



Recruiting and Training New Wildlife Rehabilitators

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Many rehabilitators are directly or indirectly involved with recruiting and training new rehabilitators. The following discusses some tips and resources that rehabilitators have used to recruit, train, sponsor, and retain new rehabilitators. It should be mentioned while recruiting and training are considered important tools in helping address the growing workload of wildlife in rehabilitation, there are a variety of strategies to address the rehabilitation workload, including decreasing the animals needing rehabilitation, improving hotline skills, increasing productivity, expanding the use and effectiveness of volunteers, and more. Other resources are available to support rehabilitators applying those strategies.

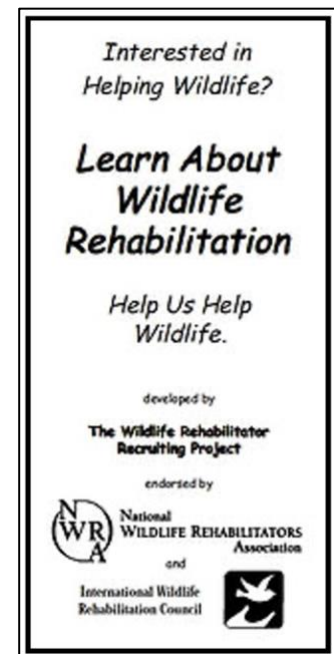
As experienced rehabilitators know, many people say they want to become a wildlife rehabilitator but are unaware of the full range of tasks and requirements. While essential to provide them basic information so they can understand what is involved, this can be time-consuming, especially during busy season. The recruiting brochure (described below), "[Learn About Wildlife Rehabilitation](#)" is a quick and easy way to provide useful basic information and save the rehabilitator time. The recruiting booklet (described below), "[Wildlife Rehabilitation: Is It For You?](#)" provides considerably more information and can save even more time for the rehabilitator. The booklet was designed to provide a realistic balance of pros and cons to help possible recruits decide if they want to get involved in wildlife rehabilitation, and to what extent.

We suggest that before you download these tools, please download the article on [Sponsoring New Rehabilitators](#) ([click here - pdf format](#)).

Recruiting Brochure

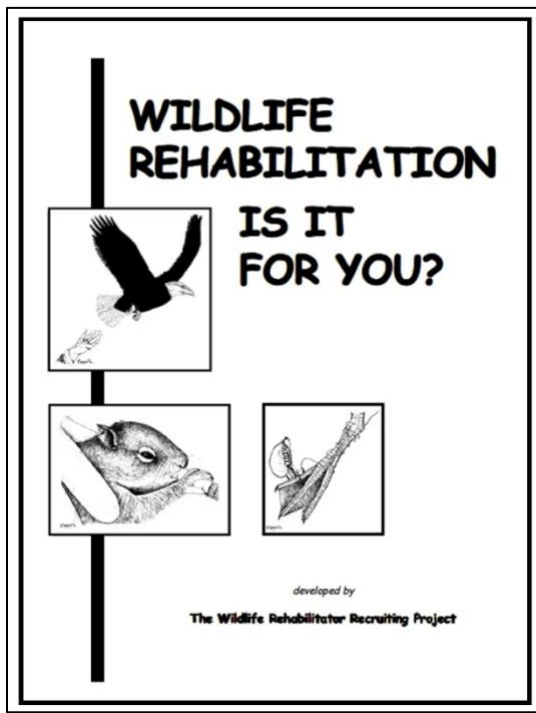
The recruiting brochure may be distributed to those people who have initial interest in becoming a wildlife rehabilitator. It may be offered to the curious rescuer who delivers a wild animal. It can be distributed at public events or educational programs to people curious about wildlife rehabilitation. It can be mailed to people who call and request information.

The brochure provides a brief description of rehabilitation activities, reasons more rehabilitators are needed, and some of the realities. It explains that rehabilitation is not easy nor a hobby. It describes ways new people can learn more. There is space on the back of brochure for rehabilitators or rehabilitation organizations to place their own contact information. [Click here](#) to either view or download a copy.



