



Wildlife Rehabilitation College **WRC-SA**

LESSON 1. What is involved with Wildlife Rehabilitation

1.1 Overview

The evaluation of quality of life experienced by animals in captivity varies from person to person. Some argue that those keeping animals in captivity and feeding them regularly could in fact enhance the living quality of the species as it is not threatened by predation or other natural elements that might be detrimental to its survival. If an artificial life in captivity is worth living, then it would be helpful or beneficial to the animals to preserve their species. If that artificial life in captivity (constantly changing the species dynamics in human settlements and backyards) is not worth living, then preserving them in captivity becomes an injury and insult to each and every specimen.

There are a magnitude of reports on unsuccessful reintroduction efforts of un-scientific rehabilitated mammals which were caged “rehabilitated” in urban built-up areas, backyards and elsewhere.

In light of the above, the establishment of wildlife rehabilitation centres should at all times be designed in a natural area similar to the native habitat of the species to be rehabilitated. Successful rehabilitation can only be achieved in appropriate “wild” enclosures allowing wildlife under rehabilitation the opportunity to acquire the necessary instinctive skills to enable survival in the wild, with limited human contact.

It is therefore debatable whether bird and reptile rehabilitation should be allowed in urbanised areas.

The WRC-SA guidelines for the establishment of scientifically designed wildlife rehabilitation centres are intended as a guide for practical assistance to those planning, designing, and establishing all the necessary requirements for a wildlife rehabilitation centre.

1.2 Planning Rehabilitation:

- a. Identify the need for rehabilitation; define project aims, objectives, and time frame; and establish a multidisciplinary team. When done correctly, wildlife rehabilitation and their re-introduction back into nature is usually very complex and expensive. Each rehabilitation and re-introduction proposal should be rigorously reviewed on its individual merits. The benefits of a rehabilitation and re-introduction project should outweigh the benefits of new or additional conservation and protection measures for current wild populations, as well as any risks involved. In some cases, rehabilitation and re-introduction can be an effective component of an overall conservation scheme or an alternative to other ineffectual conservation efforts.
- b. Rehabilitation and re-introduction requires a multidisciplinary approach involving a team of people drawn from various backgrounds and with a range of expertise. The team may include arachnologists, herpetologists, ornithologists, primatologists, representatives from governmental nature conservation authorities, non-governmental organisations, local communities, funding bodies, universities and veterinary institutions.
- c. Previous rehabilitation and re-introductions of the same or similar taxa should be thoroughly researched, and contact should be made with people and organisations having relevant expertise.

- d. The rehabilitation centre site should be within the wildlife species' intended to be rehabilitated historic, documented range. Because situations vary among "Species' Socioecological & Behaviour", the proposed rehabilitation site must be evaluated in conjunction with the critical needs of the species' of concern.
- e. Rehabilitation should take place only when the species' habitat requirements are satisfied and sustainable for the rehabilitation period and also for an extended post release period. However, some species are adaptable and flexible. Rehabilitators should consider such data on the species of interest when evaluating rehabilitation sites.
- f. An analysis of available food resources and seasonal variations in food availability in the rehabilitation enclosures (camps) should be made to confirm the presence and availability of foods consumed by wild populations of the species' of interest.
- g. Certain species are more adaptable than others to changes in diet, so each species' dietary requirements must be considered. Rehabilitators should provide species' under rehabilitation foods similar to those they will encounter in their native habitat.
- h. Determine the critical needs of the wildlife species' of concern, the status, ecology, and behaviour of wild populations must be considered. Such data might include habitat preferences, intra specific variation, adaptations to local ecological conditions, social behaviour and system, emigration/immigration patterns, group composition, carrying capacity, density, home range, shelter and food requirements, foraging and feeding behaviour, predators, and diseases. Overall, a good knowledge of the natural history of the species' of concern is important to the entire rehabilitation and re-introduction process.

