



Veterinary care for wildlife

GUIDE

CONSERVATION
REGULATOR VICTORIA

Veterinary care for wildlife

GUIDE

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

We acknowledge and respect Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it. We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices. We are committed to genuinely partner, and meaningfully engage, with Victoria's Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities to support the protection of Country, the maintenance of spiritual and cultural practices and their broader aspirations in the 21st century and beyond.



Guidance produced by the Conservation Regulator
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Contents

Veterinary care for wildlife	3
Rescue, first aid and care guidance for different species	4
Appropriate levels of vet care for wildlife	5
Euthanasia of injured wildlife	6
The role of wildlife rehabilitators	7
Still unsure? We're here to help	8

Accessibility

If you would like to receive this publication in an alternative format, please telephone the DEECA Customer Contact Centre on 136 186, email customer.service@delwp.vic.gov.au, or via the National Relay Service on 133 677 www.relayservice.com.au. This document is also available on the internet at www.deeca.vic.gov.au



The Conservation Regulator

The Conservation Regulator was established in 2019 and is an independent regulator that sits within the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.

The Conservation Regulator has regulatory responsibility for wildlife regulation, timber harvesting, fire prevention, use of public land and biodiversity.

Information about the Conservation Regulator, its regulatory roles, responsibilities and purpose is provided on its website.



FIND OUT MORE
conservationregulator.vic.gov.au

Veterinary care for wildlife

Vets can lawfully treat sick, injured or abandoned wildlife. The *Wildlife Regulations 2013* and *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986* provide exemptions that allow a registered veterinarian to lawfully treat sick, injured or abandoned wildlife without any further permissions.

These exemptions also apply to vet nurses and other clinic staff, provided they are operating in accordance with the instructions of a registered veterinarian.

Wildlife require expert care, treatment and rehabilitation. Any person can transport sick, injured, orphaned or abandoned wildlife to a registered veterinarian or authorised wildlife rehabilitator. However, only attempt to capture wildlife in need of care if it is safe to do so.

Further information about helping wildlife, including wildlife rehabilitators, can be found on the **Sick, injured or abandoned wildlife** webpage.

If you are unsure whether a person holds a current wildlife rehabilitator authorisation, call DEECA.



SICK, INJURED OR ABANDONED WILDLIFE
wildlife.vic.gov.au/sick-injured-or-orphaned-wildlife/sick-injured-or-orphaned-wildlife



EMAIL CONSERVATION REGULATOR
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Rescue, first aid and care guidance for different species

Other than transport to a veterinarian or wildlife rehabilitator, it is important that only those appropriately experienced in the care of wildlife interact with or care for injured, sick or abandoned wildlife. This is to ensure the animal gets appropriate care and can be released back into the wild as soon as possible.

For specific guidance on the rescue, first aid and care of different wildlife species, please refer to the [Victorian Wildlife Rehabilitation Guidelines](#).

Whales, dolphins, seals, marine turtles, platypus and fish cannot be acquired, received, kept, possessed, destroyed or disposed of by wildlife rehabilitators. If these species are brought into care, please contact us by calling **136 186** or emailing us.



VICTORIAN WILDLIFE REHABILITATION GUIDELINES
wildlife.vic.gov.au/victorian-wildlife-rehabilitation-guidelines/victorian-wildlife-rehabilitation-guidelines



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Appropriate levels of vet care for wildlife

Wildlife must be assessed as soon as practicable to enable early diagnosis of their care needs. This is a condition of wildlife rehabilitation authorisations. Wildlife are highly stressed by human contact, and minimising the time spent in a clinic or other care setting is likely to improve rehabilitation success.

It is up to the veterinarian to determine the best course of action for treating sick, injured or abandoned wildlife, including prescribing medication or euthanising wildlife if necessary.

It can be beneficial for registered veterinarians that don't treat wildlife regularly to seek expert advice or second opinions when needed, such as from wildlife veterinarians or animal keepers at zoological institutions.

Only registered veterinary practitioners can undertake surgical treatment of wildlife and determine the use and dosage of medication. This includes surgery, administering anaesthesia, setting bones, suturing skin, amputations of limbs or appendages (including tails), and injections into veins or bone cavities.