Recruiting Booklet

The recruiting booklet is for those people who want more information after reading the brochure. Previously, these are the people who would like to talk with the rehabilitator and possibly have a facility tour.



The booklet provides more in-depth information to help the potential recruit decide if they want to seriously proceed with becoming a wildlife rehabilitator. It presents reasons that rehabilitation is needed and some benefits. It describes rehabilitation facilities, typical activities, and requirements. Among the requirements listed are time, commitment, funding, knowledge and skill, permits or licenses, and a veterinarian.

The booklet offers some myths about wildlife rehabilitation, such as "loving animals qualifies someone to be a rehabilitator" and "the government pays rehabilitators to care for wildlife". It suggests ways new people can become wildlife rehabilitators and locate training opportunities. It describes realities, such as workload, costs, risks, and stresses and gives suggestions as to ways new people can manage them. By the time the potential recruit schedules time to talk personally with the rehabilitator, the person is much more informed and asks better questions about rehabilitation. Like the brochure, the booklet has an area for rehabilitators to place their own contact information. [Click here](#) to either view or download a copy.

After reading the wildlife rehabilitation recruiting brochure and booklet, some people will decide that becoming a wildlife rehabilitator is exactly what they want and can do. Others will decide they don't want to become wildlife rehabilitators, but may help wildlife or animals in different ways. That's the point. More rehabilitators are needed, but not everyone can and should become a wildlife rehabilitator. Hopefully these new documents will help recruit new rehabilitators, redirect others who may not be a match, and save rehabilitators' time.

The recruiting brochure and booklet were developed by a diverse team of rehabilitators from around North America. The brochure is endorsed by the IWRC and NWRA. (Note: Rehabilitators may quickly and easily customize the inset box on the back of the recruiting brochure and booklet by pasting in specific contact information. WildAgain may also be available to customize the inset box on the brochure and booklet. [Contact us](#) for more information.)

Sample Apprentice Application Form

While many wildlife rehabilitation facilities use applications for their volunteers, the use of applications has been less common with rehabilitators who recruit and train new rehabilitators, especially those who operate home-based rehabilitation facilities. An application reinforces that the rehabilitator takes the recruiting process seriously. The types of questions should be professional and relate directly to rehabilitation. It does not need to be elaborate or lengthy but can provide very useful information. The application can describe the decision process, which will likely include an interview (by phone or in person), and explain that only a limited number of people will be accepted into the apprenticeship/training and thank them for their interest.

An application form should collect basic information about the candidate, such as name and contact information. It may ask the candidate's relevant education and experience, special skills, time availability, space to keep wildlife separate from humans and domestic animals, finding funds to support rehabilitation activities, and interest in rehabilitation. It may ask the applicant about feelings regarding other related subjects, such as use of veterinarians and euthanasia. Questions should be directly relevant and not discriminate by age, gender, religion, and so forth. [Click here for an example of wildlife rehabilitation apprentice application.](#)

The completed application should be reviewed to help decide if the candidate is one that you believe may become a responsible, permitted and effective rehabilitator. For example, an application showing previous volunteer work with rabbit rescue and education about responsible pet care might be a stronger candidate than a person who writes that she only wants to be involved with sweet cuddly animals that won't bite, have parasites or die. The application could show that the person wants to do home-based rehabilitation only on weekends when she is not showing her pedigree dogs in competition. Or the application could show that the candidate sees rehabilitation animals as an inexpensive source of pets for his young children. The application could reveal that the applicant wants to work with a species that the rehabilitator does not rehabilitate – which may result in a referral to another rehabilitator.

The use of an application, such as the provided example, can help the applicant realize that wildlife rehabilitation is a serious endeavor with many requirements. It can provide the rehabilitator helpful information in deciding whether to accept the candidate as a volunteer or apprentice rehabilitator, refer to another rehabilitator, or possibly suggest another type of volunteer activity.