1.3 Socioeconomic, financial and legal requirements

- a. If suitable habitat exists, and if it has been determined the species' socioecological and behavioural needs can be met, then assess whether the project can meet the socioeconomic, financial, and legal requirements.
- b. Wildlife rehabilitation is usually long-term efforts that require the commitment of continual public, political, and financial support. An assessment of cost-per rehabilitation-animal is important to fully understand the expenses involved and to help measure success. Consultation with other rehabilitators and a review of the costs of previous projects are advised so that the actual monetary investment, time commitment, and similar requirements are fully understood before rehabilitation is initiated.
- c. Establishment of a rehabilitation centre must take place with the full permission and involvement of all relevant government conservation authorities and SAWRA. The South African Government's national and provincial legislation and regulation concerning the species' of concern should also be taken into consideration.
- d. A thorough assessment of attitudes of local communities to the proposed rehabilitation centre is necessary to ensure long-term survival, especially if the original cause of some species' decline and threat to survival was due to human factors. □ The rehabilitation centre's programmes should be fully understood, accepted, agreed upon and supported by local communities prior to initiation.
- e. Government policy toward re-introductions and the taxon concerned must be assessed. This may include checking existing provincial, national, and international legislation and regulations and working toward the provision of new measures and acquisition of required permits.
- f. If there is a risk of human-wildlife conflict or interaction developing post-release, an action plan for managing and solving such situations should be agreed upon and fully understood by all project staff and relevant authorities.

- g. A release site is most important prior to any rehabilitation taking place. A release site will be a place where the animal can enjoy a good quality of life away from human settlements and possible conflict, sustaining themselves.

1.4 Planning for Re-introduction

- a. Identify the need for re-introduction; define project aims, objectives, and time frame; and establish a multidisciplinary team. When done correctly, wildlife re-introduction is usually very complex and expensive. Each re-introduction proposal should be rigorously reviewed on its individual merits. In the planning stages, it should be considered whether available funds might be better used to finance existing re-introduction specialists. The benefits of a re-introduction project should outweigh the benefits of new or additional conservation and protection measures for current wild populations, as well as any risks involved. In some cases, re-introduction can be an effective component of an overall conservation scheme or an alternative to other ineffectual conservation efforts. Also, some approaches, such as a rescue, may be necessary and thus the only option.
- b. The potential benefits of returning rehabilitated wildlife to the wild include:
 - 1) When the existing wild population is severely threatened, re-introduction might improve the long-term conservation potential of the taxon as a whole, or of a local population.
 - 2) Re-introduction can make a strong political and educational statement concerning the fate of animals and may serve to promote local conservation values.
- c. Simply dumping animals (hard release) in the wild should be strongly opposed.

Re-introduction requires a multidisciplinary approach involving a team of people drawn from various backgrounds and with a range of expertise. The team may include rehabilitators, representatives from governmental conservation authorities, non-governmental organisations, local communities, funding bodies, universities and veterinary institutions.

Rehabilitated adult birds and some mammal species should be released in a suitable habitat as close as possible to the point of their capture except during migration. If migration has occurred while the bird or mammal has been in captivity, the animals should be released in the area of the migratory destination. Studies have shown that rehabilitated reptiles and amphibians should be released within 1 kilometre of the point of capture to maximize their chance of survival.

Notwithstanding the above, careful consideration should be applied when releasing snakes in urban or developed areas, because they may end up killed /destroyed or being brought back to the rehabilitation centre due to the public's ignorance and superstitions concerning snakes and owls.

Previous re-introductions of the same or similar taxa should be thoroughly researched, and contact should be made with people and organisations having relevant expertise.

1.5 Habitat and release site

The following covers a suggested pattern of evolution and decision-making for a re-introduction project. Some programmes have been operating for several years, so rehabilitators of these projects should integrate these guidelines where appropriate and attempt to rectify any activities that do not adhere to the steps listed below.

