

WILDLIFE REHABILITATION IN ONTARIO

Under the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997, wildlife custodians are authorized to provide specialized temporary care to sick, injured and orphaned wildlife so that they can be returned to the wild.

People who do this work are called wildlife custodians. They provide an important service to the people and wildlife of Ontario. The wildlife cared for by a wildlife custodian are not pets, and any interaction between wildlife and humans or their domestic animals is minimized to ensure the animal does not become tame. An important goal of wildlife rehabilitation is to successfully return healthy wildlife back to the wild as quickly as possible.

If you find a bird or animal that you suspect is sick, injured or orphaned, do not move the wildlife until you talk to the Ministry of Natural Resources or to an authorized wildlife custodian for advice, unless it is in immediate danger.

Please read the ministry's fact sheet "What you should do if you find a sick, injured or orphaned wild animal" for more information.

Who can keep or rehabilitate wildlife?

- People who are transporting or keeping wildlife for less than 24 hours for the purposes of delivering the wildlife to a veterinarian or to an authorized wildlife custodian can do so without an authorization.
- An authorized wildlife custodian may keep and provide rehabilitation or care to game wildlife or specially protected wildlife, as specified in the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act.
- A veterinarian may keep and provide medical care to game or specially protected wildlife without a wildlife custodian authorization. However, they require a wildlife custodian authorization for the purposes of rehabilitating and releasing wildlife.

Responsibilities of a Wildlife Custodian

- Wildlife custodians must follow specific standards of care, housing, record keeping, and requirements on releasing rehabilitated wildlife.
- They can only keep and care for wildlife that they believe have a good chance of being successfully rehabilitated and released into the wild.
- Wildlife custodians must release wildlife as soon as the animal is capable of surviving in the wild.

Becoming a Wildlife Custodian

- Aspiring wildlife custodians are encouraged to meet and volunteer with authorized wildlife custodians. Wildlife rehabilitation is a time-consuming activity that requires a great deal of specialized knowledge, and you should gain experience in this field before applying for your own authorization.
- In order to become an authorized wildlife custodian, you must apply for an authorization at your local Ministry of Natural Resources district office.
- All new applicants must pass the Ontario Wildlife Rehabilitation Exam. The district office provides home-study materials and arranges an examination date with the applicant.
- The authorization specifies what species you can keep and rehabilitate.
- Applicants who want to rehabilitate rabies vector species (raccoon, skunk, bat, fox) must also take and pass the Ontario Rabies Vector Species course and exam.
- With the exception of a few major centers, wildlife custodians conduct wildlife rehabilitation on their own time and with their own money. Some solicit donations to assist their work.

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Contact your local Ministry of Natural Resources office for more information.

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