Volunteering

There are many benefits of providing an applicant who is interested in becoming a licensed rehabilitator the opportunity to volunteer with the potential sponsor or another rehabilitator. The volunteer opportunity allows the applicant to experience rehabilitation work and decide if he/she really wants to and can rehabilitate wildlife and all that entails before applying to the wildlife agency for a license or permit. Also, some rehabilitation regulations require the person volunteer for a wildlife rehabilitator and meet time and skill requirements before applying for their own rehabilitation license.

In some cases, the volunteer will decide that he/she wants to remain as a volunteer but not seek a rehabilitation license with the increased responsibilities and commitments, such as having daily rehabilitation duties, handling workload peaks, and making euthanasia decisions on severely injured animals. Some may decide that they prefer to work with another rehabilitator due to teaching styles, workload or even rehabilitation practices. Others may decide they want to work with different wildlife species. A few may decide that they still want to seek their own rehab license and continue working with that rehabilitation sponsor.

The rehabilitator can observe the volunteer working in a wildlife rehabilitation facility and evaluate willingness to perform all the required tasks, reliability, following instructions, willingness to make decisions and accept responsibility, overall performance, and more. The rehabilitator may decide that the volunteer and potential applicant is a good match and decide to sponsor him/her. Or, the rehabilitator may decide that the volunteer would not be a good match and decide to not sponsor the potential applicant to obtain a rehabilitation license due to the volunteer's performance, preference to work with species the rehabilitator does not rehabilitate, learning or communication styles, and so forth.

Having a person volunteer can provide valuable help handling the rehabilitator's workload, allow the person to decide if they want to become a rehabilitator, and provide useful information for the potential sponsor.

Clarifying expectations in advance

If the potential applicant and rehabilitator both agree to the applicant applying for a rehabilitation license with the sponsorship of the rehabilitator, it is helpful for them to discuss and agree to mutual expectations of the learning experience, responsibilities, resources, process, and so forth before submitting a formal application to the wildlife agency. While the new rehabilitator is obviously expected to follow the state and federal rehab licensing process and regulations, there are more aspects of rehabilitation and the relationship between a new rehabilitator and a sponsor or mentor than what are mentioned in regulations. A lack of clear understanding and agreement beyond what is included in a government rehabilitation application can result in a variety of problems for everyone involved, including the animals in rehabilitation.

For example, the location of where the new rehabilitator will be conducting rehabilitation activities is identified on the application. It could be at a rehabilitation center, sponsor's location, or at a new rehabilitator's home-based rehabilitation facility. The applicant would need to understand that the sponsor may want or need to visit the new applicant's location/home before agreeing to sponsor the person in order to ensure that the applicant has adequate space available for rehab activities that are separate from other activities as described in the [Minimum Standards of Wildlife Rehabilitation](#) and possibly required by state rehabilitation regulations. If the applicant did not understand the process and reasons in advance, the applicant could consider this an intrusion.

Another example is that rehabilitation regulations require rehabilitators to have arranged for the services of a veterinarian. Those regulations, however, do not describe which individual rehabilitator will pay for those veterinary services. Discussions clarifying expectations between the rehabilitator and new apprentice should discuss how expenses are covered, including veterinary services, caging, food for wildlife in rehabilitation, supplies and more.

While some people have believed that an informal discussion of expectations will suffice, many rehabilitators have found there are benefits in documenting the expectations of the apprentice or new rehabilitator and the rehabilitation sponsor. A written document, called a ["Memorandum Of Understanding" \(MOU\)](#), that is discussed and agreed to between the rehabilitation sponsor and apprentice can describe learning objectives and approaches, resources, processes, performance standards, and more. The more complete and clear the MOU, the better the chance that expectations can be met, confusion and problems avoided, and desired results achieved. [Click here for an example of an MOU.](#)

Preparations

The preparations for the new applicant will be significantly influenced by the location at which the new rehabilitator will rehabilitate wildlife. If the new rehabilitator will be conducting their rehabilitation activities at an established rehabilitation center or the sponsor's rehabilitation facilities, fewer preparations, such as purchasing supplies or building facilities, are likely.

