

WHAT TO EXPECT – Small Mammal Rehabilitation

Wildlife Welfare works only with small mammals...mostly squirrels, rabbits and opossums. We do not rehabilitate rabies vector animals (raccoons, foxes, bats, skunks etc.) or birds.

Thank you for your interest in becoming a wildlife rehabilitator. We thought it would be a good idea for you to know what is expected in taking care of injured and orphaned wildlife. You will care for several babies (similar size and weight) raised together to avoid imprinting. We never send home just one baby. It may be that you can't do the early baby stage but can do feedings 3 times a day or maybe just the outside-cage stage....which requires a large cage preferable 4x4x6 (or 8). We will work with you on any stage that works with your lifestyle.

Time – Potential rehabbers should consider the time they have available for rehabbing. If you travel a lot, then rehabbing may not be for you at this time. Or, if you are a college student living in an apartment with others then this is not a good time to consider rehabbing. If you have young children, then this may not be a good time. Many rehabbers do work full time but have been able to adjust their schedule so they can feed young babies every 4 hours by coming home at lunch or taking them to work. Each new applicant will be interviewed to determine if they can work out feeding times during the daylight hours or whether they are a candidate for working with older self-feeding babies like opossums.

Mentor - After you are trained, a mentor will be assigned to work with you for a year or two There will be home checks when you take animals, and you will be required to inform your mentor of daily feeding amounts and weight gain. The constant contact with your mentor is extremely important. If for any reason an animal is not doing well or you have concerns, then you are to contact your mentor immediately. You must be willing to drive your animals to be seen by your mentor....even if you are 30 minutes away.

License – After your training period, your mentor will instruct you on how to obtain a **Wildlife Rehabilitation License** (Captivity License) with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. A wildlife officer will do an inspection at your home when you apply for your license This inspection is to make sure you are following the laws and guidelines set by the State of North Carolina. You will need the guidance of your mentor to make sure you pass inspection

Expenses – There will be some expenses for you out of your own pocket, and this should be considered before deciding if you want to be a wildlife rehabber. WWI does provide many supplies, some dry foods and all formulas but all the fresh produce and other foods must be bought by the rehabber. Inside and outside caging that are specific for each species may need to be build or bought by the rehabber.

Space and housing should also be considered. All small mammals are kept inside during the early stages. Do you have a room in your house that is away from family and pets? Separate space is important to not only protect the wildlife but to protect you and your family. Just like any other animal they will need constant cleaning of cages and changing of bedding so that odors are kept to a minimum. If you have a queasy stomach, then this could be a problem.

Outside Caging – Most of the small mammals (except for rabbits) require outdoor caging once they are getting close to release age and size. This is the important stage that helps them wild-up before release: 4'x4'x6' (or 8 foot) cages. Wildlife Welfare can sometimes help with some caging if available. Also, for those who have no suitable yard (lots of trees) then arrangements can **sometimes** be made to use another rehabber's release cage at their location.

Baby squirrels – Raising young babies is usually a 1½ to 2-month process if you receive them at 5 weeks old...which is the age you would receive at your first training. For several weeks they will be hand-fed formula beginning at 4 times a day (again this is for the 5-week olds, which most new rehabbers will

start off with). An example of feeding times will be 8am, 12pm 4pm and 8-9pm. They will be kept in medium size clear plastic containers with wire on top (we can show you how to make this) to allow air circulation. This stage may or may not need warmth from a heating pad. With all three species listed on this sheet, eyes-closed babies need to be stimulated to use the bathroom. This is done by your hand and a tissue wiping the genital area softly to encourage pee and poop. As they get to 6 ½ to 7 weeks old they will move to a small cage with a hidey box (fleece lined) and lots of natural things from the outside (branches and leaves). They will also be offered a variety of solid foods which are important. With growth and development, the babies will graduate to a larger cage. Once they are close to 10 weeks old, they will be put in an outdoor cage that is made of ½ x ½ inch wire about 6-8 feet tall that has a wooden nest box inside for the babies to live in. This cage will be set up with large branches for easy climbing. They will stay in this outdoor cage until about 12-13 weeks old and will be soft released from this cage; many will come back at night. Also, large nest boxes are put up on trees for them to move into. If you are unable to release in your yard or build a cage, many times we have other rehabbers who can help with this.

Baby opossums learn to lap formula on their own when they are 45-75 grams in weight, so at this stage you do not have to feed every few hours. New rehabbers will not take any babies that need to be handfed...only those eating on their own. They will be offered solid foods when they get older. They will start out in a clear plastic container with a wire top. When they are still young, they will require extra warmth from a heating pad. As they get older, they will be given branches to climb on and a fleece-lined hidey box. It is important not to crowd baby opossums once they become juveniles, so increasing the size of their cage is important. Once they are about 9 inches long you can move them to an outdoor cage made with ½ x ½ inch wire that is about 6-8 feet tall or 6 feet long with branches set up for easy climbing. They are nocturnal and will need a nest box to sleep in during the day. At release time the possums should be taken to an area that is away from people, pets, roads and predators. Make sure there is a water source near by.

Baby rabbits are handfed formula 2-3 times a day for the first 2 weeks. They are also kept in a clear plastic container with a wire top for ventilation. They are kept warm by a heating pad under part of their container until they are about 2 weeks old, and then they can be offered a larger container with a fleece-lined hidey box and solid foods. Each week the babies will get a larger container or cage. We do not keep rabbits more than 6-7 weeks of age. We release them straight from the indoor cages to a suitable place away from people, pets, roads and predators....with lots of grass and low cover bushes to hide in. Always check for good weather for 3-5 days before release.

Note: Only trainees who have prior handfeeding experience are able to take the rabbit class. Only after you have a grasp of handfeeding squirrels or tubing opossums do we let trainees take on handfeeding rabbits.

Be sure you are committed to taking on the responsibility of caring for a few babies. We take this very seriously and expect you to do the same. If you will be going out of town a lot or have a busy schedule, then this may not be the right time for you.