

Wildlife Laws

By Sharon St. Joan

It is nearly always illegal for individuals to keep wildlife in captivity. There are a very few exceptions in which special permits may allow certain professionals to possess wild animals for education purposes. These permits are not issued to the general public.



It is legal, however, for anyone to rescue and transport injured wildlife to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator, who will care for the animal with the goal of releasing the animal back to the wild. In many cases, even where there is serious injury, the animal can be successfully treated, rehabilitated, and released back to the wild to lead a happy life.

Licensed wildlife rehabilitators are individuals with a great deal of specialized training in caring for wildlife. Taking wildlife to these individuals is the only way to insure that the animal will receive the proper care.

Some states have laws against rehabilitating skunks and raccoons. Call a wildlife rehabilitator before rescuing these mammals, and ask for advice about what to do. If you are having a problem with a skunk or raccoon living in your area, ask a wildlife rehabilitator for help. Relocating these animals is usually illegal, and it is always unkind, since the adult animal may not survive relocation.

Besides the legal issue, it is not advisable to keep wildlife in captivity. Wild animals do not usually adjust to life in captivity – it is generally very stressful for them. They belong in the wild where they can live a happy and free existence.

If you come across a wild animal in a trap, call the sheriff, the police, or the state wildlife department. Describe the situation, and ask them to come look at the trap and the animal. Trapping is legal in some states. If the trap is legal, the officer will need to contact the person who set the trap to come and kill the animal to eliminate further suffering. If the trap is illegal, the officer will usually euthanize the animal, who is probably badly injured, and remove the trap. It's not a good idea to attempt to release the animal, since he is likely to be badly injured, and, if released, will probably die slowly and painfully.

Even if the animal you have rescued is too badly injured to be kept alive and has to be euthanized, it does not mean that you have failed the animal. On the contrary, you have saved him from being left to suffer and die slowly.

Sharon St. Joan established Feathered Friends at Best Friends Animal Sanctuary and has cared for birds and wildlife for over 15 years. She now devotes her time to writing about birds and wildlife-related issues.