- a. Determine if the proposed release site is suitable habitat in which to re-introduce or translocate wildlife
- b. The release site should be within the species' historic, documented range. Because situations vary among "Species' Socioecology & Behaviour" the proposed release site must be evaluated in conjunction with the critical needs of the species' of concern
- c. Re-introductions should take place only when the species' habitat requirements are satisfied and likely to be sustained for the foreseeable future. If the species' basic habitat and ecological requirements cannot be determined, animals should not be released. (Although many wild species taxa are known to fare poorly in

secondary or negative influenced natural environments, a few survive well in marginal habitats). Some species are also highly adaptable and flexible. Rehabilitators should consider such data on the taxon of interest when evaluating release sites.)

- d. The build-up of the released population should be modelled under various sets of conditions to specify the optimal number and composition of individuals to be released, such as per year, and the number of years necessary to promote establishment of a viable population. A Population and Habitat Viability Analysis (PHVA) may aid in identifying environmental and population variables and assessing their potential interactions, which would guide long-term population management.

With a reinforcement project, size of the resident wildlife species population relative to carrying capacity and density, habitat use, and social structures of the resident population must be determined. It is also important to assess the potential impact to this population due to a re-introduction.

Because reinforcement presents a risk of disease transmission, social disruption, and introduction of alien genes to wild populations, there should be no or only a few remnant individuals in the release site - unless the main goal is to increase genetic variation of a taxon or population. Surveys done to confirm or disprove extirpation should be conducted prior to release.

An analysis of available food resources and seasonal variations in food availability in the release site should be made to confirm the presence and availability of foods consumed by wild populations of the taxon of interest.

Certain species are more adaptable than others to changes in diet, so each taxon's dietary requirements must be considered. Re-introduction managers should provide captive wild animals foods similar to those they will encounter in the release site, as well as limit or avoid feeding crop foods grown by communities adjacent to the release area (to help deter possible crop-raiding and conflict episodes).

In conjunction with habitat assessment, review or gather socioecological and behavioural data on the taxon of concern.

Determine the critical needs of the species' taxon of concern, the status, ecology, and behaviour. The behaviour of wild populations must also be considered. This data might include habitat preferences, intra specific variation, adaptations to local ecological conditions, social behaviour and system, emigration/immigration patterns, group composition, carrying capacity, density, home range, shelter and food requirements, foraging and feeding behaviour, predators, and diseases. Also, population studies that reveal rate of increase, sex ratio, and ratio of young in a population provide baseline data to help measure project success. Overall, a good knowledge of the natural history of the species' taxon is important to the entire re-introduction scheme.

If socioecological and behavioural data are not available; studies to obtain this information should be carried out prior to re-introduction. If current wild populations are extinct, too few, or too shy to be sufficiently studied, information on the natural history of extant subspecies or other related wild taxa may be employed. Information on captive animals of the species' taxon concerned should be applied only as supplementary data. In such cases, consultation with experts is necessary to determine the minimum amount of natural history data needed.

Re-introduction projects must consider the humane treatment of animals. There should be an assessment of the survival prospects of the release animals to justify the risks involved. Specifically, survival prospects for released wildlife species should at least approximate those of wild species of the same sex and age.

1.6 Release stock

If the socioeconomic, financial, and legal requirements can be met, continue assessment of the suitability of the release stock.

If animals have been confiscated, the IUCN Guidelines for the Placement of Confiscated Animals (2002) should initially be consulted. These guidelines offer three options for disposition of confiscated or otherwise acquired animals: maintain in captivity for the remainder of the animals' lives (which is not addressed in this document), return to the wild, or euthanasia. If these guidelines have been reviewed, and release to the wild is an option, then continue assessment of release-stock suitability.

Captive or artificially propagated stock must be from a population that has been soundly managed as much as possible, both demographically and genetically, according to the principles of contemporary conservation biology.

Inbreeding in captive populations can make some individuals more susceptible to disease; decrease their reproductive ability, etc. Caution should be taken to ensure that highly inbred animals are not released.

Possible behavioural aberrations of release stock due to time in captivity must be considered. Most captive-held wild animal species can acquire an inappropriate behavioural repertoire. Also, because of their association with and reliance on humans during captivity, captive wild animal species generally have diminished capacity to survive in the wild after re-introduction.

