal's needs are met requires rehabilitators to achieve the standard of "good practice". The Animal Welfare Act (2006) does not define what represents good practice, as this may be subjective. Until court cases shed light on its meaning, it would seem advisable to:

- Assume that "good practice" is the standard that the majority of people with expertise in the relevant area would consider to be the appropriate level of care. The standard is likely to change as expert knowledge develops.
- Produce good practice guidelines to cover all areas of the rehabilitators' operations, practical and administrative. One example is the guidelines produced for badgers by the RSPCA, The Badger's Trust and Secret World Wildlife Rescue. Such guidelines should be compiled from existing evidence in the public domain and good quality data on rehabilitation success collected by the rehabilitators. Rehabilitators should have written standards of how they keep different species, as achieving or surpassing such standards could help show that a rehabilitator has met the legal standard required.
- Take into account any codes of practice which DEFRA issues under the Act. DEFRA intends to produce a codes of practice for the care of particular kinds of animals. Organisations such as the BWRC will be involved in any consultations that take place. These codes may provide practical guidance relating to the welfare offence. Failure to comply with a code will not constitute an offence but could be used as evidence to establish liability for the offence, whereas compliance with the code could be relied on as tending to negate liability for the offence.

## **5. WILDLIFE SPECIES**

This section is for you to tell us which species you are willing to treat or hold at your centre. This can either be for full treatment and rehabilitation through to release or for holding until we can transfer the animal to a suitable facility for long-term care. If you can only provide facilities for holding some species (for up to 48 hours), please tick the box.

As already stated, you will require a licence from Natural England or Countryside Council for Wales to release or keep some species (e.g. grey squirrel, muntjac, Canada goose), so please tick the boxes if you have the appropriate licences.

You should clearly define the scope of your centre in terms of numbers and species of animal the centre can accommodate, and this must not be exceeded. Therefore please complete this part of the form accordingly.

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The range of species and numbers of animals that can be handled by a centre will depend on the facilities, staffing levels and expertise available. Each enclosure will have a limit as to the numbers of animals it can hold and this will limit the numbers of animals you can hold at the centre. Particular consideration should be given to times when you are very busy as the standard of care given to each animal could be affected. (a-e).

RSPCA staff bringing animals to the establishment should not try and encourage the staff at the establishment to take “just one more”, nor should your staff be tempted to do so. Rehabilitators should:

- review their capacity and availability of resources for seasonal peaks of animals being received into the establishment;
- plan for emergencies such as unexpectedly large numbers of animals requiring care, or staff shortages.

### Oiled seabirds

If you intend to clean oiled seabirds at the centre then the minimum requirements listed in the RSPCA’s Oiled Guillemot Protocol must be applied. This should be a separate facility apart from the main establishment and you must be aware that there are strict regulations regarding the disposal of contaminated water, etc. A copy of the protocol is available from the RSPCA’s Wildlife Department.

### Orphans

Taking in orphans is regarded as the last resort and careful consideration must be given to all the possible alternatives such as returning them to the place they were found, e.g. foxes (Robertson and Harris 1995). (*See Appendix 1*) They should only be handled when required for feeding, cleaning, etc., as prolonged handling will make them accustomed to people and so not suitable for release. They should not be handled by members of the public or other visitors.

## **6. COLLECTIONS**

This section allows you to tell us if you are willing to:

- take animals from RSPCA staff only;
- take animals from RSPCA and members of the public;
- collect animals on our behalf.

If you are willing to receive or collect animals from members of the public, then please provide us with a contact number that you are happy for us to give to members of the public, when required. You can confirm that you are willing for us to do this when you sign the declaration (section 10 and 11).

If you are willing to collect animals, then please let us know the area you are prepared to collect them from. As our system uses postcodes, then this is the best way to tell us; otherwise please state town(s) or county(ies).

## **7. VETERINARY SURGEON**

You must have an arrangement for a veterinary surgeon to visit your establishment on a regular basis. All visits must be recorded on the animals’ notes (e). Please record the details of your veterinary surgeon/practice here and, if possible, provide details of their experience with wildlife.

