Keeping Iowa Wildlife Wild

Iowa Association of Naturalists

Iowa Wildlife and People Series
Iowa Association of Naturalists

The Iowa Association of Naturalists (IAN) is a nonprofit organization of people interested in promoting the development of skills and education within the art of interpreting the natural and cultural environment. IAN was founded in 1978 and may be contacted by writing the Conservation Education Center, 2473 160th Rd., Guthrie Center, IA 50115, 515/747-8383.

Iowa Wildlife And People Series

Students need to understand basic ecological concepts in order to understand the interconnecting roles of people, wildlife, and the environment. These interactions have a profound effect on attitudes and behaviors of people toward wildlife. The Iowa Association of Naturalists has created this series of booklets that offer a basic understandable overview of the interactions of wildlife and people and basic ecological concepts. These booklets will assist educators in teaching students about the basic concepts of ecology, exploring the ways wildlife and people interact, and clarifying some misconceptions about Iowa wildlife. The eight booklets in this series are:

- *Iowa Wildlife Management* (IAN-401)
- *Keeping Iowa Wild* (IAN-402)
- *Misconceptions About Iowa Wildlife* (IAN-403)
- *State Symbols of Iowa* (IAN-404)
- *Iowa Food Webs and other Interrelationships* (IAN-405)
- *Natural Cycles in Iowa* (IAN-406)
- *Iowa Biodiversity* (IAN-407)
- *Adapting To Iowa* (IAN-408)

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Text: Kay Neumann
Illustrations: Mark Müller
Design and Layout: Dennis Melchert, Ames Best Communications, Ames, Iowa
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Keeping Iowa Wildlife Wild

What it means to be wild

Wildness is difficult to define. There is not a clear, black-and-white definition of wild. To understand wildness and a wild animal, it may be helpful to consider some other types of animals that are not wild.

**Domestic** animals have been selectively bred by humans for some specific purpose. Pigs, chickens, and cows provide people with food products. Chickens have been bred to be either reliable egg-layers or fast-growers which produce large breast muscles. Dairy cows have been bred for their milk production. Food is not the only use humans have for domestic animals. Sheep and llamas are sheered for their wool, and horses and oxen are trained and bred to help people with work. Domestic breeds of dogs, cats, and hamsters have been developed for companionship, and trained hunting dogs and racing pigeons provide people with hours of recreation.
All domestic animals depend on human attention and care for their survival. People meet domestic animals’ day-to-day needs by providing food, water, shelter, and an appropriate amount of space. Domestic animals usually are not allowed to roam free but are confined by fences, leashes, or buildings to give humans control over their movements.

Wild animals provided the original gene pool for domestic animals. Dogs, for example, have their ancestry linked to wolves. Wild boars and javelina contributed to the genetics of hogs. All domestic animals are linked genetically to ancient wild ancestors.

Some wild animals are called tame, and some domestic animals are called feral. These animals form the gray area between wild and domestic. Humans have been able to take animals from the wild and tame them (condition them to accept and tolerate human presence). This is the beginning of domestication. Elephants have not been selectively bred to do work, but humans can tame and train them to do certain tasks, just as parrots can be trained to mimic words. These animals, while in captivity, depend on people to feed and take care of them. However, they may still have the skills necessary to survive in their proper habitat in the wild.

**Feral** animals are domestic animals that have escaped human confinement and have been able to survive in the wild without any human help. Feral and outdoor house cats have become such efficient hunters that they are threatening songbird and game bird populations in some areas. Escaped burros and horses have reproduced so well in the wild that their numbers are causing destruction of
native vegetation on some western ranges. Feral animals cause imbalances in the wild systems they enter when they take what they need to survive from a habitat that evolved without them.

