

**Wildcare Inc**  
**Code of Practice**  
**for the Welfare and**  
**Care of**  
**Orphaned, Sick and**  
**injured Native Wildlife**

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## 1 Definitions

For the purpose of this Code of Practice the following definitions apply:

**Enrichment** means "...a process for improving or enhancing animal environments and care within the context of their inhabitants' behavioural biology and natural history. It is a dynamic process in which changes to structures and husbandry practices are made with the goal of increasing behavioural choices available to animals and drawing out their species-appropriate behaviours and abilities, thus enhancing animal welfare". (AZA/BAG 1999).

**Carer** means the person responsible for the welfare and care of the animal in the Top End of the Northern Territory.

**Permit** means a Carer's Permit issued by Parks & Wildlife.

## 2 Introduction

This Wildcare Inc Code of Practice - *Minimum Standard for the Welfare and Care of Native Wildlife* has been developed by and for Wildcare Inc members and carers. Its purpose is to provide guidance in the best possible methods to enable these animals to survive post-release. In writing this document we have taken into consideration the best rehabilitation practices in the Northern Territory and other states of Australia.

This Code of Practice provides guidelines for the rescue, care and rehabilitation of orphaned, sick and/or injured animals kept pending release into the wild. In the NT all native fauna is protected under the *Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 2005*:

Animal welfare standards and practices are becoming increasingly important in the keeping of animals. This Code is based on established experience and current scientific knowledge and contains guidelines for persons involved in native fauna care in the Northern Territory. Practices once considered acceptable are now being reassessed and modified according to new knowledge and changing attitudes. This includes the need to provide an enriched environment to **all** animals in care. It is no longer acceptable to just provide the basics ie food, water and shelter.

This Code is consistent with the requirements of the *Northern Territory Animal Welfare Act 2004* and is the standard necessary for animals in care. Adhering to the full implementation of this Code will achieve a quality of life for captive animals whilst under care, and increased post-release survival chances. Obviously, carers should always strive for the best quality of care and rehabilitation that can be provided.

### 3 Objectives of Care of Orphaned, Sick or Injured Wildlife

The objectives of care and rehabilitation of orphaned, sick and/ or injured animals are to:

- Assume responsibility for arranging the early assessment of the animal by either a Veterinarian or carer experienced with the species;
- Alleviate the immediate suffering of the animal;
- Ensure standards of care are appropriate to the needs of any animal in care;
- Properly prepare an animal for release to the wild;
- Assess the likelihood of the animal surviving the injury or illness and whether suffering will be prolonged or ongoing;
- Arrange for the prompt euthanasia of any animal that is unlikely to survive, whose treatment would cause prolonged suffering or stress, or be an unsuitable candidate for release;
- Provide appropriate care, food and housing for the species;
- Adequately prepare each animal for survival into the wild.
- Ensure each animal is released into the wild in a 'wild state' ie predator aware and dehumanised; and

Where appropriate, carers are to obtain professional and technical advice from Wildcare Inc and/or Parks and Wildlife Services.

Should the animal be unable to be released to the wild, then other options must be discussed with an authorised officer of Parks and Wildlife as to the animals' future.

## 4 Code of Ethics for Wildcare Members

Wildcare Inc members should strive to:

- Provide the highest standard of care through all stages of care and rehabilitation by applying professional and humane practices;
- Continuously improve methods of care, rehabilitation and release;
- Apply enrichment strategies to improve the quality of life for the animals whilst in care and increase the animal's ability to survive post-release;
- Apply enrichment strategies to allow in-care animal to develop species-appropriate behaviour;
- Update their knowledge and understanding to meet the needs of animals in their care and actively keep informed of current rehabilitation and release information and methods;
- Abide by legislative requirements ie *Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 2005*; *Northern Territory Animal Welfare Act 2004*; and other relevant legislation;
- Provide the highest quality food and facilities;
- Apply high level of hygiene practices;
- Place the need of the animal in care above their own ie personal gain or gratification;
- Have a sound understanding of the animal's needs post-release and apply the methods required for the animal to obtain and maintain those survival qualities;
- Seek assistance from others (Veterinarian, Parks and Wildlife Officers, experienced carers) and acknowledge limitations in knowledge and/or ability to provide required facilities or level of care necessary;
- Be professional in their dealings with members of the public, professional service providers and other carers, recognising that an individual member's conduct reflects on Wildcare Inc and other carers;
- Maintain release candidates in a wild condition ie not humanised, must be predator aware, able to survive in a natural environment (ie readily eating bush tucker);
- Acknowledge (and act on) the right of non-releasable animals to be humanely euthanased when applicable; and
- Treat each animal in care with respect and dignity.