### First aid/treatment

The involvement of a veterinary surgeon that is both keen and knowledgeable in the treatment of wild

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animal casualties is essential and is encouraged. The close relationship between the vet, the rehabilitator and staff at the centre will obviously benefit the animals in the long run (e).

All lay persons dealing with wildlife casualties should be instructed in the techniques likely to be used to stabilise a patient. First aid techniques should "do no harm" and promote the rapid recovery of the patient (e). There are many publications relating to the care of sick orphaned and injured animals and for selected references see the list in *Appendix III*. Any subsequent treatment should be undertaken under the advice of a veterinary surgeon. Invasive or surgical procedures can only be undertaken by, or under the direct supervision of a veterinary surgeon (e).

A responsible member of staff with the appropriate experience and qualifications must check every animal at regular intervals and any animal that needs attention must receive it promptly (e).

## **8. FACILITIES**

### Animal reception/examination

New arrivals should be examined in a secure and quiet area away from other patients and the public, so a reception and/or examination area should be provided. This area must be secure to prevent the animal from escaping.

Specific attention should be paid to the potential of diseases and parasites that may arrive with sick and casualty animals. A recognised routine for the control of such organisms should be agreed with your veterinary surgeon (a, e).

### Veterinary facilities

In order for your vet to perform their duties at your establishment, you should provide: an examination table, a range of surgical instruments, anaesthetic facilities, and basic diagnostic instruments. Sufficient power points to take additional lights or other electrical equipment should be available along with a comprehensive range of drugs (e). A quiet area where animals can recover from any effects of sedation should be provided (e). *It should be noted that anybody using the centre's veterinary facility to its full capacity is subject to the provisions of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, Medicines Act 1968, and any other relevant legislation.*

If you keep a supply of drugs, vaccines or other veterinary products they must be kept under lock and key with access by authorised persons only. Complete and up to date records of all drugs must be kept and their use must be recorded (e).

If you cannot provide a full veterinary facility, a clean, ventilated treatment room or secure area should be provided for routine examination of animals along with a quiet area where animals can recover from any effects of sedation (e). A quarantine area should also be provided to keep new admissions away from the other casualties. This area can also hold particularly sick or distressed animal(s), but any such area must be separately ventilated (e).

### Design, positioning and maintenance of rehabilitation facilities

All animals must be provided with adequate space and enrichment to promote the best possible recovery. Enclosures should be designed, positioned and maintained so as to prevent distress or discomfort to the animals for which they are intended. You should be aware of current improvements in design and these should be incorporated in enclosure construction and renovation (a).

Each enclosure should clearly marked (e.g. numbered) and must also be designed in consideration of the different phases as outlined in *Appendix I*.

Each enclosure should allow the natural behaviour patterns of the animals to be expressed and developed without undue competition, although it is accepted that this will be subject to management

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and clinical requirements (a, c). Consideration should also be given for the need to catch the animal for veterinary inspection and release. Environmental enrichment, such as using natural substrates on the floors of the enclosures, the use of branches, plantings, screens, logs, rocks, etc. to provide perches, hiding places and so on, will promote natural behaviours in most species (a, c). It is also recommended that you do not rely on food bowls but that you allow the animals to forage by spreading or hiding food within the enclosure.

A balance needs to be achieved between the animal's clinical needs and mental well-being (a,e) and so when providing environmental enrichment, efforts must be made to limit the spread of pathogens, parasites and pests in the enclosures.

Enclosures must be adequately spaced and screened from any stressful influences which may affect the animals' recovery, rehabilitation, release and its successful integration into its native environment, including (a,e):

- domestic animals;
- predatory animals;
- humans;
- machinery;
- pollution.

There should be enclosures available meeting all the above criteria for animals that:

- need to be kept separate from other animals;
- need to be kept together with sufficient space for all the individuals especially with regard to shelter and roosting/resting sites (a, d).