Wild animals are born or hatched in the wild and have not been selectively bred for any human purpose. They are predators, prey, scavengers, or decomposers—players in a natural system that has evolved over hundreds of thousands of years to work together in a complex and dynamic balance. Some wild animals have been captive-bred for reintroduction to the wild, as in the case of endangered species like the peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) and the California condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*). Special techniques are used in the captive care of these animals to retain their wildness.

Wild animals have their own social systems and behaviors that help them to cope with their surroundings. For example, wolves (*Canis lupus*) and Harris hawks (*Parabuteo unicinctus*) hunt most successfully in packs or family groups and have complex ways of communicating within their group. Crows, pheasants, and quail feed in flocks, with more eyes to watch for predators. Black bears (*Ursus americanus*) live solitary and independent lives, usually only spending time with other bears as cubs or during the mating season. All of these different strategies maximize that animal's survival and reproductive success.
Wild animals do not need people to survive, but some types of wild animals take advantage of human lifestyles and may become partially dependent upon some of the things people provide. For instance, wild birds readily use bird feeders, rats and mice take advantage of the shelter of buildings, raccoons cannot resist the temptation of food scraps in a garbage can, and skunks frequently hunt for grubs in urban lawns. The number of these animals might be smaller without the influence of human activity, but the existence of their species is not dependent on humans. The survival of a wild animal depends on its own ability to find food and adequate shelter, to evade predators, and to resist disease. A wild animal has no consciously-imposed human limitations on its freedom of movement or on its day-to-day choices.

Wildlife and the law

The first thing to keep in mind when dealing with wild animals is that most of them are protected by laws. Wildlife belongs to state and federal governments, and it is illegal to keep most wild animals as pets. Some exceptions are the European starling (Sturnus vulgaris) and the house sparrow (Passer domesticus). These are the only bird species that are not protected. They are not native to North America and compete with many of our native songbirds for nest sites and food. Garter snakes (Thamnophis sirtalis) and timber rattlesnakes (Crotalus horridus) are the reptilian exceptions to legal protection.
Mammals which are endangered, threatened, or belong to a taxonomic family that includes a game animal have legal protection. This means that most moles, pocket gophers, and mice are not protected, while chipmunks and ground squirrels (both belonging to the squirrel family) are protected. The only mammal family that is an exception to this law is the Vespertilionidae (the bats). All bats are protected. Insects that are not endangered or threatened also are not protected by law.

**Game** species (animals that are legally hunted or trapped such as pheasants, ducks, raccoon, turkey, and deer) may be harvested only at certain times of the year under strict license and limit requirements. They are protected the rest of the year. To display taxidermy mounts of game animals, you need proof that the animal was killed legally (e.g. keep on file hunting licenses and stamps). A fishing license is required to harvest turtles, amphibians, and mussels in Iowa; there are limits on the amount you may harvest. A commercial turtle license is required to harvest more than 100 pounds of turtle or to sell any of these animals. There are many rare and, thus, protected species of turtles, amphibians, and mussels. These are listed in the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Fishing Regulations booklet. Great care must be taken to correctly identify the species you harvest. Snapping turtles (*Chelydra serpentina*) and bullfrogs (*Rana catesbeiana*) are the species most people harvest for food.

**Birds**

Pheasant, quail, gray partridge, duck, coot, geese (Canada, white-fronted, brant, and snow), rail (Virginia and sora), snipe, pigeon, turkey, crow, ruffed grouse, and woodcock

**Mammals and furbearers**

Deer, rabbit (jack and cottontail), squirrel (fox and gray), woodchuck, raccoon, opossum, fox (red and gray), coyote, mink, muskrat, weasel, striped skunk, badger, and beaver

**Fish, reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates**

All fish, frogs, salamanders, turtles, and mussels that are not threatened or endangered
Nongame species (animals that are not hunted or trapped) include all bats, most birds, and some fish, reptiles, and amphibians. Their eggs, nests, young, and body parts are protected year-round. All nongame bird species are protected by both state and federal laws. Federal laws are in place to protect birds that may cross state and national borders during migration or dispersal. Special permits are required when dealing with nongame animals or their carcasses.