The new rehabilitator who plans to conduct rehabilitation activities at his/her own home-based rehabilitation facility will need significantly more preparations. These preparations include obtaining supplies and acquiring, arranging for, or building rehab caging for the species on the license prior to the application. Since federal and state rehabilitation regulations require each rehabilitator have access to a consulting veterinarian, it is likely that the new rehabilitator will need to identify and make arrangements for such veterinary services unless the rehabilitation is conducted at an established rehabilitation center. Some states require the rehabilitator include a signed consulting agreement by a veterinarian - even if the rehabilitator will be using the physical facilities at a rehabilitation center.

There are many additional preparations depending on the species to be rehabilitated, types of licenses, size of rehabilitation activities, state and federal regulations, and so forth. It is helpful for the sponsor to provide the new applicant with lists of preparations, supplies, and so forth needed for the species the person will be rehabilitating. Basic lists of caging, supplies, etc. are available from various rehabilitation associations, publications, training, and even in some publications available from wildlife agencies (such as Wisconsin's rehabilitation facility regulations). It is likely that the rehabilitation sponsor will want to help customize the list of preparations for that new applicant.

Preparing a rehabilitation facility to have the cages, supplies, and so forth for an inspection by state or wildlife officers as well as be ready to admit and rehabilitate wild animals requires considerable time, money, and work. This preparation also can provide useful information for the sponsor who will notice the extent the applicant is willing to prepare an effective rehabilitation facility, find and use the resources for the facility and to cover the expenses, and engage in the problem-solving and decision making of preparation. There have been situations when either the potential sponsor or applicant realize that rehabilitating wildlife is very different from and possibly more demanding than the applicant really can or wants to do, or that the working relationship will have problems - and terminate the sponsorship relationship and application process.

It could be disappointing for either or both the rehabilitator and applicant to stop the application process or sponsorship relationship at this point in process. However, as experienced sponsors know, it is better to stop a process that is revealing problems that are unlikely or unable to be resolved effectively before more time and resources are expended, the initial rehabilitation license is granted by the wildlife agency, and the applicant has wild animals in rehabilitation.

Rehabilitation training during apprenticeship

There are many subjects that rehabilitators must be knowledgeable and skilled in order to provide quality care for wildlife. Sponsors often use a written list of knowledge and skills that the applicant needs for the species he/she wants to rehabilitate to ensure key items are covered and not accidentally omitted. A national task force of wildlife rehabilitators, including leadership from the National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association (NWRA) and the International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council (IWRC), developed and proposed such a list in 1996 that is still relevant over two decades later. It includes:

- Regulations, including state and federal wildlife rehabilitation regulations, state and local health ordinances, local zoning, etc.,
- Basic identification of wildlife species,
- Natural history and behavior of wildlife species,
- Humane solutions and problem prevention regarding human-wildlife conflicts,
- Facilities/caging/habitat needs for the wildlife species,
- Diet and nutrition of wildlife species,
- Safe capture and handling of wildlife species,
- Identification and general assessment of basic wildlife problems and conditions,
- Basic first aid and problem-solving of wildlife species,
- Wildlife diseases, including zoonosis,
- Euthanasia criteria and methods,
- Release criteria, considerations, preparation,
- Public contact (handling phone calls, getting information and animals, education, etc.),
- Ethics of wildlife rehabilitation,
- Working with orphans (including imprinting issues) of wildlife species, and
- Basic resources and references.

Sponsors may want to or be required by regulations to develop a specific Learning Plan to help guide the new rehabilitator's training and experience. The Learning Plan describes key information the new rehabilitator needs to know and be able to apply, resources, possible schedule, and when the section is completed.

Rehabilitation regulations in Colorado require apprentice rehabilitators, called Provisional rehabilitators, to have a specific Learning Plan to guide their training as well as show progress and completion. Examples of those Learning Plans are available on their website or by clicking [here](#) and [here](#) for two examples. That website also includes numerous resources for sponsors and apprentices, including recommended guidelines for sponsors and apprentices, a flow chart of the application process, Rehabilitation Study Guide, rehab inspection form, application, consulting veterinary agreement form, requirements for use of volunteers, links to rehab associations, and more.