It must be remembered that wild animals have different senses to humans so providing screens to prevent animals seeing each other is pointless if the animals can still smell or hear each other (a, e).

All external enclosures must have sufficient shelter to enable the animals to avoid extremes of weather, e.g. rain, sun, wind, snow, etc. should they choose to do so. The enclosures must be kept in a good state of repair. Any defect likely to cause harm to the occupants or allow them to escape must be rectified immediately. Certain materials are also known to be toxic and these must not be used in the construction of enclosures.

#### Additional requirements for indoor enclosures

*The following must be read in conjunction with the paragraphs above.*

All animal areas must be totally separate from any human living space and staff rest areas. Wild animals undergoing rehabilitation should not be kept within a human living space and domestic pets should not be allowed to mix with wild animals undergoing rehabilitation.

All indoor enclosures must be suitable for the species of wild animal that are to be kept in them; this includes ventilation and lighting. All animal areas must be maintained at a temperature, and where necessary, humidity suitable for the animals in care. Day and night-time cycles should be maintained and, where possible, animals should be given a choice by providing dark refuges (e.g. kennels, roost boxes) during hours of daylight. Note that some species of animal may be affected by the flickering of fluorescent lighting (a, e).

#### Hygiene controls

You should have a policy for the control of disease and pest species and for preventing further outbreaks. Care must be taken to prevent cross infection between casualties. This may require that

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clean gloves and utensils be used for each casualty and that footbaths or similar be provided between enclosures.

All inside enclosures must be constructed so as to facilitate easy cleaning, in order to control pathogens and parasites. All cleaning must be undertaken on a regular basis. Proper standards of hygiene both in respect of personal hygiene and that of the enclosures, kitchens, treatment rooms, etc, must be maintained especially:

- attention to be given to animal enclosures to avoid the build up of pathogens including, in the case of aquatic animals, the regular monitoring of water quality both indoors and out;
- non toxic cleaning agents should be used along with appropriate means to apply them;
- fresh water must be available for rinsing down;
- veterinary advice should be sought on all aspects of cleaning of enclosures or other areas;
- additional advice may be required following identification of an infectious disease in any animal.

The drainage of all enclosures should be capable of removing all excess water efficiently, subject to local water authorities or Environment Agency guidance and the refuse material must be regularly removed and disposed of. *(The disposal of waste may be subject to a variety of legislative controls. Advice may be sought from the Environment Agency or the Environmental Department of the local authority) (e).*

Smoking by staff within the centre must be prohibited. Special areas can be provided for smokers (e).

#### Provision and storage of suitable food and drink

Food and drink must be suitable for the species concerned and for each individual animal. The condition, size and age of each animal must be borne in mind as well as the need to allow for special circumstances (e.g. fast days, hibernation, etc.) and special diets for certain animals (e.g. animals undergoing a course of veterinary treatment, or pregnant animals) (b). Where necessary, obtain veterinary or other specialist advice regarding the diet of a particular species or individual (b). *(See Appendix I, paragraph 6)*

Environmental enrichment is important to consider when feeding captive wild animals. Where possible, animals should be presented with choice and a diet similar to that which it would eat in the wild. Animals should also have opportunities to forage; remember that wild animals do not feed from bowls, nor do they take food from tweezers (b).

All food and drink receptacles must be thoroughly cleaned at least daily and sterilised where and when appropriate. Supplies of food and drink must be stored under hygienic conditions and in particular:

- food and drink must be protected against dampness, deterioration, mould or from contamination by flies, birds, rodents or other animals (b, e);
- supplies of perishable food and drink, other than those brought into the premises on a day-to-day basis, to be stored under refrigeration, where appropriate (b, e);
- receptacles and utensils used for animal food must not be used for any other purpose (e).

All food should be prepared in a hygienic kitchen facility in an area separate from the main animal housing areas and should not be used for human food preparation. The kitchen must be of a size compatible to the size of the centre and the number of animals likely to be held.