Unknown to many people, it is illegal to possess seemingly abandoned or fallen nests, eggs, or molted nongame bird feathers. Some bird nests that appear abandoned to a person may still be useful to the birds. Some birds reuse nests from one year to the next, or the location of last year's successful nest may help a bird choose a location for this year's new nest. Nests and feathers also pose a law enforcement problem. A conservation officer cannot tell the difference between a nest picked up after having been blown out of a tree and one emptied of eggs or young and stolen out of a tree. It also is difficult to tell the difference between a molted feather left on the woodland floor and one pulled from an illegally-killed bird. So, to protect these animals, it is illegal to possess nongame bird feathers or any bird's eggs or nests without a special permit.
These laws and classifications are well-thought-out by biologists and law enforcement personnel. The season and limit requirements for harvesting game animals are usually made more restrictive if data indicate declines in their populations. Some animals are protected because their populations are already threatened or endangered from habitat destruction or pollution. An animal also may be classified as nongame because it has a low reproductive rate and a hunting season on this type of animal may have serious negative effects on its population. There are also cultural reasons that some animals are not hunted; for example, some species traditionally may not be used in this country for food or its fur.

There are very few salvaged animal parts that may be taken or kept without the collector being issued a license or special permit. Since rules and regulations change frequently, both at the state and federal level, it is best to check with a local conservation officer about the legalities of a specific item brought home or into the classroom. Special permits can be issued to agencies and organizations, including schools, to salvage animals killed accidentally. The pelts, taxidermy specimens, feathers, or parts of these animals then may be used for educational purposes. Schools may apply for state and federal salvage permits. Usually private individuals cannot qualify for these types of permits.

For application procedures, contact the Iowa Department of Natural Resources License Bureau, Wallace State Office Building, Des Moines, IA 50319-0034 (515/281-5638) and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) - Law Enforcement, P.O. Box 45 Federal Building, Fort Snelling, MN 55111-0045 (612/725-3776).

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**Permit information**

Special license definitions from the Code of Iowa (Chapter 481A) and the IDNR Commissioners' Rules (Chapter 111).

**Scientific collector's permits** allow permittees to collect state-protected birds, nests, eggs, mammals, reptiles, fish, amphibians, invertebrates, plants, or parts thereof for scientific research projects approved by the IDNR.

**Wildlife salvage permits** allow permittees to salvage state-protected birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, fish, or invertebrates (all of which have died from natural causes or accidents) for educational purposes. Special approval is required for the salvage of abandoned bird nests.

**Educational project permits** allow permittees to possess live state-protected birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, fish, or invertebrates for educational purposes and zoological displays. There are limitations on the numbers and species which can be kept.

**Wildlife rehabilitation permits** allow permittees to take and temporarily possess orphaned or injured wildlife for rehabilitation, with the intent to return the animal to its natural habitat as soon as possible. There is an apprenticeship requirement for this permit.

- A separate federal collector’s, salvage, education, or rehabilitation permit is required when dealing with migratory birds. Under The Migratory Bird Treaty Act, all birds are considered migratory, except: house sparrows, starlings, upland game birds, and pigeons.

- Annual reports on permitted activities are required. Records and facilities must be available for inspection by officers of the IDNR or USFWS during reasonable hours.
People do not make good substitute parents for wild animal babies. Often when people illegally try to raise wild animals, they are unsuccessful and the babies die or develop defective bones and nervous systems due to malnutrition. If the animal lives, it usually cannot be released back to the wild. Wild animals raised by humans usually do not have the needed survival skills taught by the wild parents.

Young birds may become imprinted on humans. Imprinting is a complex behavioral process in which hatchling birds gain their identity from the first moving object they see. In a normal situation, this object would be their parent. The process occurs during the first few weeks of life and varies with each species. A human-imprinted bird loses its fear of people and may even look for a human as a mate when it reaches adulthood. It may not be able to communicate properly with others of its own species and probably would not be able to reproduce in the wild.