Consideration should be given to species' taxa that are especially prone to becoming human-oriented and, in turn, less able to survive after re-introduction. Care should also be taken to ensure that potentially dangerous species are not so confident in the presence of humans that they might be a danger to local inhabitants.

1.7 Genetic assessment

If stock is deemed suitable for release; conduct a genetic assessment of the species' taxon.

An assessment should be made of the species' genetic and taxonomic status of individuals to be re-introduced, as well as the potential for revision of the currently accepted taxonomy.

With reinforcement projects, genetic assessment (variation, kinship, etc.) of wild populations of the species' taxon of interest is recommended. Non-invasive collection of samples, such as hair or faeces, is highly advised.

To avoid the mixing of distinct genetic lineages or introduced behavioural or other abnormalities, release wild species should be of the same species or subspecies as those currently residing in the release area or of those that were extirpated.

In case of doubt as to taxonomic status, an investigation of historical information about the loss and fate of individuals from the re-introduction area should be undertaken. A study of genetic variation within and among populations of this and related taxa can be helpful. Special care is needed when the population has long been extinct.

Caution should be taken to ensure that inter-specific hybridization (offspring produced by different species, subspecies, or races) in the wild that would not have occurred naturally is avoided, and that no hybrids are present in the release stock. Hybrids are often not easily determined by morphology. Genetic testing is generally considered the best form of assessment.

2. Code of ethics

A Wildlife Rehabilitator's Code of Ethics

1. A wildlife rehabilitator should strive to achieve high standards of animal care through knowledge and an understanding of the field. Continuing efforts must be made to keep informed of current rehabilitation information, methods, and regulations.
2. A wildlife rehabilitator should be responsible, conscientious, and dedicated, and should continuously work toward improving the quality of care given to wild animals undergoing rehabilitation.
3. A wildlife rehabilitator must abide by local, state, provincial and national laws concerning wildlife, wildlife rehabilitation, and associated activities.
4. A wildlife rehabilitator should establish safe work habits and conditions, abiding by current health and safety practices at all times.
5. A wildlife rehabilitator should acknowledge limitations and enlist the assistance of a veterinarian or other trained professional when appropriate.
6. A wildlife rehabilitator should respect other rehabilitators and persons in related fields, sharing skills and knowledge in the spirit of cooperation for the welfare of the animals.
7. A wildlife rehabilitator should place optimum animal care above personal gain.

8. A wildlife rehabilitator should strive to provide professional and humane care in all phases of wildlife rehabilitation, respecting the wildness and maintaining the dignity of each animal in life and in death. Releasable animals should be maintained in a wild condition and released as soon as appropriate. Non-releasable animals which are inappropriate for education, foster-parenting, or captive breeding have a right to euthanasia.
9. A wildlife rehabilitator should encourage community support and involvement through volunteer training and public education. The common goal should be to promote a responsible concern for living beings and the welfare of the environment.
10. A wildlife rehabilitator should work on the basis of sound ecological principles, incorporating appropriate conservation ethics and an attitude of stewardship.
11. A wildlife rehabilitator should conduct all business and activities in a professional manner, with honesty, integrity, compassion, and commitment, realizing that an individual's conduct reflects on the entire field of wildlife rehabilitation.

3. Significance as source of information

3.1 Overview

Wildlife casualties provide an under-utilised source of information on the ethology, disease transmission, medical treatment, feeding and the viability of rehabilitation of wildlife species and the health of wild populations. The major source of information comes from scientific observations and post-mortems examination of casualties that die or are euthanized and material collected in this way can be used to monitor for the presence of infectious disease causing organisms and for evidence of environmental pollution. The existence of many disease-causing organisms in wild populations has been established through the examination of wildlife casualties.

Long-term studies on the levels of pesticide raptors and vultures have relied greatly on the examination of tissues from casualties. Casualties presented to wildlife units often act as indicators of the biodiversity of an area, especially with crepuscular species (those that are active at dusk and dawn) or nocturnal species.

