1 Overview of wildlife rescue

On any given day in the United States, it can be estimated that tens of thousands of wild birds and mammals suffer injuries directly attributable to humans. Causes of such anthropogenic injuries include motor vehicles, power lines, domestic dogs and cats, pesticide use, pollution and oil spills, errant fishing line, and intentional acts of cruelty.

During spring and summer months, when tree trimming and brush clearing is rampant, the number of wild animals that are displaced or injured can triple. Entire populations can be impacted through loss of habitat and natural disasters, increasing the number of potential wildlife victims to an even greater figure.

The estimated number of wildlife casualties is based on records of wild animals that have been reported or rescued – a journey that begins when an animal is first observed by someone who is willing to seek help. With luck, the *finder's* quest will lead them to a specially trained wildlife professional.

The rescue of wild animals requires a unique set of skills, considerably different from those used in handling domestic animals. Not only do wild animals behave differently, capturing and handling them can be dangerous, especially for the animal. Wild creatures perceive approach and handling by humans as a threat; most will flee or fight for their lives, even if it kills them. How the animal is handled and the quality of care it receives can mean life or death. Even if the animal is not critically wounded, inadequate housing, mishandling, and improper food can be fatal. It is therefore imperative that first responders receive specific training on proper methods of tending to wild animals in peril.

First and foremost, they must learn the natural history of the species they're going to encounter. This will help them locate individuals in distress and help them determine if an animal is behaving normally or needs to be rescued. Familiarity with the species will also help responders plan safe and successful capture strategies. Responders must also be trained and equipped to handle and confine wild animals without causing additional harm. If an animal requires immediate aid, first responders must be capable of providing basic life-saving emergency care – similar to human search and rescue personnel and paramedics. Wildlife search and rescue technician (WSART), wildlife paramedic, wildlife trauma specialist, wildlife EMT – these are relatively new terms being used to describe a

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specialized division of animal rescue. Unfortunately, however, these unique and valuable service providers are absent in most communities.

In the United States, for example, of the hundreds of licensed wildlife rehabilitation centers, relatively few provide field service. Instead of sending a team of experts into the field, they rely on animals being brought to their doors. This often leaves the actual rescue of an injured or ill wild animal to the finder. Finders who are unable or unwilling to perform a rescue themselves will look for help, which can be a daunting experience.

In some regions, game wardens will assist with calls regarding disabled wildlife. In urban environments, the duty of responding to reportedly disabled wildlife is often assumed by municipal animal control agencies as part of their public service. In either case, unless these officials are extensively trained and equipped specifically for wildlife, they can do more harm than good.

In the absence of someone with the skills to find, identify, assess, and provide immediate aid to wild animals in distress, countless lives are lost. This often-overlooked issue may very well be the greatest dilemma faced by wildlife casualties and the people who find them.