Young mammals also go through an imprinting process and, if raised by humans, they will probably not be able to lead a normal wild life. Human-imprinted wild animals have little fear of people. As adults, these
animals may behave unpredictably or dangerously toward people. These animals usually must be euthanized (killed). In dealing with wild animals in trouble, it is best to contact licensed and knowledgeable professionals immediately.

In the spring of the year, young wild animals often are discovered by people. They may seem to be without a parent and usually cannot run or fly well enough to escape a person. If you find a young wild animal, leave it alone and determine if it really needs human assistance. Just as wild animals are different from humans in the structure of their social systems and in the ways they communicate, most wild animals have different strategies for raising their young.

There are many species that provide very little or no parental care for their young. Some reptiles, for instance, lay eggs underground in a warm, sunny spot, and the hatchlings are completely on their own from the moment they dig out of the nest. Some mice leave their just-born young nestled in an insulated nest. With other animals, once the young have enough fur or feathers to be able to thermoregulate (keep their body temperature constant), the mother may spend very little time with them, although she may be hidden nearby. This strategy may protect the young from predators by reducing the amount of scent at the nest or den. For some species, the parents may have to leave their young while the adults gather food.
Mother cottontail rabbits and white-tailed deer spend only brief periods of time, spaced out over the day, nursing their young. The rest of the time, the young instinctively know to rest, lie still, and remain hidden. Fawns and baby rabbits (kits) are supposed to be alone most of the time. If you find a rabbit kit or a fawn, keep your distance, so you don’t frighten them or draw predators to the area. Leave them where they are. They are most likely being watched by a parent from a distance.

Most animal parents will not reject young that have been touched by people. While it is true that mammals are dependent on a keen sense of smell, a young fox or coyote can be returned to its den without worry that the mother will reject it because of human scent on the kit or pup. Wild animal parents are much like humans in their instinctive parenting behaviors. If a child had been lost in the woods and was found after having been sprayed by a skunk, the parents would not reject the child simply because he or she smelled bad. Wild animal parents react similarly to the return of one of their young.
Birds of prey

Birds of prey (raptors) are white and downy when they are one to three weeks old and are called eyasses. An eyas found on the ground needs to be replaced in its nest; parent birds seem to feed young at this growth stage only when they are located in the nest. Replacing an eyas in the nest may require an experienced tree climber with appropriate safety equipment, including a helmet. The parent birds will not understand the good intentions of the intruder at their nest and might try to drive the person away by striking the climber’s head with their talons (toenails). Raptor nests are usually located 50 or more feet up in the trees. A call to a county conservation board, licensed wildlife rehabilitator, or IDNR conservation officer should be the immediate course of action.

Raptor eyasses grow quickly, reaching their adult size by the time they are six weeks old. The siblings are soon too large for the nest. They then become branchers, a term used to describe hawks and owls that are old enough to walk and climb but cannot fly. These young birds climb around in the branches near their nest with their parents still feeding and protecting them. Wind or a misjudgment of their own abilities may cause branchers to fall to the ground. Most of the time, they climb back up to a safe perch or the parents care for them on the ground.
A brancher on the ground is more susceptible to predators and to human intervention. If a healthy, feisty young hawk or owl with feathers is found on the ground, it can be moved to a safe branch near the trunk of a tree. The young bird then will be protected from predators and hidden out of sight of other birds, such as crows, that may mob or harass it. Be careful and wear leather gloves to move even this young bird. If you are unequipped or uncertain as to how to move the brancher to safety, it may be left to find its way to a safe location in a tree.

