



### This fact sheet provides guidelines and requirements for veterinary clinic staff in relation to sick, injured or orphaned wildlife.

In Victoria, sick, injured or orphaned wildlife can be rehabilitated by a wildlife shelter operator or foster carer (wildlife carer) who is authorised under the *Wildlife Act 1975*. These authorisations are issued by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP).

Within 48 hours, the health of incoming wildlife must be assessed by a registered veterinary practitioner or a person experienced in diagnosing illnesses, diseases and injuries in the affected species. This is a condition of the Wildlife Shelter and Foster Carer Authorisation.

#### Euthanasia of injured wildlife

Euthanasia of injured wildlife is sometimes necessary to prevent further pain, trauma or suffering in an animal unlikely to survive in the wild. Humane and safe methods must be used when undertaking euthanasia of wildlife. Humane euthanasia is required where the wildlife:

- is suffering from unreasonable and/or incurable pain, distress, trauma, sickness or injury;
- has lost essential limbs or function of limbs, including tails;

- has permanent vital sensory loss (hearing, sight, smell, taste);
- has an incurable (able to be treated but not cured) infectious disease or chronic ill health;
- has permanent damage to their nervous system;
- is likely to require extensive surgery to survive;
- is unable to adjust to temporary care;
- is likely to require extended periods in captivity to be rehabilitated;
- is unlikely to survive or integrate in the wild; or
- is under-developed young (e.g. un-furred young or 'pinkies').

Any animal that requires extensive periods in care may develop dependence on humans and display unnatural behaviour. If animals cannot be released back to the wild, humane euthanasia is necessary.

It is considered inhumane to take an animal from the wild and keep it in captivity permanently.

Additionally, many wildlife species display territorial behaviour, and failure to release the animal back to the location found and in a timely manner may result in

**Whales, dolphins, seals, marine turtles, platypus and fish cannot be acquired, received, kept, possessed, destroyed or disposed of by wildlife carers.**

the animal having to compete for territory. These stressful circumstances significantly lower the chance of survival in species such as Brushtail Possums.



## Triage guide for different species

### High-conservation value species

For wildlife of high conservation significance that can be utilised in captive breeding or similar programs, special effort should be made to rehabilitate these animals even if release into the wild is unlikely; unless the animal is suffering from unreasonable and/or incurable pain, distress, trauma, sickness or injury.

These animals should not be released back to wildlife carers. The rehabilitation of these animals is best undertaken by experienced wildlife veterinarians, such as those at Healesville Sanctuary.

### Marine and waterway species

Wildlife carers are not endorsed to rehabilitate whales, dolphins, seals, marine turtles, or platypus.

- For incidents concerning whales or dolphins, the Whale and Dolphin Emergency Hotline on 1300 137 017 must be notified.
- For seals and marine turtles, contact the AGL Marine Response Unit on 0447 158 676.
- For platypus, the animal must be transferred to Healesville Sanctuary Wildlife Hospital ((03) 5957 2829).

### Introduced species

Introduced species, such as wild rabbits and foxes, that are presented to a clinic with illness or injury from the wild should be humanely euthanised. Dogs, cats, livestock and other domestic animals are the responsibility of the local council and should not be released back to a wildlife carer.

### Marine birds

Although marine birds (e.g. penguins, pelicans, petrels) are covered by a shelter authorisation, these animals require specialist care and facilities and are best cared for at Phillip Island Nature Parks ((03) 5951 2800) or Melbourne Zoo through the AGL Marine Response Unit.

### Raptors and owls

For any raptor or owl, consider the need for specialist care and rehabilitation of the presenting animal, as the bird may be best suited for transfer to Healesville Sanctuary. The veterinarians at Healesville are highly trained and experienced wildlife veterinarians and can provide the best possible outcome for the animal, including flight aviaries to build muscle and appropriate whole prey for nutrition.

## Appropriate levels of veterinary care for wildlife

Sick, injured or orphaned wildlife must be assessed and diagnosed early in their care to ensure the best treatment and likelihood for release.

Any illness or injury that requires prescription medication requires a veterinary consult. If a wildlife carer is in a remote location and attendance at a veterinary clinic is restricted, phone consults are suitable in some cases.

In some rare cases, a specialist other than a registered veterinarian can be consulted for advice on care. This would only be acceptable in the case of animal keepers with zoological institutions, or some animal behaviour experts.

Wildlife carers are volunteers and generally learn from experience and guidance. Do not assume that a wildlife carer can care for all species of wildlife. Ensure the wildlife carer is well equipped to rehabilitate the animal, or find another more suitable wildlife carer to do so.

Wildlife held by a shelter or foster carer are not the property of the shelter or foster carer - it is a wild animal. If you have concerns about the level of care the animal is receiving, the likelihood of release, or the capacity of the wildlife carer to provide appropriate care, you may refuse to release the wildlife to the wildlife carer. If this occurs, you may allocate the wildlife to a known, appropriate carer if you believe rehabilitation is achievable; transfer the wildlife to a wildlife veterinarian for further assessment if you are unsure; or humanely euthanise the animal.



Only registered veterinary practitioners can undertake surgical treatment of wildlife. This includes surgery, administering anaesthesia, setting bones and suturing skin, amputations of limbs or appendages (including tails), and injections into veins or bone cavities. Only a veterinarian can undertake these treatments and determine the use and dosage of medication.

Any surgical treatment that is extensive or is likely to jeopardise the animal's chances of survival in the wild post release should not be attempted (see section on euthanasia of injured wildlife).

Prescribing intravenous medication for wildlife in care is not appropriate. While some carers can undertake the provision of subcutaneous fluids, this is a skill many do not have.

## Sedation of wildlife & bolt guns

Sedatives or tranquilisers used in darting an animal for capture, assessment and/or transport have restricted possession and trade laws, and generally can only be prescribed by a veterinarian for use on wildlife.

A veterinarian may be liable if misuse of a prescribed sedative occurs, or if illness, injury or death arises through accidental dosing of humans.

Anyone using a dart gun or tranquiliser must be appropriately licenced and under direct veterinary supervision.

DELWP does not endorse the use of captive bolt guns by wildlife carers, regardless of the training provided. If an animal is approachable to the point where use of a captive bolt is viable, the best course of action is to transport the animal to a veterinary clinic for humane euthanasia via lethal injection or to contact local police for humane euthanasia via firearm.

## Wildlife shelter and foster carer conditions

Wildlife shelters and foster carers are only authorised to acquire, receive, keep, possess and dispose of wildlife for the purpose of the care, treatment and rehabilitation of sick, injured or orphaned wildlife back to the wild. The purpose of the authorisation is to ensure that wildlife receives appropriate care that results in wildlife being released back to the wild at the point of capture. No rescued wildlife can be kept long-term.

Wildlife carers are subject to conditions attached to the authorisation. To obtain a copy, go to [www.wildlife.vic.gov.au](http://www.wildlife.vic.gov.au) and search 'wildlife shelter'.

For further information, call the DELWP Customer Contact Centre on 136 186 and ask to speak to a Forest and Wildlife Officer.

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