Any surgical treatment that is extensive or is likely to jeopardise the animal's chances of survival in the wild post release should not be attempted (see [Euthanasia of injured wildlife on page 6](#)).

Sedatives or tranquillisers used in darting an animal for capture, assessment and/or transport have restricted possession and trade laws. Anyone using a dart gun or tranquilliser must be appropriately licensed and under direct veterinary supervision.

To protect animal welfare, it is illegal to contravene or fail to comply with veterinary directions or requirements. Requirements under other legislation, including the Wildlife Act, must still be met.



Euthanasia of injured wildlife

Euthanasia of injured wildlife is sometimes necessary to prevent further pain, trauma or suffering of an animal that is unlikely to survive in the wild, even with extensive treatment and recovery. Humane and safe methods of euthanasia must be used.

Under law, registered veterinarians have the power to euthanise animals in certain circumstances, such as if they reasonably believe that:

- a The animal is likely to cause serious injury or death to any person or animal, or
- b The animal's condition would cause continued suffering if it remained alive.

This includes where the wildlife:

Is suffering from unreasonable and/or incurable pain, distress, trauma, sickness or injury

Has lost essential limbs or function of limbs, including tails

Has permanent vital sensory loss (hearing, sight, smell, taste)

Has an incurable (can be treated but not cured) infectious disease or chronic illness

Has permanent damage to their nervous system

Is likely to require extensive surgery to survive

Is unable to adjust to temporary care

Is likely to require extended periods in captivity to be rehabilitated

Is unlikely to survive or integrate in the wild

Is under-developed young (e.g. un-furred young or 'pinkies').

Extensive periods of care may cause wildlife to develop dependence on humans, display unnatural behaviours, or have difficulty competing for territory upon release. If the animal cannot be released back into the wild, humane euthanasia is necessary.

It is inhumane to take an animal from the wild and keep it in captivity permanently.



The role of wildlife rehabilitators

A wildlife rehabilitator is a wildlife foster carer (person) or wildlife shelter authorised under the *Wildlife Act 1975* to rehabilitate sick, injured or orphaned wildlife. They are sometimes referred to as wildlife carers or foster carers.

The authorisations are issued by the Conservation Regulator to ensure sick, injured or orphaned wildlife receive appropriate care before being released back to their home range in the wild.

Animals received by wildlife rehabilitators must be assessed within 48 hours by a registered veterinary practitioner. Phone consultations are appropriate in some cases, such as in remote areas where in-person consultations are not practical.

Wildlife cannot be kept long-term and is not the property of the wildlife rehabilitator.

If a veterinarian is concerned about the level of care being provided, the likelihood of release, or capacity to provide appropriate care, they may refuse to release wildlife to the wildlife rehabilitator and contact the Conservation Regulator.

If this occurs, the veterinarian may:

- Allocate the wildlife to a known, appropriate carer if rehabilitation is achievable
- Transfer the wildlife to a wildlife veterinarian for further assessment
- Humanely euthanise the animal.

Wildlife rehabilitators are subject to conditions attached to their authorisation. Further information on these conditions is available in our **Wildlife Rehabilitator Authorisation Guide**.

The **Victorian Wildlife Rehabilitation Guidelines** have also been developed to support wildlife rehabilitators adhere to these conditions.

We encourage wildlife rehabilitators and veterinarians to develop partnerships and work together to deliver the most appropriate outcomes for sick, injured, orphaned or abandoned wildlife.



WILDLIFE ACT 1975

legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/wildlife-act-1975/129



WILDLIFE REHABILITATOR AUTHORISATION GUIDE

vic.gov.au/wildlife-rehabilitator-authorisation-guide



VICTORIAN WILDLIFE REHABILITATION GUIDELINES

wildlife.vic.gov.au/victorian-wildlife-rehabilitation-guidelines/victorian-wildlife-rehabilitation-guidelines



Still unsure? We're here to help

If you're still unsure about veterinary care for wildlife, please reach out to us for a discussion of your individual circumstances by calling **136 186** or emailing us.



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