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Wildlife Rehabilitation – Foster Caring

Information Sheet

Interested in Becoming a Licensed Wildlife Foster Carer?

The DSE define wildlife rehabilitation as *"caring for injured, sick, or orphaned native animals and providing veterinary assessment and treatment where required, then nursing care and support, with the goal of restoring them to their natural condition and habitat".*

Foster carers are registered with an Authorised Wildlife Shelter to gain experience and training under their guidance. The DSE issue permits under the provisions of the Wildlife Act 1975. Wildlife in the care of a foster carer is registered to the Shelter Operator. It is illegal to hold wildlife without the appropriate permit. Foster Carers must have a minimum of 12 months experience before being eligible to apply to be a Shelter Operator.

What to Expect as a Carer

Caring for wildlife can be very satisfying and rewarding, it is a privilege and responsibility. It can also be heartbreaking and exhausting. Some important factors to consider include;

Financial Commitment
As volunteers all expenses to ensure an animal's needs are met are the responsibility of the carer. This includes providing appropriate housing, food and possibly medications and bandaging. You will also need some basic equipment and incur transport costs. Some animals require a 'nesting box' or other suitable home as part of their release.

Wildlife Welfare and Ethical Considerations
The prime consideration must always be the animal's welfare. They must be housed away from domestic pets, noise and children and in accommodation that meets the Code of Practice guidelines. Carers must provide the appropriate husbandry ie food, water, hygiene, security, space, lighting, supervision, clean air and protection from noise, disease, weather and unnecessary human contact.

Not all animals can be rehabilitated – it is illegal to keep 'feral species' and where it is unlikely that an animal will be able to recover sufficiently to return to the wild then it should be taken to a vet to be euthanised – wild animals need to be 100% fit to survive in the wild.

Time Commitment
Some animals are in care a few days but others require months of care such as orphaned young, some need round the clock feeds. Rehabilitating wildlife also involves maintaining and cleaning enclosures and equipment and keeping records.

Legal Obligations
Foster carers must operate within the 'DSE Revised code of practice for the welfare of wildlife during rehabilitation – Foster carer conditions and entitlements'.

Zoonoses
There are a number of diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans. Wildlife rehabilitators need to be aware of these and practice preventative measures.

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Steps to Becoming a Carer

1. Find a Shelter to Mentor you. You can do this by contacting AWARE's Volunteer Co-ordinator, directly approaching a shelter operator, attending an information event, contacting the DSE or approaching a Wildlife Group.

2. Attend training – training and learning is an ongoing commitment for rehabilitators. You will be expected to do one on one or group training with your shelter.

3. We also encourage you to attend training events that are run by other wildlife groups such as Dr Anne Fowler workshops – details of many training opportunities can be found on the AWARE and Wildlife Victoria websites.

4. We also recommend training offered by the Victoria University such as 'Rehabilitate and release native wildlife' and 'Care for young animals' which are part of Cert III in Captive Animals. Some TAFE colleges also offer relevant wildlife rehabilitation courses.

5. Consider working as a shelter helper before taking the steps to become a licensed foster carer. This will give you an insight into what is required and if wildlife rehabilitation will fit into your lifestyle and home environment.

How AWARE Supports Carers

- Subsidised food
- Free equipment from donations such as pouches and medical supplies
- Loan equipment and in some cases loan aviaries
- In-house training, mentoring and networking thus providing emotional support
- AWARE have agreements with other groups to attend their training at reduced cost

What AWARE Expects from Carers

- Follow the DSE guidelines and protocols.
- Do not take in any wildlife without discussing with your shelter first, this is also a requirement under the code of practice.
- Maintain a good working relationship with your shelter and seek their help first with any concerns or problems you may have.
- Support the group that supports you by providing data as requested and assisting at fund raising events whenever possible.