3.2 Significance of legislation

- a. Almost every aspect of life is regulated, some more than others, and, to make matters worse, we are regularly reminded that ignorance of the law is no defence. The staff of a wildlife rehabilitation unit must be aware of a whole raft of legislation covering SA National and Provincial Environmental Laws, international treaties, Animal Protection Act, employment, health and safety and the use of veterinary medicines.
- b. Nature conservation legislation does have a significant part to play in the activities of a wildlife rehabilitation centre, mainly through legislation that protects wildlife. Although the conservation laws recognise some wildlife species as low priority and problem (damage causing) animals, the legislation does allow for casualties to be taken into captive care in Government registered rehabilitation centres for rehabilitation/treatment and release or for humane destruction (only as a last resort). All wildlife species need to be registered whilst in captivity and the conservation authorities duly informed.
- c. The practise of keeping any wild animal species without the necessary permits culminates in the animals being confiscated by Conservation Authorities. In some provinces certain seized animal species considered to be damage causing animals are destroyed. However, some Provincial Authorities may transfer them to rehabilitation centres or captive sanctuaries. There are only a few rehabilitation centres in South Africa caring for the above animal species under very strict conservation authorities' regulations.
- d. All legislation is liable to change with time and keeping abreast of these changes is an important part of the working of a wildlife rehabilitation centre.

3.3 Health & Safety in Wildlife Rehabilitation

- a. Health and Safety is one of those subjects that most people tend not to think about too much until something happens. However, you have to remember that the legislation was not just dreamed up by some bureaucrat but is there to protect everyone's welfare. It should be fundamental to the running of any animal centre.
- b. Health and Safety Legislation
 1. The Law applies to employers, the self-employed, or indeed any person who is in charge of a Wildlife Unit/Centre/Premises. It requires a responsible person to assess the risks to employees, volunteers and any person who may be affected by the work activity. That would include members of the public bringing in a wildlife casualty, visitors who come for 'open days', the postman, milkman and contractors. The law puts a duty of care on the rehabilitation centre. A breach of that duty could lead to prosecution by the SA Departments of Health and Labour (which can lead to fines and/or imprisonment), or the Centre could be sued under civil law. It is important to note that ignorance is no defence and it is the duty of the responsible person to find out what is required to comply with the law.

3.4 Potential Hazards

- a. Zoonoses are diseases and infections which can be transmitted to humans from animals.
- b. Slips, Trips and Falls. It is important to have a tidy working environment, to wipe up spills, ensure that there are no trailing hoses and that walkways are clear and tidy.
- c. Bites and scratches. Wearing protective clothing e.g. gloves is essential when dealing with casualties. Even the sickest animal will 'have a go' and try and bite its rescuer.
- d. Manual handling. There is always a certain amount of lifting involved in rehabilitation, e.g. handling heavy casualties or lifting heavy sacks of food. Care must be taken and the correct method of handling and lifting must be adhered to.
- e. Plumage dust. It is vitally important to wear a face mask when dealing with bird casualties especially when cleaning out their cages. Plumage dust if inhaled can cause severe lung problems. In enclosed spaces it is recommended that avian extractors are installed to suck up the fine dusts. Dried faecal matter harbours bacteria which can be inhaled whilst cleaning out cages, and this is another reason for wearing an appropriate face mask. A PP3 is the type of mask recommended by Health and Safety experts.
- f. Power Tools and Machinery must be checked to make sure that they are in good condition and fit for the job they are designed to do. The people using tools or machinery must be properly trained to do so. This applies also to equipment brought in by volunteers.
- g. Animal dander. Flakes of skin, hair and other detritus from animals can affect some people. It is important when taking on staff or volunteers that they make you aware of any allergies or other medical problems they may have.
- h. Working near water. Walkways must be kept mud free. Hoses, buckets, brushes, brooms, rakes etc must all be tidied away after use.
- i. Clinical waste. This includes animal carcasses, used needles and syringes, used dressings etc. Arrangements must be in place for the safe disposal of carcasses and used medical equipment.
- j. Electricity. Any electrical appliances and electrical cables must be checked daily especially when coming in contact with water e.g. steam cleaner/power washer.
- k. Medicinal Products. Protective clothing, e.g. masks and gloves must be used when dealing with certain medicinal and chemical products. Always read the safety instructions before dispensing tablets/medicines.
- l. Fire. Ensure that the appropriate fire extinguishers are in place that they are checked and updated regularly and also that people have been trained in their use. Staff and volunteers must be aware of the correct procedures to follow during a fire drill.
- m. Injuries. A qualified first-aider should be available to attend to any wounds or injuries. A fully stocked first aid box must be available and kept where it is easily accessible. A medicine and wound/injury treatment registered must always be kept updated.
- n. Lone Working. Lone working with adult or dangerous animals should preferably not be allowed. However, should a situation arise when it requires lone working, a system should be put in place to ensure that the lone worker is contacted periodically to ensure their well being.
- o. Hazardous substances. It is important to read all the safety instructions on the data sheets supplied with the product and to comply with these instructions.
- p. Stress. Wildlife rehabilitation can be a very stressful job. Dealing with wildlife sickness, injuries, caring and death or destruction can take its toll. Situations with other staff, volunteers and members of the public can also cause stress. It is important to take breaks during the day and time-off/holidays. A stressed rehabilitator is liable to make mistakes and is of no use to the casualty.

