

Wildlife Rehabilitators of North Carolina

**BEGINNER BASICS****Perform a Thorough Exam**

By Jean Chamberlain

After examining the eyes, ears and mouth of the animal, proceed to examine the rest of the body. Feel along the body for general muscle condition. Is the animal thin? Look for cuts, bruises, punctures, and bare spots. Is there any swelling? Is the abdomen distended? Note any painful response to the touch. Look for lameness. Determine whether the animal can use all limbs normally. Extend each limb and check for muscle tears and tendon problems. Feel the bones for fractures and dislocations. Look at the feet, checking the pads and toes for wounds and abrasions. Also, check the anus for abnormal discharge, colored or smelly stools.

For your first few exams proceed carefully, making sure to perform a thorough exam. If you find something unusual on one side of the body, compare your findings to the same area on the other side. With practice you will learn what is normal and become skilled at performing the exam quickly.



*This is the third and last article in the series on Intake and Physical Exams. See the December 2009 issue for the first article titled 'Practicing principles of the physical exam' and the March 2010 issue for the second article titled 'Take it from the Top'.*