Songbirds

When songbird nestlings leave the nest, or fledge, they already may be able to fly or are very close to having flight abilities. Fully-feathered songbirds will be cared for on the ground by their parents for a few days as they learn to fly. If found on the ground, these flightless young can be placed in a safe location in a tree for protection from predators. Songbirds at younger stages need to be replaced in their nests. Songbird nests are usually accessible with a stepladder. Although the parent birds may put on quite a loud fuss, they probably don’t pose enough of a threat to warrant a helmet. Most species of birds do not have a very well-developed sense of smell, and young returned to the nest will be readily accepted by the parents with no notice of human scent.
If you find a baby wild animal and are uncertain as to whether some help is needed, call your local county conservation board or IDNR conservation officer for professional advice. Many situations can be handled with information given by phone. If the animal does need assistance, these professionals should know a licensed wildlife rehabilitator to contact in your area.

Finding an injured wild animal

There are many hazards for wildlife in the human-altered environment. Powerlines, fences, vehicles, feral cats, pesticides, and even picture windows can cause injuries to wildlife. As a result, people sometimes find wild animals that are injured and need help.

Birds are often stunned or dazed and sometimes killed by flying into windows. They see grass, trees, and sky reflected in the glass and fly into it, perhaps thinking they are going to investigate a new area. Window collisions can be alleviated by hanging owl or falcon silhouettes in large windows. The birds may think that the area is being patrolled by a predator, something they would like to avoid. Closing the curtains on windows that birds tend to fly into also helps to prevent collisions. Shades or netting can be placed over the window to reduce the reflectance of the glass. If you do find a small bird dazed from a window collision, place it in a brown paper sack, close the sack with a clothespin, and place the sack and bird in a warm, quiet area for an hour or two. This will allow the bird to recover its senses in a non-stressed environment. Release the bird when it appears to be standing up and looking or jumping around normally.
Other types of injuries may be more severe and require immediate attention from a licensed wildlife rehabilitator or licensed wildlife veterinarian. If an injured bird or reptile is found and a conservation officer or rehabilitator is unable to get to the animal immediately, you may be asked to secure it in a box until help arrives. Most rehabilitators are privately funded and do appreciate animals being transported to them so they may avoid travel expenses.

Most diseases and parasites that affect birds or reptiles are host or species-specific. This means it is highly unlikely that anything could be transmitted to a human handling the animal. Still, it is best to wear gloves to protect yourself when handling wild animals. The best way to temporarily house or transport most injured animals is to place them in a cardboard box with small air holes punched near the bottom of the box. Keeping the box in a warm, dark, quiet location until it can be transported will help reduce the stress on the animal inside.

Care and caution need to be used in handling raptors. They have sharp talons, strong feet, and hooked beaks. If a raptor does need to be handled, wear leather gloves to place a blanket or towel over the bird’s head and entire body. Reach down over the back of the bird to securely grab its legs. Place the bird in the box with the blanket for it to hold in its talons. Securely tape or rope shut the lid of the box. One common injury to birds is broken bones. To successfully repair a bone, immediate medical attention is needed. If bones begin to heal or tissue begins to die, chances of repairing the injury are slim. In many of these situations, the injuries are too severe and the animal may have to be euthanized.
Reptiles, being cold-blooded and very good at escaping, need to be kept warm and secure. They may be placed in a pillow case, tied shut with a string, and stored in a portable picnic cooler to protect them from temperature extremes. Sixty to seventy degrees Fahrenheit is a good temperature range for a nonhibernating reptile. The cooler should be opened every hour or so to add fresh air. Call a licensed rehabilitator, county conservation board office, or IDNR conservation officer as soon as possible; it is very important for the survival of an injured wild animal.

Finding an injured or sick wild mammal is uncommon. Injured mammals usually hide themselves until they die or a wound heals. A mammal that is found in close proximity to humans is probably too severely injured to hide or it may be diseased. There are diseases that can be transmitted to humans or their pets from sick wild mammals. For example, raccoon populations have disease cycles. Some years there seems to be a high incidence of raccoons with distemper. These animals are likely to be noticed by people, because they are out wandering around during the day (which is unusual for this nocturnal animal), seem unafraid of humans, and have glazed-over eyes. They will probably die.