3.5 Risk Assessments and Control Measures

The duty of care requires the responsible person to assess risks to health and safety. A risk assessment is a careful examination of what could harm people as a result of the work activity. This means going round your centre and looking for hazards like the ones mentioned above. Then a decision needs to be taken on whether more needs to be done to protect the staff and volunteers. This could involve appropriate signage, more training, the supply of the correct protective clothing, or to put protocols and procedures in place. However, it is not enough just to do all this; you must also have a written record of the identified hazard, the action taken and by whom. A proper recording system must be in place so that careful checks can be made and monitored. This written record is vital because the Centre can use it as a defence against any action taken by the Health and Labour Departments or against a civil case for compensation brought by an injured person.

The written record should identify the hazard, and identify who is at risk (this could be anyone working in the centre/unit/premises or anyone visiting for whatever reason). The higher the risk, the more urgent the action is required. However, the law does not expect you to do the impossible. You should do something so far as is “reasonably practical” and that would include a consideration of the cost (measured in terms of time, effort and funding). Once the control measure has been implemented, staff and volunteers must be trained in the new procedure. However, once trained you cannot just then forget about it. There must be ongoing supervision to make sure the staff and volunteers continue to operate the measures.

There should also be health surveillance. Before taking on employees or volunteers it is important to know if they have any illnesses, disabilities or allergies that may prevent them from doing a particular task. Providing advice and suitable protective clothing may be enough to ensure their well being. You will always have to provide first aid facilities and you must have an accident/ illness reporting procedure e.g. an accident book. You should also be aware of what needs to be reported to the Health and Labour Departments under the reporting of injuries, diseases and dangerous occurrences regulations.

3.5.1 Disaster planning and emergency preparedness

Rehabilitation centres may be subjected to unexpected conditions that result in the catastrophic failure of critical systems or significant personnel absenteeism, or other unexpected events that severely compromise on-going animal care and well-being. Rehabilitation centres must have a disaster plan. The plan should define the actions necessary to prevent animal pain, distress, and death due to the loss of systems in the accommodation of the wildlife such as;

- a. Unpredicted fire (natural vegetation in and around enclosures and indoor structures).
- b. Unpredicted flooding of enclosures and indoor facilities.
- c. Controlling of ventilation, cooling, heating, or provision of potable water.

The geographic locale may provide guidance as to the probability of a particular type of disaster.

Disaster plans should also be established in conjunction with the responsible care giver/s and staff taking into consideration both the priorities for indoor and outdoor accommodation and rehabilitation facility needs and resources.

