

A wildlife rehabilitation permit is issued by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission to allow a citizen to take possession of an animal for the purpose of rehabilitating it and returning it to the wild. For many years North Carolina has had more permitted rehabilitators than any other state in the nation. This was partly due to the fact that it was easy to obtain the permit. In recent years the permit process has become more structured. Currently to obtain a permit the applicant is expected to have some knowledge of wildlife care. They are expected to apply to rehabilitate only those animals for which they can provide good care.

Today there are many people in North Carolina who are very involved in the rehabilitation of animals, some as an extensive hobby and many others, full time, as a career. Some of these individuals rehabilitate hundreds of animals a year.

There are non-profits, large and small, that advertise that they provide care for wildlife. These organizations provide care for thousands of animals each year. They solicit donations from those that bring them animals, from the public at large and from corporations, and they apply for grants to support their work. Some of these wildlife rehabilitation organizations have many volunteers who work together at a center, others belong to local organizations where they can network and help one another. Today there are centers that have full-time paid staff members. A few centers also have veterinarians on staff.

The number of animals that are presented for rehabilitation increases each year. As man develops more land, reduces the habitat for wildlife and has more contact with wildlife, the need for qualified rehabilitators grows. As we become more and more urban a larger portion of the public is becoming more involved with wildlife and wildlife concerns. More people are seeking rehabilitators to care for injured animals. When the public turns an animal over to a rehabilitator, they expect that the rehabilitator is trained to provide the animal with proper care.

Wildlife rehabilitators do more than just care for animals. They deal with the public on all kinds of wildlife concerns. Veterinarians, nature and science centers, animal control and the police departments refer people to rehabilitators daily for help solving a wide variety of problems. Citizens regularly ask rehabilitators how to keep raccoons out of trashcans, remove squirrels from attics, and skunks from under sheds. They deal with owls trapped in chimneys, turtles and snakes in the yard and opossums in garages. Some rehabilitation organizations have a hotline and take calls from the public. Wildlife Rehab, Inc in Winston-Salem, for example, handled more than 1600 calls last year and statewide rehabilitators answer tens of thousands of wildlife calls each year. Many are about animals needing help; many others are from citizens seeking information or assistance with animal problems.

Many wildlife rehabilitators and rehabilitation organizations are also involved in presenting wildlife and environmental education programs to schools, church groups, scout troops and at various state and local parks.

As people undertake rehabilitation of large numbers of animals, it is important that they have training in additional areas. They must understand the risk of zoonotic diseases and the protocols to reduce that risk. They must understand the problems inherent in the translocation of animals. They must understand the importance of releasing animals in their home territory. Many people become rehabilitators without any concept of these crucial issues. These people need training with an emphasis on safety: safety for the animals, the rehabilitators, the community, and the state of NC.

We realize that NCWRC historically may have felt that requiring training for wildlife rehabilitators wasn't necessary. In the past that may have been true. We feel the need has changed. Training is needed because of the increased number of animals requiring care, increased involvement of the community in wildlife problems, the expanding role of rehabilitators and an increase need for an emphasis on safety. WRNC is willing to partner NCWRC to bring core training to all wildlife rehabilitators.

Full wildlife rehabilitation training classes are already in place in several areas of the state. A 30+ hour course is taught twice a year at Forsyth Technical Community College as part of their continuing education

program. Another course is taught in Asheville and a third in Charlotte. The wildlife rehabilitation centers also hold training sessions for their volunteers.

In our previous proposal WRNC offered to develop and provide training for new and currently permitted rehabilitators. We proposed that we would develop a training course for the current rehabilitators during the last half of 2003. We understand that, at the time of our initial proposal, WRCNC may not have been confident that WRNC could provide this training. Even though our initial proposal was rejected, WRNC has gone ahead and developed the half-day course. We refer to it as our refresher course. This course was offered for the first time at our symposium this winter. More than 60 rehabilitators took the course. WRNC is offering the course across the state in Charlotte, Raleigh, Winston-Salem, Greenville, Wilmington and Asheville during the next few months. Since the main purpose of WRNC is to provide educational opportunities for rehabilitators and educators, we are committed to the idea that all rehabilitators must be provided basic training.

WRNC is keen to provide the training for all new rehabilitators. We are in good position to do so. Our membership is solid and comes from all parts of the state. We have held two successful symposiums, each attended by more than 100 rehabilitators, demonstrating our ability to put together a program such as this. We have an eager and long standing willingness to help implement responsible and safe rehabilitation. Among our members are rehabilitation experts and teachers who would develop and present a quality rehabilitation course.

We propose that *new* rehabilitators be required to attend a 2-day class and subsequently pass a test, before they are issued a permit. WRNC offers to develop and administer such a training program. WRNC would organize meetings of those members that are currently presenting rehabilitation instruction in order to compile a course outline for this basic rehabilitation course. Each applicant could take one of the courses offered by rehabilitation organizations in the state or the new WRNC course. WRNC would produce a manual for this basic rehabilitation course and coordinate the teachers who would teach the classes. Class content would be submitted to the NC Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) for its approval prior to instituting this proposal.

WRNC offers to develop the test and a manual containing questions and answers that will be used for the test. This manual would be provided to applicants for study purposes. WRNC is willing to administer the test if NCWRC prefers. Our intent is to implement this training program in a way that raises the standard of rehabilitation in North Carolina at no additional cost to the state.