Do not handle a sick or injured wild mammal. Raccoons, coyotes, foxes, muskrats, and opossums all have sharp teeth and will bite if frightened, threatened, or cornered. Deer may not bite, but they can cause severe damage with strong, swift kicks. Keep children and pets away from wild mammals that are acting strangely, and call your local conservation officer to properly and safely handle the situation.
As more and more wild places are developed for human uses, some wild animals adapt to these human-altered conditions, creating more opportunities for human and wildlife interactions. As people move out of cities into secluded country and suburban homes, they are moving into the wild animals’ spaces. Living in a natural area, people will be confronted with an occasional bat in the attic, snake hibernating in the basement, woodchuck making a den under the tool shed, or raccoon investigating the garbage. People can learn to share their yards with wild living things, without the animals posing health or safety threats. Some tolerance of wild animals in closer proximity may be necessary in some situations until other coexisting solutions can be worked out.
Relocation

Animals that homeowners see as problems may be live-trapped and relocated with permission from a local conservation officer. There is very little information available, however, as to the survival of these animals after such a move. The animal may be placed in an already-occupied and totally unfamiliar territory. It may not be able to find enough food, shelter from weather and predators, and a water source quickly enough to survive. The relocated animal may negatively affect the wildlife already occupying the release area by displacing them or transmitting a disease. And another animal may immediately move into the niche emptied by the relocated animal. Some states, such as Pennsylvania and Vermont, will not allow animals to be relocated. If the landowner wishes them to be removed, they must be euthanized. The best solution for that animal may be to allow it to remain in its own territory and have the humans make adjustments. Some effort at excluding the animal from a building is often a successful solution. Providing animals with quality backyard habitat, thus luring them away from the tool shed, attic, or basement, is another option.
Eviction

It is sometimes necessary to remove wild animals from your home. Care should be taken to protect you and the animal being evicted. Changes should be made to exclude the animal from re-entering the house. For example, holes and cracks in foundations can be repaired in the summer to prevent snakes from entering in the fall to hibernate.

Bats found in the living quarters of a house are usually young of the year that are lost and looking for an escape route. Close the doors to the room containing the bat and open a window in that room. The bat will usually find its way out, following the air currents. Bats are less likely to transmit rabies than feral, unvaccinated cats. In fact, less than 0.5% of bats contract rabies. So you do not need to be overly fearful of the animal; just use care and common sense. If the bat needs to be trapped, wear leather gloves and wait for the bat to land. Trap the bat under a jar or can and slide a piece of cardboard between the jar opening and the wall or floor. Carry the bat outside for release.

Bats are protected by state law and every effort should be made to release them unharmed from a building. However, bats found in buildings occupied by humans are not protected under this law unless they are
the endangered Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*). Bats hibernating in an attic should be left alone until spring. When the bats become active again, find their entrance hole and plug it after the bats have left for the evening to feed. Avoid plugging the hole during the months of June or July when flightless young may be present. Shutting out the adults at this time will cause starvation of the young.

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**Invitation**

Providing habitat for wildlife near a person’s home can be an enjoyable and beneficial activity. Building bat and bird houses can give these animals alternatives to a person’s house and will keep efficient mosquito-eaters in the area. A bat can catch and eat up to 600 insects (including mosquitoes) in only one hour of hunting! A snake *hibernaculum* (strategically placed logs and rocks) can provide alternatives to a person’s basement and still keep these rodent-eating predators in the area. A well-placed owl decoy may keep woodpeckers from investigating house siding for insects. There are many alternatives to continually trapping and relocating animals that may be inconveniencing people. Wildlife and humans can peacefully coexist. Tolerance and creativity can make the challenges enjoyable.