## 9. RELEASE OF REHABILITATED WILDLIFE

You should only be releasing animals that can be released under current legislation and that are healthy, fully fit and able to sustain themselves once free. *Failure to comply with this may constitute an offence under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, or the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 (as amended).*

If an animal has become dependent on you and is unable to fend for itself in the wild, then releasing that animal is likely to be a welfare offence. (It might also be a cruelty offence if the animal suffers unnecessarily as a result.) A rehabilitation programme that gradually re-accustoms such animals to the wild is necessary. For the majority of that programme you will remain responsible for the animal and should put out food and water for as long as it is necessary. Only when the animal is free to roam at will and not dependent on food or water provided at the release pen will your obligations cease.

For the majority of species, adult animals must be released in the area from which they came and into their own territory. You should not release an animal into a new area even if you think the area where the animal was found is unsuitable. However, for juvenile animals it is often necessary to find a new release site away from where the animals were found.

Release sites must be selected with care. Where practicable, all releases must be undertaken with the consent of the landowner. There may also be occasions when they will be asked to co-operate in some way, such as feeding the animal at the release site. Care should be taken that the release site is not protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, because the release of even a native species onto such a site may constitute an offence. Such areas include Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) or Areas of Special Protection (ASPs).

The site for release must be suitable for the species concerned. Particular attention must be paid to the following:

- suitability of habitat;
- habitat carrying capacity;
- territories already established in the habitat;
- food availability;
- man-made hazards, e.g. roads, pest control operations, power cables, oil spillage, hunting, etc.

Weather conditions must be appropriate for the particular animal and type of release proposed; generally, no animal should be released in heavy snow or rain, high wind, or extended wet, dry, hot or cold periods or if such conditions are imminent.

### Post-release monitoring

The RSPCA encourages, where possible, the marking of rehabilitated animals on their release so that information can be obtained as to their survival. However this is subject to the appropriate licensing, e.g. badgers can only be tattooed under a licence from Natural England or CCW. However, the Society accepts that there may be restrictions due to the numbers of animals and the cost of some marking and tagging equipment.

RSPCA Wildlife Centres are engaged in research to monitor the survival of rehabilitated wild animals after release. Other RSPCA centres and independent rehabilitators should be encouraged to consider doing likewise. Advice on the techniques of methods available can be obtained from the RSPCA Wildlife Department. The Society aims to publish the results of this research in scientific journals – some are already available (see reading list). Copies of these papers can be provided on application to RSPCA Wildlife Department.

**10. DECLARATION**

This section effectively replaces the old boarding agreement by providing a number of clauses for which we would like your agreement. Please tick the boxes and sign at the bottom. By signing, you agree to work according to the policies set down by the RSPCA in this document.

Statements 1-3 relate to the RSPCA's monitoring of the establishments we use and so we keep a database of those establishments. It is important for us that the information you provide us is accurate and up-to-date, so we ask you to confirm that the details are accurate and to inform of us of any changes that may occur.

Statements 4 and 5 relate to the RSPCA's approval process. Your establishments will only be used by the RSPCA once it has been visited and approved by one of our Wildlife Officers. We would also like your agreement that we can enter your premises if we have received a complaint about an animal in your care.

For statement 6 we are asking you to volunteer any information about any convictions you or your staff may have had under animal welfare or conservation legislation. Any convictions will not necessarily prevent your establishment from being approved.

We regret to say that, at present, we cannot permit the use of the RSPCA logo or any reference to the RSPCA in any promotional literature.

**11. DATA PROTECTION**

This section is for you to sign the form and so give us consent (or not) to give your details to members of the public if they should require these details to report an animal in distress.