Animals that cannot be protected from the consequences of the disaster or relocated must be humanely euthanized. The disaster plan should identify essential personnel who should be trained in advance in its implementation and include personnel and care givers safety during disaster operations.

3.5.2 Emergency, Weekend, Public Holidays and annual Leave Care

Animals should be cared for by qualified staff and care givers every day, including weekends and holidays, both to safeguard their well-being and to satisfy the keeping and rehabilitation requirements. Arrangements and agreements must be made with local veterinarians to be available after work hours, on weekends, public holidays and annual leave holidays.

It is therefore essential that a CWR and staff must be present at the rehabilitation centre 24/7 all year. Weekends off, public holidays and annual leave must be well prepared in the beginning of each year.

4. Legislation and treatment of animals

4.1 The law

The law in relation to the treatment of animals, both in the use of licensed medicines and in the extent to which procedures can be applied, has always been a concern to those in the front line of handling wildlife casualties. The reason for this is most probably due to the fact that wildlife rehabilitation is relatively new in South Africa and that the Veterinary Council and law makers did not make provisions for wildlife rehabilitation.

The complications of the law may be difficult to understand and, when dealing with a wildlife casualty in an emergency, the law frequently seems to be in conflict with the welfare of the animal being treated. The following description of the Veterinary and Para-Veterinary Professions Act 19 of 1982, The Veterinary Medicines Regulations and The Medicines and Related Substances Act is a description of the present situation regarding the extent to which a wildlife rehabilitator can treat a wildlife casualty and remain within the law.

4.2 The Veterinary Surgeons Act

- a. The Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 and Veterinary and Para-Veterinary Professions Act 19 of 1982 was enacted to safeguard the welfare of domestic or stock animals by protecting them from treatment by untrained persons. In South Africa only those registered with the South African Veterinary Council are allowed to practise “veterinary surgery” and this is defined as “the art and science of veterinary surgery and medicine”. The law makes it illegal for a non-registered person to diagnose a disease or injury in an animal and to treat it, regardless of whether this is for gain or not. The administration of a general anaesthetic to an animal is considered an act of veterinary surgery. It is generally understood that as fish and amphibians are not mentioned in the Veterinary Surgeons Act they are not covered by the Act. There are, however, certain important circumstances in which the law permits unregistered persons to treat sick and injured animals:-
- b. The administration of first aid in an emergency for the purposes of saving life or relieving pain and suffering.
- c. For “owners” of an animal to administer 'minor medical treatment' to their own animals. Medical treatment is regarded as the administration of any medication to an animal, as opposed to surgical treatment (which involves entering the body, usually by incision). Administration of medication may involve entering the body by passing oral tubes or injecting through hypodermic needles, so long as such procedures do not involve entering body cavities.

For anyone handling wildlife casualties the way to remain within the law and to protect them is:-

To become “owners”, as being temporarily in possession of that animal, that person can be regarded as the owner or keeper and therefore allowed to perform minor medical, but not surgical, treatment. Therefore a person holding a wildlife casualty can legally administer first aid to that animal. Furthermore, First Aid can only be regarded as a temporary measure to relieve pain and stabilise a casualty and cannot in reality extend beyond the initial period following capture and assessment.

Notwithstanding the above, minor medical treatment can only be given once a diagnosis has been made and this can only be done legally by a veterinary surgeon. However, as you are aware that most wild mammals require sedation before you can make an attempt to assess the nature and extent of injuries, it virtually makes it impossible to rescue and administer “First Aid” to wildlife being hampered by the veterinary laws. It also makes it dangerous for you to try and transport the wild animal to a nearby veterinary practice and also for the veterinarian’s staff and public.

The only solution to this problem is to work closely with a sympathetic veterinary surgeon. The latter may be a real problem to find but is absolutely vital in ensuring the welfare of their wildlife patients, to be aware of the limits within which they can work legally and to keep meticulous records.