While rehabilitation sponsors provide some of the training for their new apprentices, there are many other sources of rehab training. Some states require new rehabilitators to complete specified training conducted by a specific rehabilitation association or group.

A few states require new rehabilitators to take and pass an examination of rehabilitation knowledge before they will grant a rehabilitation license. Rehabilitation Study Guides and sample test questions and answers may be available from the state wildlife agency, state rehabilitation groups, and individual rehabilitators.

There are many additional sources of learning for new and experienced rehabilitators. Included are publications from national and state rehabilitation associations, veterinary associations, wildlife agencies, universities, and more. Training programs, workshops, seminars, conferences, and classes are available on a wide variety of topics helpful for rehabilitators. There also are an increasing number of rehabilitation publications and training programs available online.

As mentioned earlier, it is important for the new rehabilitator and sponsor to discuss and come to mutual understanding about these learning opportunities, approaches, schedules, methods to assess quality of the training, and how the apprentice's learning will be evaluated. While the sponsor will have a key role in training the new rehabilitator and provide supervision for 'hands-on' experience, the rehabilitator is not expected to personally provide all the rehabilitation training.

Supervising and guiding new apprentices

Experienced rehabilitators know that new rehabilitators need help rehabilitating animals, even when they have had previous training, inspections, passed tests, and so forth. Some rehabilitation regulations also require that the sponsor supervise the new rehabilitator to ensure that the animals are being given quality care. The sponsor needs to allow time for frequent communication (often daily) and regular supervision - as well as training.

New rehabilitators are often enthusiastic to start admitting and rehabilitating wildlife. This enthusiasm is a good thing. However, it can also result in the new rehabilitator becoming overwhelmed by the activities involved in admitting and caring for large numbers of animals, different species and age animals, complicated health conditions, talking with members of the often-demanding public, and the overall workload required to rehabilitate wildlife.

While the sponsor and apprentice hopefully established some initial limits and guidelines during the development of the MOU, it is a good idea to reconfirm before the person starts getting calls for help and admitting animals. For example, they may decide to limit the number of species, types, sizes and ages of animals that he/she will rehabilitate. Limiting the total number of animals admitted for rehabilitation is

another good option. Many sponsors, and some rehabilitation regulations, require that the new rehabilitator begin by only rehabilitating a small number of wild animals of smaller species at a time in order to allow them to focus on a few animals, master skills, balance the schedule, and provide high quality care. These limits can be increased or decreased based on experience, time, and results.

Sponsors also have many other responsibilities with their apprentices, such as supervising wildlife care, advising on diets and nutrition, helping identify and solve problems with rehab practices, preparing and submitting rehab records, and more. These require regular and frequent communications.

While a rehabilitator may want to sponsor multiple apprentices concurrently to 'quickly increase the people available to help with the rehab work,' the sponsor's workload will also expand dramatically. Taking on multiple apprentices at a time may decrease available training, supervision and general help for each apprentice, place increased pressure on the sponsor/rehabilitator, and, possibly, reduce the quality animal care.

As much as a rehabilitator may be equally eager to have the apprentice's help handling a heavy animal workload, the sponsor needs to remember that he/she is also supervising the care of the animals in the apprentice's possession, as well as training him/her. In addition, most sponsors are also rehabilitating wildlife - which require time and effort. Recruiting, training, and supervising new rehabilitators is a major commitment for the sponsor in many ways.

Benefits

Recruiting, training, and supervising new rehabilitators can help build the rehabilitation community and expand the number of rehabilitators available to provide a large and growing number of wild animals being brought for rehabilitation. Recruiting and sponsoring also have a major impact on the quality of care given to the wild animals in rehabilitation and the effectiveness with how wild animals are released back to the wild. It also takes substantial time, effort, knowledge, skill, and commitment by the rehabilitation sponsor.

For more information, see the articles: "[Sponsoring New Rehabilitators](#)" (PDF) by Casey and "Recruiting: More Than a Brochure", by Casey and Bolton-Martin in the NWRA Quarterly, Winter, 2001.

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