Every carer must apply the principles of The 5 Freedoms appropriately, as defined by the RSPCA (RSPCA Australia, [www.rspca.org](http://www.rspca.org)).

The Five Freedoms are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst: by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour;
2. Freedom from discomfort: by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area;
3. Freedom from pain, injury and disease: by prevention through rapid diagnosis and treatment;
4. Freedom to express normal behaviours: by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind; and
5. Freedom from fear and distress: by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

## 5 Assessment

Rapid and accurate assessment of the animal, with the least amount of stress and suffering possible, plays an important role. Assessments may require consultation with people experienced in the particular requirements of the species to ensure the most appropriate action is taken ie experienced carers, Parks and Wildlife Service Officers, or Veterinarians familiar with the treatment and requirements of native fauna.

Assessment (and associated paperwork) should include:

1. Identification of the animal
2. Nature of the injury, rehabilitation needs and prospects of recovery including:
  - a) loss of mobility (loss of limbs or significant function of limbs, including tail);
  - b) permanent vital sensory loss (hearing, sight, smell);
  - c) permanent neurological damage;
  - d) abnormal behaviour patterns;
  - e) loss of ability to feed (or find) native food;
  - f) inability to adjust to the rehabilitation process;
  - g) acute or chronic ill-health including an infectious disease (also zoonotic diseases);
  - h) level of dehydration and poor body condition;
  - i) age.
3. The capacity of the carer to provide adequate care for the animal;
4. Circumstances of the animal needing to come into care (dog attack, poisoning, roof top possum, inappropriate rehab or release);
5. If the animal has been provided with food, water or other substances; and
6. Future quality of life.

Any young brought in with an adult should be assessed in the same way as listed above.

Regular assessment should be made to ensure recovery without unnecessary suffering or stress and that the animal is fully fit at the time of release.

**Euthanasia** should be carried out by a qualified/licensed person. Where the initial assessment indicates any of the following, the animal should be euthanased as soon as practical to prevent undue suffering or stress:

- Will not survive without radical surgery (eg amputation) which is likely to prevent its survival if returned to the wild;
- Has injuries of such a nature that it will not recover;
- Has an immune system that regularly predisposes it to disease;
- Would be subject to prolonged suffering prior to recovery ie appendage loss due to burns.

Transportation of any animal whether first coming into care, being taken for medical treatment or taken to release site, must be such as to minimise stress, discomfort, duration and the chance of further injury. Animals should not be transported in the boot of a car. The container should allow enough room for limited movement without being jostled about. Air-conditioning should not blow onto a transported animal and noise is to be kept to a minimum ie radio off, human passengers quiet. Animals should **NEVER** be taken into a noisy environment ie shopping centres, sporting events etc.

## 6 Basic Rehabilitation Requirements

### *HOUSING*

Housing plays a vital part in rehabilitation and should promote the welfare of the animal to aid recovery and physical development.

It is essential that basic requirements are met and maintained ie:

- Where appropriate, the housing should provide a balance of natural light, sunlight and adequate protection from weather extremes. It should provide protection from the wind and rain.
- Only very young or sick animals that need constant warmth and attention should be housed indoors. Artificial environments should be gradually reduced during the transition into an outdoor enclosure.
- Space - sufficient room to develop appropriate skills.
- Security - mental stress can be reduced by providing areas of seclusion for sleeping and feeding. Domestic pets and other predators should not have access to rehabilitation facilities.
- Human contact must be restricted, where necessary.
- Adult wild possums are to be housed separately (only 1 adult per trichinary);
- Suitable multiple nesting facilities, logs and perches are provided (including a selection of horizontal and vertical perches and ropes)
- Noise levels are such that no unnecessary stress is placed on the animal ie barking dogs, noisy children, etc;
- Suitable yards.
- An enriched environment with stimulation opportunities

Some individuals are adapted to living in social groups and are rehabilitated more successfully when raised and released together. Co-operation between Wildcare volunteers and Parks & Wildlife can help get these animals together; remember giving up an animal to live with another may be the best thing you can do and imprinting is much less likely in these instances.

