



Back to the Wild

Wildlife Treatment & Rehabilitation



Introduction

Sick, injured or orphaned wildlife require careful and skilled attention if they are to be rehabilitated and successfully reintegrated back to the wild. The RSPCA estimates that there are probably in excess of 700 establishments throughout England and Wales dealing with anything up to half a million wildlife casualties a year.

Most of these victims are, either directly or indirectly, the result of human activities. Many are injured in road accidents or wounded or trapped by fishing tackle or other rubbish; others may be poisoned, contaminated with oil, attacked by cats or dogs, injured by garden implements or deliberately shot or snared.

Treatment and Rehabilitation

- The ultimate aim of RSPCA wildlife centres is the rehabilitation of wild animals for release and successful integration back into the wild. Any wild animal brought in for treatment at an RSPCA wildlife centre is therefore given a careful examination by the Society's skilled staff to ascertain the type of treatment needed and to assess the animal's chances of recovery and subsequent survival in the wild.
- Sadly, where an animal is suffering from severe injury or illness; or unlikely to have a reasonable chance of survival in the wild; or will, in the opinion of the veterinary surgeon or other qualified staff, have an unacceptable quality of life during or after treatment; the decision will normally be made to put the animal to sleep to avoid prolonging suffering. There may be occasional exceptions, but in principle the RSPCA does not provide a permanent sanctuary for wild animals that cannot make a full recovery and return to the wild.
- All animals accepted for treatment are provided with an environment aimed at promoting the best possible recovery and minimising any unnecessary distress or discomfort. Careful attention is paid to diet and to the animals' need to exercise normal behaviour patterns. Human intervention is kept to a minimum to avoid over-familiarisation and consequently access to visitors is strictly controlled.



RSPCA Wildlife Centres

In 2014 in excess of 16,000 wild animals - anything from house sparrows to common seals - were treated by the RSPCA's four wildlife centres at West Hatch in Somerset, East Winch in Norfolk, Stapeley Grange in Cheshire and Mallydams Wood in East Sussex.

In these wildlife centres the RSPCA aims to promote best practice and pass on its experience to other rehabilitators nationwide.

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Release

Once the animal is judged to be healthy, fully fit and able to sustain itself in the wild, arrangements are made for its release ideally back to where it came from, or if not appropriate, at a carefully chosen site. The selection of a release site is determined, of course, by the species of animal but a number of other factors are carefully considered, such as the type of habitat, food availability, weather conditions and known man-made hazards which may affect survival, e.g. proximity to roads. The support of the landowner, and even the local community, is also important. Where possible, animals are marked on their release to enable their progress to be monitored. Data on the progress of animals released into the wild can provide valuable information to increase the chances of survival of other animals in the future.

Becoming a rehabilitator

A licence is not currently required to rehabilitate animals, but future legislation may change this. We would support legislation requiring all wildlife rehabilitation centres to be licensed as we have concerns about the current lack of regulation. Licences are required for some activities, such as the keeping and release of grey squirrels or certain birds of prey.

The **British Wildlife Rehabilitation Council (BWRC)** encourages rehabilitators to learn from each other with an annual conference and newsletter. Anyone rehabilitating wildlife should learn about the ecology or behaviour of the species first.

Rehabilitators must consider the needs of any animal they have in care, as defined in the **Animal Welfare Act 2006**, as well as ensuring they are following the relevant legislation. The RSPCA have put together a guide for rehabilitators that can be accessed and downloaded online.

Wildlife casualties are first and foremost wild animals

The more people understand about how they behave, where they live and what challenges they face, the better they will be able to care for them and prepare them for release.

To report an injured
or sick wild
animal to the RSPCA
please ring the
24-hour cruelty
and advice line on
0300 1234 999

