

Wild Animals and the Veterinary Practice: Obligations under the Law

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If a client or employee brings stray or injured wildlife into a veterinary practice, California state law allows for treatment to stabilize the animal. But the law also requires the practice to turn the animal over to designated wildlife rehabilitation centers under certain circumstances.

What should I do if I find, or a client brings me, an injured or orphaned wild animal?

California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 679, states that the public has 48 hours to contact the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) or a licensed rehabilitator to place an injured or orphaned wild animal. Veterinary practices must also comply with this regulation if they are not a permitted wildlife rehabilitation facility, or working directly with a licensed rehabilitator. CDFW recognizes that there are times when a wild animal may need intensive care for more than 48 hours. The decisions for care are made on a case-by-case basis, but this needs to be coordinated with CDFW and/or a licensed wildlife rehabilitation facility. Additionally, as soon as the animal is stable, it shall be turned over to a licensed wildlife rehabilitation facility in accordance with the law.

If the animal is in critical or unstable condition, the California Business and Professions code, Section 4826.2 does permit the veterinary practice to render care to stabilize the animal.

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, a veterinarian, registered veterinary technician, or an unregistered assistant working under the supervision of a veterinarian, may provide veterinary care and treatment for any restricted animal.

This section also states that “veterinary care and treatment” does not include the boarding and care of a native, wild or exotic animal in the absence of veterinary care.

What if I am not sure about what species I am dealing with? How do I know if it is restricted, protected or endangered?

CDFW operates a Wildlife Investigations Lab with veterinarians available to discuss cases. The lab can be reached at: (916) 358-2790 or WILAB@wildlife.ca.gov

Additionally, the CDFW Wildlife Rehabilitation Program Coordinator, Ms. Nicole Carion, can be reached at 530-357-3986 or Nicole.Carion@wildlife.ca.gov to assist practices in determining what should happen with each case.

How can I find a wildlife rehabilitation facility?

A complete list of CDFW approved wildlife rehabilitation facilities can be found at:
<http://www.dfg.ca.gov/wildlife/WIL/rehab/facilities.html>

How can I become a licensed wildlife rehabilitator?

Wildlife rehabilitation permits are issued to facilities that provide minimum standard caging and must keep the housed wildlife isolated from people and domestic animals. These facilities must also demonstrate that they have the proper training and experience in wildlife rehabilitation. If a

veterinary practice is interested in obtaining a wildlife rehabilitation permit call the CDFW's Wildlife Rehabilitation Program Coordinator, Ms. Nicole Carion, at: 530-357-3986 or Nicole.Carion@wildlife.ca.gov

Receiving a wild animal into a practice can be a lasting memory for many practices. But make sure that the memory is all that you keep when the animal leaves. There are several laws and regulations that govern possession of wild animal parts (e.g., fur, feathers, bones and carcasses) and in many cases, a permit is required to do so.

For more information on treating wild animals, visit the CDFW at:
<http://www.dfg.ca.gov/wildlife/WIL/rehab/index.html>

or the AVMA for a printable version of a “Wildlife Decision Tree”:
https://www.avma.org/KB/Resources/Reference/wildlife/Pages/default.aspx?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=socmed