



## Can I Keep Him? NO!

If you have found a wild animal that is truly in crisis, you may be facing a dilemma. Of course, you want to do what's best for the animal, but you may find it difficult to turn him or her over to a rehabilitator. Letting go can be hard when the animal is a baby. The temptation to care for the baby yourself may be strong. And having eager young children in the house begging to raise the animal does not make the decision any easier. So why can't you keep the animal?

In almost every case, keeping a wild animal is illegal. Native wildlife species are protected by state and/or federal laws. To keep a wild animal in captivity for any length of time, for any reason, requires a special permit. Most communities have local ordinances that prevent individuals from keeping wild animals in captivity. Many neighborhood associations or covenants also prohibit keeping wildlife within property boundaries.

More importantly, wild animals deserve the best possible care. Providing the proper care is challenging because each species has specialized needs. Orphans need special diets and formulas to grow strong and healthy. They also must learn survival skills, including how to recognize and find food, escape predators, and how and where to make a nest, den, or burrow before being released back into the wild. Young animals need to be raised in the company of their own kind for proper behavioral development. Infections, parasites, and injuries are difficult to detect and treat in wild animals.

There is also the welfare of your own family to consider. Wild animals can be dangerous, especially when frightened or injured. Wildlife diseases, such as distemper, may pose a threat to companion animals, while others, including rabies, can be transmitted to humans, too.

Most people who want to care for a wild animal themselves plan to release the animal once it is grown or has recovered from its injuries. That is the goal of wildlife rehabilitation, but rehabilitators have an advantage when they return their patients to the wild — they have years of experience in letting go. Learning to avoid becoming too attached to a patient is an important part of becoming a good wildlife rehabilitator.

If you are tempted to care for a wild animal on your own, please ask yourself these questions first:

- What is the best thing I can do for this animal?
- If I'm having a hard time letting go of the animal now, how will I feel after I've really grown attached?
- Am I prepared to deal with the legal and financial consequences of keeping a wild animal illegally? How will I feel if the animal is discovered, confiscated, and possibly euthanized?
- Can I be certain that, once I've released the animal back to the wild, it is capable of surviving on its own? Am I providing the best possible chance for survival?
- How will I feel if the animal does not survive or is permanently impaired by my improper care?