## **GUIDELINES FOR ACCOMMODATION AND KEEPING**

### **GENERAL GUIDELINES**

1. The accommodation of a casualty may require 3 distinct phases:
  - i) Intensive care, where the animal needs regular and possibly frequent close attention and a controlled environment.
    - a) Essential requirements are warmth, darkness, quiet, privacy, and cleanliness.
    - b) Housing for individual animals or groups of animals should have independent control of temperature, light, ventilation, and drainage. Note that proper control of temperature and ventilation also requires good insulation.
    - c) Enclosures should allow animals to be visually separated where necessary, but should provide for observation by staff without disturbance.
    - d) A food preparation and storage area within intensive care and separate from the rest of the facility is desirable.
    - e) A quarantine space, that can be totally isolated from the remainder of the intensive care area, may be desirable.
    - f) Bedding should be regularly changed to maintain good hygiene. Bedding should be either of disposable material such as paper, or easily disinfected if it is to be reused. Hay and straw are not recommended, as they can be sources of serious infection. Towels may be suitable for some species: calf-matting, astroturf or plain concrete for others, depending on species and circumstances.
  - ii) Intermediate care, where some, but lesser attention is required and environmental variables are less critical.
    - a) Intermediate caging should be spacious enough to allow exercise, but not so large as to make observation, handling or catching of the animals difficult.
  - iii) Rehabilitation, where human attention should be minimised and environmental conditions are approximate to those found in the wild.
    - a) Rehabilitation accommodation should offer as much space for exercise as possible, in surroundings similar to the natural environment.
    - b) Shelter from rain and wind should be provided, but the animals should also have access to areas exposed to the weather.

- c) Furnishings and equipment appropriate to the species should be provided, particularly in the rehabilitation phase, where behavioural as well as physical needs are important.
2. The vast majority of injured or sick animals will only require intensive care facilities as described above before being released. This is on the assumption that such care is short term only and, that during such care, the animal's behaviour will be restricted due to its treatment regime.
3. To accommodate a wide variety of species, accommodation in each phase, especially in intensive care, should be flexible in design.
4. Good hygiene is important in all stages of treatment, and is imperative in intensive care. Accommodation should be designed to allow maintenance of the best hygiene standards. Disposable or "knock-down" accommodation may be appropriate for many species.

### **ORPHANS**

5. Taking any orphaned animal into care should be regarded as a last resort. In many cases, and for most species, a young animal which is apparently orphaned or abandoned by its parents has a higher probability of survival if left where it is found. Possible options include, leaving the animal alone, and/or providing some form of in-situ care such as supplementary feeding. Other options may be available and should be carefully considered (*see, for example, reference list at Appendix III*). It is normally only orphaned animals that will go through all three phases of care.

### **CARE AND FEEDING**

6.
  - a) Veterinary care and support is essential to provide for the physical needs of casualties. First Aid to stabilise the condition of a casualty may be undertaken by an experienced rehabilitator, but further treatment requires veterinary advice. (*See Appendix II, Legislation*)
  - b) A good knowledge of the behaviour and ecology of the species in care is necessary to develop proper rehabilitation and release programmes. (*See Appendix III, reference list*)
  - c) Care must be taken during the more intensive phases of treatment to avoid imprinting or habituation of the animal to humans. Rehabilitation programmes must remove any tameness that may have resulted from earlier intensive care and develop or re-establish the animal's natural behaviour patterns. It should also provide a wide range of natural experiences for naive animals.
  - d) Food should be of high quality, and appropriate to the species. An appropriate balance of carbohydrate, fat, protein fibre, minerals and vitamins should be provided, together with ample clean water. For some species water may also be important for bathing or other activities.

## LEGISLATION AFFECTING WILDLIFE REHABILITATION

*The purpose of this document is to highlight those areas where transgression of the law may occur. This is not produced as the definitive guide to law but simply as a quick reference to common areas of concern. If you are particularly concerned about a specific piece of legislation, you are advised to seek further legal advice and/or obtain the statute from Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Most pieces of legislation can be found at <http://www.statutelaw.gov.uk/>*

*It should also be noted that England and Wales may develop variations on specific pieces of legislation, so it is worth checking with Defra or the Welsh Assembly. Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own legislation, which is not discussed here.*

### **ANIMAL WELFARE LEGISLATION**

#### ANIMAL WELFARE ACT 2006

The welfare offence is as follows: “A person commits an offence if he does not take such steps as are reasonable in all the circumstances to ensure that the needs of an animal for which he is responsible are met to the extent required by good practice.” (Section 9, Animal Welfare Act)

Rehabilitators must take reasonable steps to ensure that the needs of animals in their care are met in accordance with good practice. Unlike the offence of causing cruelty (“unnecessary suffering”), an animal does not need to have suffered for the welfare offence to arise.

