**What is a Wildlife Rehabilitation Mentor?**

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A wildlife rehabilitation mentor is an experienced licensed wildlife rehabilitator who guides and trains a person who is learning the skills of caring for and treating sick, orphaned or injured wildlife. The person in training will hold an apprentice license with the state as they work towards the achievement of an independent wildlife rehabilitation licensure.

**Wildlife Rehabilitation Mentor Must Have**

**Experience –** In North Carolina a mentor is required to have a minimum of two years of wildlife rehabilitation experience to be allowed to mentor an apprentice per the Wildlife Resources Commission. One who has had many years of experience and/or one who has had a consistent flow of wildlife intakes will naturally have a larger skillset to pull from when mentoring an apprentice. Extra training such as attending wildlife seminars or classes is also a plus when evaluating the range of one’s abilities to mentor.

**Time –** In addition to making time to care for their own caseload of rehab patients, a mentor must also set aside time to talk with their apprentice(s). They should be available to answer questions within a time efficient manner as the lives and health of the animals are often time sensitive and an apprentice will need a quick response to ensure the best possible outcome for their patient(s). While sometimes responses can be short and to the point, a mentor should also be prepared to be engaged in more lengthy discussions and teaching moments with their apprentice.

**Commitment –** Anyone considering mentoring an apprentice in North Carolina should expect to be committed to the apprentice for at least 12 months as this is what is required by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. Due to a variety of circumstances, it is possible that the apprentice may take longer than 12 months to acquire the skills needed to be providing independent wildlife rehabilitation. Therefore, a potential mentor should be aware that there is a possibility of being asked by the apprentice to continue the mentor/apprentice relationship for longer than 12 months.

**Permits –** The apprentice license in North Carolina allows the apprentice to work with rabbits, opossums, and squirrels. Therefore, the mentor should have a license to rehabilitate small mammals. All other species not covered by the small mammals license will have different requirements which can be found through the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission website or the US Fish and Wildlife website.

**Good communication skills that include the ability to:**

* Give constructive feedback in a positive manner
* Be honest and realistic with expectations
* Patiently handle challenging situations
* Problem solve
* Encourage teamwork and networking with other rehabilitators
* Plan, prepare, and organize
* Recognize when the apprentice is frustrated or overwhelmed and help them with stress management strategies
* Recognize when a teaching style change is needed and implement that change
* Listen to the apprentice and respect them as a colleague
* Allow the apprentice to try different methods for rehab if the methods are supported by good evidence and have been proven to show success
* Use a variety of communication methods (phone calls, text messages, Facetime calls, pre recorded videos, in person visits, etc)

**Duties of a Wildlife Rehabilitation Mentor**

* Teach how to appropriately assess animals upon intake
* Teach appropriate evaluation and treatment methods for a variety of injuries at different severity levels in wildlife of ages “newborn, young, juvenile, and adult”
* Teach appropriate methods of successfully raising orphaned wildlife
* Teach how to respond to phone calls from the public regarding a wild animal in need of assistance
* Teach normal behavior of a variety of wildlife to know when the animals in question are actually in need of help versus needing to stay put
* Teach how to keep documentation of rehab patients as it complies with licensure requirements
* Teach proper husbandry of rabbits, opossums, and squirrels and provide guidance to information on the minimum standard caging requirements as well as where to purchase cages or how to approach building cages
* Teach proper diet and nutritional facts for rabbits, opossums, and squirrels as well as discuss economical ways to achieve meeting diet requirements
* Teach proper medications for each species as they relate to specific injuries causing need for medication(s).
* Provide guidance in using wildlife formularies
* Provide guidance on how to appropriately communicate with the veterinarian regarding medications and encourage independent communication between the apprentice and the veterinarian
* Provide guidance in how to look for growth or improvement of the animal(s) while in rehab as well as how to detect regression and decline in health status and determine if changes need to be made as a result of growth or decline
* Provide guidance in recognizing when euthanasia is needed
* Provide guidance in recognizing when the animal is ready for release and how to find legal and appropriate release sites
* Provide information regarding available training opportunities such as wildlife seminars or classes as well as provide other helpful resources (articles, websites, etc) to promote and encourage self-initiated research and continued education when the apprentice receives independent licensure
* Provide education on laws and regulations regarding public and animal safety as it relates to viewing or showing of rehab animals
* Provide support and different levels of scaffolding methods (modeling, prompting, etc) until the apprentice reaches full independence

**Benefits of Being a Mentor**

* Reinforces skills that the mentor has already obtained
* Ensures that the mentor as a wildlife rehabilitator is continuing to learn new rehabilitation methods as science changes and progresses
* Increases the number of wild animals that will be saved and returned to the wild
* Provides more geographical areas across North Carolina with trained rehabilitators
* Reduces the workload and overcrowding of wildlife needing rehabilitation in one specific area
* Increases a network of rehabilitators
* Provides a sense of gratification by helping and watching another individual grow in wildlife rehabilitation knowledge and experience

**Concerns of Being a Mentor**

**Is a mentor expected to have all the answers? –** A wildlife rehabilitator mentor is not expected to have all the answers to every question that is asked by the apprentice. However, a mentor should have access to a network of other rehabilitators as well as other resources that can be utilized in obtaining an answer to the question.

**Is my personal wildlife rehabilitation license at risk? –** If the apprentice breaks laws as set forth by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, they are at risk of losing their apprentice licensure. However, the mentor is not at risk of losing their license unless the mentor was aware of the unlawful acts that were occurring and did not report the apprentice to the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission and/or try to stop them from occurring.

\**If you are unsure if your apprentice has done anything unlawful or you have concerns regarding the legality of their practice, please contact the NC Wildlife Resources Commission at 919-707-0132.*

**Is a mentor expected to pay for the apprentice’s supplies or provide caging?** - A mentor is not required to pay for an apprentice’s supplies or provide caging. However, if an apprentice trains at a wildlife rehabilitation facility, it is possible that supplies and caging housed at the facility may be used. An apprentice should always be ready to purchase their own supplies and caging when working from their home.