### *HYGIENE*

Basic hygiene measures for all species;

- Wash hands between animals.
- Wash carry and treatment cages with disinfectant and rinse thoroughly with clean water.
- Ensure feeding stations are clean.
- Isolate all new arrivals.
- Clean cages at least twice weekly.

## ***ANIMALS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS***

Specialised knowledge, experience and vaccinations are essential with some animals.

- **EMUS** May only be kept on rural land.
- **BATS** May only be handled and cared for by carers with current Rabies Vaccinations.
- **RAPTORS** May only be kept by carers who have had 2-3 months experience as a volunteer at the Territory Wildlife Park in the Raptor section.
- **SNAKES** May only be kept by carers with proven experience and authorised by Parks and Wildlife.

## ***FEEDING***

- A carer must have knowledge of the normal dietary foods of a species. Diets should approximate the natural nutritional requirements as these will ensure the animal's normal digestive functions are maintained.
- Food must be fresh and clean (do not feed decaying food), must be adequate to meet energy requirements but not in excess to cause obesity or compromise optimum health.
- Water must be fresh and changed regularly.
- Animal's are to be provided with a variety of bush food throughout the rehabilitation process.

## ***HANDLING***

Safety to the carer comes first, take care to minimise the risk to handlers by animals attempting to escape or defend themselves.

- Always keep handling to a minimum and perform it gently and efficiently. Wildlife, especially if sick or injured, are frightened, stressed and disoriented when handled.
- Animals must not be permitted to develop relationships with domestic animals, they are wild animals and should never be regarded as pets.
- Always wash thoroughly after handling any animal.
- One exception to the minimal handling rule is orphaned young who need to interact with their carer but this must be progressively reduced as they get older.
- Be aware of Zoonotic diseases (diseases that can be transmitted from some animals to humans).

## **7 Release Procedures**

Only properly rehabilitated animals who exhibit all the skills and behaviours necessary for successful post-release survival are to be released. Preparation for release should begin the day the animal comes into care.

The basic principles for release:

- Fit and of suitable maturity or weight.
- Able to recognise, obtain and utilise native food.
- Readily eating native bush food.
- Predator aware/dehumanised.
- Able to exhibit natural instincts and behaviours.
- Acclimatised to seasonal weather conditions.
- Must be a whole animal or bird.
- Where applicable sleeping in and be familiar with its release log at least two weeks prior to release.
- Where applicable be fully vaccinated (macropods).
- Had 2-3 weeks flight practice for birds and bats, in an aviary suitable for their size.
- Released at a suitable time for the species, eg migratory or nocturnal.

### **Release site selection**

Carers should be cognisant of what environmental characteristics constitute a suitable release site. These include:

- Availability of suitable habitat
- Ensuring there is available home range
- Ensuring existing population base is not compromised,
- Ensuring existing species that have similar requirements (competition for resources such as nest sites, food source, mates etc) are not compromised
- The area is free from proposed land clearing or development as this will impede release site options
- The area has low intensive fires and, if possible, sound burning regimes
- Existence of multiple hollows where applicable to find sleeping sites and to disperse
- Sites are away from growers using chemical sprays, existing human habitation, roads and infrastructure.
- A generous canopy for shade and protection is essential.

Releasing wildlife should be done at a suitable time of year to give the animal a good food source.

Never release in extreme weather conditions and ensure that the animals are released at the right time of day, eg nocturnal animals during late evening.

If a release is unsuccessful despite repeated attempts, then other options may need to be discussed with Parks and Wildlife.

ALL Flying Foxes must go to the rehabilitation centre for release.

ALL Possums should go into the possum release program.

ALL Macropods should go to the macropod centre for release.

## 8 Records

Wildlife volunteers have an important task with the compilation and maintenance of detailed and accurate records of each animal's that comes into their care. Records are an important resource and assist in the treatment, rehabilitation and release of further animals that come into care.

Records must include the following information;

- Species and where feasible the sex of the animal.
- Weight, measurements and approximate age.
- Nature of the injury and possible cause.
- Name and address of the person who found the animal.
- The date that the animal was found and the date it was delivered into care.
- Accurate locality of where the animal was found, this is very important for animals that need to be returned to the area it formally occupied.
- Details of veterinary diagnosis and treatment, including medication and surgery.
- Details of care and food that was undertaken by the carer.
- Method and locality of release.
- Date of release or disposal.
- Method of disposal.
- Any other information that the carer may think relevant.