The Act lists some of the needs of an animal to be:

- its need for a suitable environment;
- its need for a suitable diet;
- its need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns;
- any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals;
- its need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease;

More information can be found in an RSPCA booklet available at:

<http://www.rspca.org.uk/servlet/ContentServer?pagename=RSPCA/RSPCARedirect&pg=WildlifeReportsandResources>

#### VETERINARY SURGEONS ACT 1966 (AS AMENDED)

#### PROTECTION OF ANIMALS (ANAESTHETICS) ACTS 1954 & 1964

#### THE WELFARE OF ANIMALS DURING TRANSPORT ORDER 2006

The 2006 Order must be read along with Council Regulation (EC) 1/2005 [http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2005/l\\_003/l\\_00320050105en00010044.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2005/l_003/l_00320050105en00010044.pdf).

- that the receptacle is suitable for the species contained therein;
- that there is means of inspection;
- that the animal can stand in its natural position, turn around and lie down;
- that there is suitable ventilation and litter (bedding)
- that the animals are fed and watered at suitable intervals according to species.
- no animal should be transported within sight of a natural predator.

These conditions apply to healthy wild animals in transit.

## **WILDLIFE LEGISLATION**

### WILDLIFE AND COUNTRYSIDE ACT 1981 (AS AMENDED)

The Wildlife and Countryside Act is the definitive legislation that protects most wildlife and habitats in this country and as such it is a bulky and complicated document with many amendments. The following points are of particular concern to people responsible for the care of wild animals in captivity. Unlike much British legislation, the onus of proof is often placed upon a defendant to ‘show the court that’ the offender’s action was ‘otherwise than in contravention of the Act’ (Offences of strict liability). In simple terms, there are instances where an accused person has to prove their innocence in the light of evidence against them put before the court. This goes one step further than the ‘innocent until proved guilty’ rule.

Section 1 protects all wild birds defined in Section 27 of the Act as “*any bird of a species which is ordinarily resident in or is a visitor to the European territory of any member State in a wild state but does not include poultry, or, except in sections 5 and 16, any game bird*”. Subject to certain exceptions, (e.g. Section 4 subsections 2a and 2b) it is an offence to kill, injure or take or attempt to kill, injure or take any wild bird. Section 2 provides exceptions such as seasons for shooting waterfowl. Section 4 contains more exceptions, and these are important to know. The rehabilitator is allowed to take a wild bird under the following exception:

*Section 4 (2): notwithstanding anything in the provisions of section 1 or any order made under section 3, a person shall not be guilty of an offence by reason of -:*

- (a) the taking of any wild bird if he shows that the bird had been disabled otherwise than by his unlawful act and was taken solely for the purpose of tending it and releasing it when no longer disabled;*
- (b) the killing of any wild bird if he shows that the bird had been so seriously disabled otherwise than by his own lawful act that there was no reasonable chance of its recovering.*

It should therefore be noted that an incident where, for example, a pair of swans has been removed from a lake due to injury to one of them would create two individual offences. The removal of the injured swan is defensible under the defence given above but the removal of the healthy swan creates a Section 1 offence under the Act. It is a general rule that treating any sick or injured wild animal with a view to releasing it at a later date is a defence in law.

Section 7 relates to the registration of certain wild birds, especially birds of prey. Any bird which appears in Schedule 4 of the Act, which includes many raptors, can only be kept if the birds are ringed, or otherwise marked, and registered with the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) at Bristol. However, there are two general licences WML GL09 and GL10 (available from Natural England <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/regulation/wildlife/licences/generallicences.aspx>); WML GL09 allows certain individuals to keep Schedule 4 birds for 15 days for rehabilitation purposes, without the need to register the bird. WML GL10 allows vets to keep Schedule 4 birds without registration for up to six weeks, while under their care. Any raptors bred in captivity, with the exception of owls, have to be ringed and registered in the same manner.

