

WHAT TO EXPECT – Small Mammal Rehabilitation

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

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. We are a network of home rehabilitators in and around the Raleigh area. This can be a very rewarding experience if you are prepared for hard work, continual learning, and the deep satisfaction that comes from helping wildlife heal and return to the wild.

When Wildlife Welfare accepts an applicant for training, we will spend a LOT of time and energy working to get you trained. Therefore, we are very selective in who we agree to work with. There may be a number of reasons why we choose not to move forward with an applicant, but with over thirty-five years of experience, we have developed a strong sense of which candidates are likely to be successful in the long term. Wildlife rehabilitation is not a hobby; it is a significant commitment of time, energy, and responsibility.

Reasons we may not consider to accept an applicant for training:

- If you travel a lot
- If you are a student or are living in an apartment with others
- If you have young children (toddlers and younger)
- If you rent your home, your landlord may not approve of animals in cages. We have occasionally accepted someone who rents, and if we do, we will require a signed, written statement from your landlord that wild animals in cages are allowed in the home.
- If you do not have a room to keep the animals separated from from pets and children
- If we do not have a mentor who lives close enough to work with you (as required by the NC Wildlife Commission)
- While having a suitable yard for outdoor enclosures is highly beneficial, we recognize that this may not be possible for everyone. Each situation is evaluated individually based on space, safety, the environment (tree canopy for shade), and the species being rehabilitated.

To begin with - We will begin with a phone interview. If we both feel this is a good fit, we will send you a video that explains how our organization operates and what is involved in raising baby mammals. If you still wish to proceed after watching the video, we will provide the necessary forms to complete and sign online. At that point, the \$85 training fee is due. During your hands-on training, you will receive over \$200 worth of supplies, as well as your first babies to care for.

Training session - A date will be set for you to come to the home of one of our members, so you can have first-hand experience in feeding your babies and in making their formula. You will be sent a link to another video that describes in detail how to take care of the babies. During your training session, you will see a demonstration of formula preparation, and practice feeding your babies under the guidance of your mentor. You will then take home several babies (similar in size and weight) raised together to avoid imprinting. (We never send anyone home with just one baby.) After your training session, you will be in contact with your mentor every day for the first few weeks, so their progress can be tracked.

Time commitment – Potential rehabbers should consider the time they have available for rehabbing. Many rehabbers do work full time but have been able to adjust their schedule so they can feed young babies every four hours by coming home at lunch or by 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 - When you are trained, a mentor will work with you for at least a year. 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, 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.

Prompt communication with your mentor is an absolute must, and if you are not able to text or return phone calls promptly, we may not be able to continue to work with you.

License – As you begin your training, you will be given instructions on applying for an Apprentice Wildlife Rehabilitation License from the NC Wildlife Commission. Your mentor will sign your application, and monitor you for at least a year before you can apply for your full license. A wildlife officer will do an inspection at your home 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. Wildlife Welfare can sometimes loan cages for indoor or outdoor use, or you may build or buy your own.

Space and housing should also be considered. All small mammals are kept inside during the early stages. You must have a room in your house that is away from family and pets that has space for a wire cage that is approximately 3'x2' and at least 3' tall. Separate space is important not only to protect the wildlife but to protect you and your family. Just like any other animal, they will need regular cleaning of cages and changing of bedding so that odors are kept to a minimum.

Outside Caging – Once they are getting close to the release age and size, most of the small mammals (except for rabbits) require an outdoor cage that's approximately 4'x4'x8' and constructed of ½" hardware cloth. This is the important stage that helps them wild-up before release. Wildlife Welfare can sometimes help with some caging, if available. 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 4 to 5 weeks old...which is the age you will receive at your training session. For several weeks, they will be hand-fed formula, beginning at 4 times a day. An example of feeding times will be 8am, 12pm 4pm and 8-9pm. They will be kept in a medium-size clear plastic container with wire on top to allow air circulation. (This is provided with your training package.) 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 eliminate. This is done by using a tissue and wiping the genital area softly to encourage pee and poop. As they get older and are beginning to climb, they will move to an indoor wire cage with a hidey box and lots of natural things from the outside (branches and leaves). They will also be offered a variety of solid foods which are important. Once they are close to 10 weeks old, they will be moved to an outdoor cage that is made of ½ x ½ inch hardware cloth, is 4x4x8 feet tall and 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, sometimes we have other rehabbers who can help with this.

Baby opossums learn to lap formula and eat on their own when they are 45-75 grams in weight, and this is the stage that new rehabbers will begin with. 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 moved to a larger wire cage and 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 weigh about a pound, you can move them to an outdoor cage made with $\frac{1}{2}$ x $\frac{1}{2}$ inch wire that is 4'x4'x8' minimum 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 nearby.

Baby cottontail rabbits are handfed formula 2-3 times a day for the first 2 weeks. Only trainees who have prior handfeeding experience with gray squirrels are allowed to take the rabbit class. They are 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 older 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.