4.3 The Animal Protection Act

The main principle of this legislation is to impose a duty of care on the keeper of animal to ensure its welfare. An offence would be committed if suffering is caused to an animal through the actions of its keeper, or through the failure of its keeper to act. A wild animal is protected by the legislation once it is in captivity and under the care of a person, who is then responsible for its welfare. This legislation using terminology “Unnecessary suffering” has

always been difficult to define accurately and varies from case to case. In the field of incompetent wildlife rehabilitation it could apply in many scenarios, for example, to the inappropriate treatment of long-term casualties.

4.4 Medicines Legislation

The legislation that controls the prescribing of veterinary medicines has always placed responsibilities on those allowed to dispense such drugs and has been a source of confusion, if not downright irritation, on those needing to acquire such drugs. Recent changes in the legislation have further muddied the waters. At the start it should be made clear why such controls are deemed necessary. Certain drugs are dangerous (anaesthetic and analgesic agents) and their use must be restricted to those qualified to understand their actions and trained in their safe usage. With other drugs their misuse can lead to serious consequences; this applies especially to antibiotics where misuse can lead to antibiotic resistance developing in bacteria. (There is a strong opinion in the medical profession that the veterinary use of many antibiotics should be restricted for this very reason).

4.5 Health and Safety

Those in possession of veterinary medicines have a duty to ensure the safe handling and appropriate usage of such products. Only trained members of staff should handle and administer medications. Storage of medicines, syringes and needles should be in a secure site and at an appropriate temperature for that particular product.

It is important that the instructions for administration of a medicine are closely followed and that records are kept of the medicines used and the patients receiving them.

4.6 National Legislation

- a. National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act (NEMBA), (Act 10 2004) will have a significant effect on rehabilitation centres. The new Act replaces the majority of old wildlife conservation ordinances and now firmly places a “duty of care” on anyone regarded as a keeper of an animal to preserve its welfare. Once in captivity, a wild animal will be afforded the protection of this Act.
- b. A consultation process is in place at the moment and it is important that proper representations are made to National Government to ensure that, if a registration scheme is imposed, it will be workable and with the welfare of wildlife casualties as its priority.
- c. National Environmental Management Act, 107 of 1998.
- d. Environmental Conservation Act 54 of 1989
- e. Veterinary Medicines Act, 101 of 1965 and Medicines and Related Substances Control Amendment Act (Act 90 of 1997)
- f. Criminal Procedures Act, 51 of 1977
- g. Animal Protection Act, 71 of 1962
- h. Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act, 130 of 1993
- i. Animal Matters Amendment Act 1993
- j. Animal Diseases Act, 35 of 1984
- k. Agricultural Pests Act, 36 of 1983
- l. Biodiversity Act
- m. Health and Safety Act
- n. Basic Conditions of Employment Act
- o. Unemployment Insurance Act, 63 of 2001

4.7 Provincial Legislation

- a. KwaZulu Nature Conservation Act 29 of 1992 ; Natal Nature Conservation Ordinance 15/1974
- b. Limpopo Environmental Management Act ?? ; Transvaal Nature Conservation Ordinance 12 of 1983
- c. Mpumalanga Act 10 of 1998
- d. Free State Ordinance 8/1969
- e. Western Cape Conservation Act of 2000; Western Cape Ordinance 19/1974
- f. Northern Cape Ordinance 19/1974
- g. Gauteng Provincial Conservation - Transvaal Conservation Ordinance 12 of 1983
- h. Eastern Cape – Using Western Cape’s Ordinance
- i. North West Provincial Conservation Ordinance – Using Transvaal Conservation Ordinance 12 of 1983

4.8 National and International Policies / Guidelines

CITES - Convention for International Trade in Endangered Species Fauna and Flora

ICBC - International Convention of Bio-diversity Conservation 1992

IUCN – Guidelines on management of captive wildlife; IUCN – Guidelines for reintroductions

SAWRA – South African Wildlife Rehabilitators Association

IWRC – International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council

NWRA – National Wildlife Rehabilitation Association

BWRC – British Wildlife Rehabilitation Council

PASA – Pan African Sanctuary Alliance

WVS – Worldwide Veterinary Services