Section 8 of the Act provides protection for certain captive birds. Every caged bird, with the exception of poultry, must be able to spread its wings throughout the length, breadth and height of that cage. A bird can only be kept in a cage smaller than this if it is being shown at a public exhibition, being transported, is being trained for showing in a show cage for any period up to one hour in 24, or if it is receiving treatment from a veterinary surgeon. Experience shows that a court considers that a veterinary surgeon has to see and diagnose the condition of each individual bird under these circumstances. It is not sufficient for a veterinary surgeon to diagnose one bird and for the keeper to apply the same logic and treatment to any subsequent bird without the veterinary surgeon having seen it.

Section 9 confers protection to certain other animals. The list of protected animals is listed on Schedule 5 of the Act and includes species of invertebrate, amphibian, reptile and mammal, but is quite limited. Sections 10 details the exceptions to Section 9 and includes the following defence:

*Section 10 (3): notwithstanding anything in the provisions of section 1 or any order made under section 3, a person shall not be guilty of an offence be reason of -:*

- (a) *the taking of any such animal if he shows that the animal had been disabled otherwise than by his unlawful act and was taken solely for the purpose of tending it and releasing it when no longer disabled;*
- (b) *the killing of any such animal if he shows that the animal had been so seriously disabled otherwise than by his own lawful act that there was no reasonable chance of its recovering.*

It should be noted that some species have only partial protection (e.g. adders) while certain other species which were formally protected fully under this Act are now protected under the Habitats Regulations (e.g. otters, bats).

Particular attention must be paid to section 14 which prohibits the release of any animal which:

- (a) *is of a kind which is not ordinarily resident in and is not a regular visitor to Great Britain in a wild state; or*
- (b) *is included in Part 1 of Schedule 9.*

Schedule 9 lists animals that are established in the wild but by virtue of section 14 species may not be freed, or allowed to escape, from captivity. For example, if an injured Canada goose were taken into captivity and healed, it would be an offence to release that animal into the wild. However, Section 16 of the Act does allow for licence applications to release these species, and rehabilitation is one of the reasons for which release is permitted. However, this is always at the discretion of the relevant authority. It should also be noted that certain species on Schedule 9 also require a licence to keep them, under the Destructive Imported Animals Act 1932. For England licence application forms can be obtained from Natural England:

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/regulation/wildlife/default.aspx>

At present, licences are not available in Wales.

For up to date information on Schedule 9 animals, go to:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-pets/wildlife/management/non-native/documents/gov-response-schedule9%20.pdf>

## COUNTRYSIDE AND RIGHTS OF WAY ACT, 2000

## CONSERVATION OF HABITATS AND SPECIES REGULATIONS 2010 (HABITAT REGULATIONS)

These regulations enact European Directive 92/43/EEC. These replace the old Conservation (Natural Habitats) Regulations of 1994 and basically cover much the same ground as the Wildlife and Countryside Act, but a series of amendments in 2007 and 2009 now mean that there are some important differences to note. The changes caused by these amendments have prompted the Regulations to be rewritten, hence the new title of Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010.

These regulations protect European Protected Species (EPS). These are bats, otters, dormice, cetaceans and some others. The protection for these species has largely been removed from the W&C Act due to the protection conferred on them by these Regulations. These Regulations do permit rehabilitation, but if you should wish to keep an EPS in permanent captivity, or any part of an EPS after it has died, you will need a licence to do so. For example, if you wish to keep a dead bat for display, you need a licence.