A snake *hibernaculum* can provide an alternative habitat to your basement.
Many times, even though an injured wild animal receives prompt expert attention, the injury may be irreparable. In this case, a choice must be made. Should the animal be euthanized or placed in an educational facility or captive breeding program? First, a determination is made as to the suitability of the animal for display, interpretive programming, or captive breeding.

Endangered or rare species may be able to be placed in breeding projects. This would be a first-choice option for a rare animal, allowing it to make a valuable contribution to its species. However, the injury may be so impairing to the animal that it would not do well in captivity. For example, a bald eagle or any bird that has lost a foot will eventually develop sores and infections on the one foot it is forced to stand on continually. If the animal cannot regain and maintain a stable, healthy condition in captivity, it should be euthanized.

Some species, such as goshawks (Accipiter gentilis) and sharp-shinned hawks (Accipiter striatus), do not adjust well to captivity and may actually die from the stress of being viewed by people. Other types of animals may survive the stress, but they will have to tolerate a poor quality of life in an exhibit situation. Wild mammals, such as coyotes and foxes that are accustomed to roaming large territories, may pace incessantly in a caged situation and may react with fear each time a human approaches. Game farm-bred individuals of these species are available if an educational display is necessary.
These captive-bred mammals are familiar with limited freedom of movement and can adjust better to a caged situation. Permanently-crippled wild mammals that are not an endangered species are usually given their freedom through euthanasia.

Each permanently-crippled bird or reptile needs to be evaluated individually to determine its suitability for display or interpretive programming. Some states, such as Missouri, only allow human-imprinted birds to be used for education. Human-imprinted birds do not fear people and do not suffer as much stress from program situations as do non-imprinted birds. The wild animal considered for programming needs to tolerate human presence well and needs to be able to adjust to life in a cage.

Finally, after all these determinations and considerations have been made, there must be a quality, licensed captive breeding or educational facility available to accept the animal. The facility must have quality species-specific caging available and meet the professional standards developed for keeping display and program animals. The facility also needs to be committed to the long-term costs of food and staff time needed to properly care for the animals.

These are all decisions made by humans trying to do the most humane thing for the animal. It must be understood that humane is defined from a human point of view. It is difficult for people to imagine how a wild animal would die in its own environment, whether from starvation, being eaten by a predator, or freezing in an ice storm. Which would the animal choose – dying quickly by going into a deep sleep in strange and frightening surroundings or hiding for days in a familiar woods with familiar sights, sounds, and smells as
starvation or predation ended the injured animal’s life? This is an impossible question for humans to answer. In America, most people agree that euthanizing irreparably injured wild animals is a humane way of resolving the situation. In the Middle East, when a falconer’s bird is injured and cannot be mended to fly again, the bird is taken to a familiar hunting ground and released, presumably to die on its own. Obviously, different human cultures have different ways of defining humane.

Closing thoughts

Wild animals do not need people to survive and have developed complex social systems and other adaptations to meet their survival needs and reproduce in their environment. There are laws regarding the care, taking, and use of most wild animals and their associated parts. Hunting and fishing licenses are required for harvesting game species, and special permits may be issued to salvage nongame animals. Our laws are designed to help keep wildlife wild.

If an injured wild animal is found or if you have questions about a possibly orphaned animal, contact your local county conservation board (their phone numbers can be found in the phone book), IDNR conservation officer, or local licensed rehabilitator. The latter two contacts may be found by contacting the IDNR - License Bureau (515/281-5638). These people are professionals who are trained to handle these types of situations and want to keep wildlife wild.
People often have interactions with wildlife in their homes and yards. People can learn to deal effectively with uninvited visitors and to enjoy sharing their outdoor space with resident and visiting wildlife. Providing backyard wildlife habitat can lead to many positive close encounters with wild animals. The more interactions people have with wildlife, the more connected they seem to become to their environment. These interactions help people to understand the importance of keeping wildlife wild.

Useful resources


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