Bats are also fully protected by this legislation and no bat roost may be interfered with in any place, other than the "*living area of a dwelling house*" (not including any cavity elsewhere in the building) other than

under the authority of a licence issued by the Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation, e.g. Natural England. The Regulations allow for possession and treatment of sick and injured bats but these animals must be released immediately they are fit. You will need a licence if you have bats that cannot be released and wish to keep them for education purposes. More information can be obtained from the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) [www.bats.org.uk](http://www.bats.org.uk)

#### CONSERVATION OF SEALS ACT 1970

#### DEER ACT 1991 (AS AMENDED)

#### PROTECTION OF BADGERS ACT 1992

Sick, injured or snared badgers, seals and deer may be taken for treatment, rehabilitation and release or humanely killed if necessary. If any attempt to kill a wild animal is made, all due care must be taken to ensure that this is a humane act. However, badger rehabilitation guidelines are available at <http://www.badger.org.uk/content/w-rehab.asp>

#### PROTECTION OF WILD MAMMALS ACT 1996

This Act provides some protection for all mammals, namely, by outlawing certain actions that are intended to cause pain and suffering to any wild mammal.

#### PESTS ACT 1954

This Act specifies conditions under which certain pest species can be controlled by specified methods including traps. The controls are strict and must be adhered to. If any person has in their possession a rabbit suffering from myxomatosis, and that rabbit is intentionally released into an uninfected warren, an offence is committed under the Act. This legislation also outlaws the use of any toothed spring trap (gin trap) and the Spring Traps Approval Order 1995 (as amended – see also variations), made under this Act, specifies types of legal traps and circumstances under which they can be used.

#### DESTRUCTIVE IMPORTED ANIMALS ACT 1932

Various Orders are made under this Act to control non-native animals living in this country. The Grey Squirrels Order 1937 creates an offence for keeping grey squirrels in captivity without a licence. The Coypu and Mink Order 1972 creates an offence for keeping these species without a licence. Such licences are obtained from Natural England or equivalent but it may be difficult to acquire such licences because the purpose of these Orders is to prevent further escapes of these species. The non-indigenous Rabbit Order 1954 also creates an offence of liberating non-indigenous rabbits.

#### CONTROL OF TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES (ENFORCEMENT) REGULATIONS 1997 (COTES)

These Regulations enact the Convention in Trade of Endangered Species (CITES) in UK legislation. Although unlikely to affect rehabilitators, it should be noted that permits are required to sell or display certain animals that are listed in the Appendices. Therefore you should be aware which species are listed and be aware of the legislation.

#### ZOO LICENSING ACT 1981

A zoo, as defined by the Zoos Licensing Act (1981), is an establishment where wild animals are kept for exhibition to the public other than for the purposes of a circus or pet shop. A wild animal is defined as an animal not normally domesticated in Great Britain. Any rehabilitator who allows members of the public to see wild animals in their establishment would qualify as a zoo.

A licence is required for any zoo to which members of the public have access, with or without charge for

admission, on seven days or more in any twelve-month period. Such a licence is obtainable from the Local Authority and any establishment will be subject to inspection by a member (or members) of the Secretary of State's Inspectorate. The Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 (as amended) states that if any animal scheduled under this Act is kept then a licence from the Local Authority is required. Therefore any rehabilitator that has the occasional open day would not require a licence, provided that they do not have more than six open days in one year. More information is available at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-pets/zoos/index.htm>

*While we have skimmed across the surface of this animal associated legislation, there are other laws on the Statute Books which have not been mentioned, so while this information will be of assistance to anyone handling wild animals, such people are urged to seek further advice if there is any misunderstanding or ambiguity with regard to the application of such laws. Sources of further information include your lawyer, the police, the RSPCA, the RSPB, Natural England, Countryside Commission for Wales (Scottish, and Northern Irish equivalents) and the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).*

*The RSPCA cannot be held responsible for any action that may arise from the wrongful interpretation of these brief notes.*

## APPENDIX III

**READING LIST**

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**NOTE: Inclusion in this list does not necessarily imply RSPCA endorsement of the publication.**



**Table 1. Minimum details required.**

Species	Incident No	Arrival Date	Result				Comments
			Date	Pts	Died	Released*	

\* Please give any additional release information in the Comments column, i.e. location, identification no.

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**NOTES**

