

Wildlife Rehabilitation Standards and Guidelines - Euthanasia

Objective

The primary objective of wildlife rehabilitation is the successful reintegration of injured or abandoned fauna into the wild. However, where an animal's suffering cannot be appropriately mitigated or where resources are not available to provide appropriate care/quality of life throughout the likely rehabilitation period, or the animal is unlikely to survive or be reintegrated into the wild, it should be euthanased. All wildlife rehabilitators, whether individually licensed or operating under an organisation licence, must be able to provide for the euthanasia of wildlife when required.

Scope and Context

This document should be read in conjunction with the Draft Code of Practice for Wildlife Rehabilitation in Western Australia and Wildlife Rehabilitation Standards and Guidelines - Acquisition of rehabilitated wildlife that cannot be released into the wild.

This document provides a decision-making framework for the management of fauna in Western Australia that is the property of the Crown and has been admitted into care for the purpose of rehabilitation and which requires a management decision about its future. This includes fauna that is:

- sick;
- injured; or
- abandoned juvenile fauna.

This guideline pertains only to fauna as defined in the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*. Refer to the Draft Code of Practice for Wildlife Rehabilitation in Western Australia for details regarding management of animals not native to Australia, and/or species that are native to Australia but are outside their natural range or identified as pests.

The decision of how best to manage sick, injured or abandoned juvenile fauna must consider both the welfare of the individual and the conservation of existing populations of that individual's species. The Department has a number of standard operating procedures (SOPs). Despite being written from a research perspective, a number of these SOPs may provide further guidance, including care of ejected pouch young, First aid for animals, Humane killing of animals under field conditions and Managing disease risk in wildlife management <https://www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/plants-and-animals/monitoring/standards-and-protocols/99-standard-operating-procedures>.

Standards

As outlined in the Draft Code of Practice for Wildlife Rehabilitation in Western Australia, wildlife must be promptly euthanased when:

- it is necessary to alleviate unreasonable and/or incurable pain, distress, trauma, sickness or injury when such pain and suffering is not able to be managed by a veterinarian;
- further treatment is not practical, including where extensive surgery is likely to be required for the animal to survive;
- recovery is not expected such that the animal can be successfully rehabilitated to the wild; or
- an animal is likely to require extended periods in captivity to be rehabilitated.

Unless authorised by a wildlife officer or authorised person, an animal must be euthanased when:

- an orphaned animal is not viable or is unlikely to be rehabilitated;
- there is no suitable release location and/or the release area is situated a significant distance from the point of care (e.g. requires additional resources, such as air transport, that cannot be funded by the centre);
- the ability to reproduce is lost due to an injury, disease or surgical procedure;
- the ability to move freely or normally (i.e. run, climb, crawl, hop, fly or swim) is permanently impaired due to, for example, a missing or impaired limb, wing, foot or tail, such that it will significantly impair the animal's ability to survive in the wild;
- the ability to sense the surrounding environment (i.e. see, hear, smell, taste or feel) is permanently impaired due to a missing or injured organ such as an eye, ear or nose, such that it will significantly impair the animal's ability to survive in the wild;
- the ability to catch, find or handle food is permanently impaired;
- its advanced age renders it unlikely to survive in the wild;
- resources are not available to provide appropriate care or an acceptable quality of life throughout the likely rehabilitation period.

The following principles must be considered in determining the appropriate management of native fauna when admitted for rehabilitation. Figure 1 outlines the decision-making framework to be used in applying these principles.

1. *Ensure animal welfare is not compromised*

The immediate and long-term welfare of fauna must first be considered to achieve a humane outcome for the individual animal.

Questions that should be asked are:

- Is the animal suffering from unreasonable and/or incurable pain, distress, trauma, sickness or injury?
- Has the animal lost essential limbs or function of limbs, including tails?
- Does the animal have permanent vital sensory loss (hearing, sight, smell, taste);
- Does the animal have an incurable (able to be treated but not cured) infectious disease or chronic ill health?
- Does the animal have permanent damage to its nervous system?
- Will the animal likely require extensive surgery to survive?
- Is the animal unable to adjust to temporary care?
- Will the animal likely require extended periods in captivity to be rehabilitated;
- Is the animal unlikely to survive or integrate in the wild (e.g. territorial behaviour, flight or fight response)?
- Is the animal under-developed young (e.g. unfurred young or 'pinkies') and chance of survival, successful rehabilitation and integration into the wild is less than 50%?

Upon assessment, if you answered yes to any of the above questions, then euthanasia should be administered.

2. *Protect wild populations*

Displaced fauna should not be returned to the wild if it poses an unreasonable risk to native populations (through disease transmission, displacement of extant species, or compromising the genetic integrity or behavioural repertoire of wild populations). Fauna should not be released into the wild unless the provenance of the individual is confidently known and release at the location of origin, or suitable habitat in the likely vicinity, is feasible. Release at a new location may jeopardise the genetic integrity or behavioural repertoire of wild populations and put the individual at unacceptable risk if released into inappropriate habitat. Consideration should be made as to whether the individual is likely to have been exposed to disease or novel parasites based on the amount of time and conditions in which it has been held in captivity. A quarantine period and health screening may assist in addressing these risks however the feasibility of applying quarantine, health screening and monitoring to the individual for signs of disease before release should be considered.

3. *Consider conservation status*

For wildlife of high conservation significance i.e. threatened or specially protected or in Schedule 6, where survival or reintegration back into the wild is unlikely and provided the animal is not suffering from unreasonable and/or incurable pain, distress, trauma, sickness or injury, special effort should only be made to rehabilitate these animals upon notification to and approval by the DBCA.

High conservation value species will be given special consideration for management, involving consultation with DBCA staff (e.g. Principal Zoologist, Species and Communities Program), Perth Zoo veterinarian and subject matter experts. This should be addressed via the Rehabilitated Fauna Notification Form (Appendix 1). In accordance with Regulation 124 of the Biodiversity Conservation Regulations, 'anyone who takes possession of species listed as threatened or specially protected or Schedule 6 fauna (e.g. penguins), must give notification in writing to DBCA within 24 hours of taking possession of the fauna.' As part of this notification, wildlife rehabilitators should identify if the animal is unlikely to survive or reintegrate back into the wild.

4. *Fauna to be kept in captivity for educational purposes only where there is a conservation benefit*

The keeping of fauna will only be considered for established/recognised zoos, wildlife parks and facilities, education organisations/institutions/establishments and approved breeding programs for species recovery where a conservation benefit can be demonstrated.

5. *Cost or logistics of release.*

Resources or logistics may limit the feasibility of returning fauna that is not of high conservation value to the wild or to remote locations.

Euthanasia

If fauna is not suitable for release or use for conservation, or educational purposes, euthanasia is considered the most humane outcome. Euthanasia must be undertaken using approved, humane methods, by appropriately trained and licenced personnel. Each individual instance of fauna admitted for rehabilitation needs to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Special cases may require consultation with experts, such as for species of high conservation value and decisions should be made in accordance with the principles and decision-making framework outlined to maximise the conservation and animal welfare outcomes for the fauna.

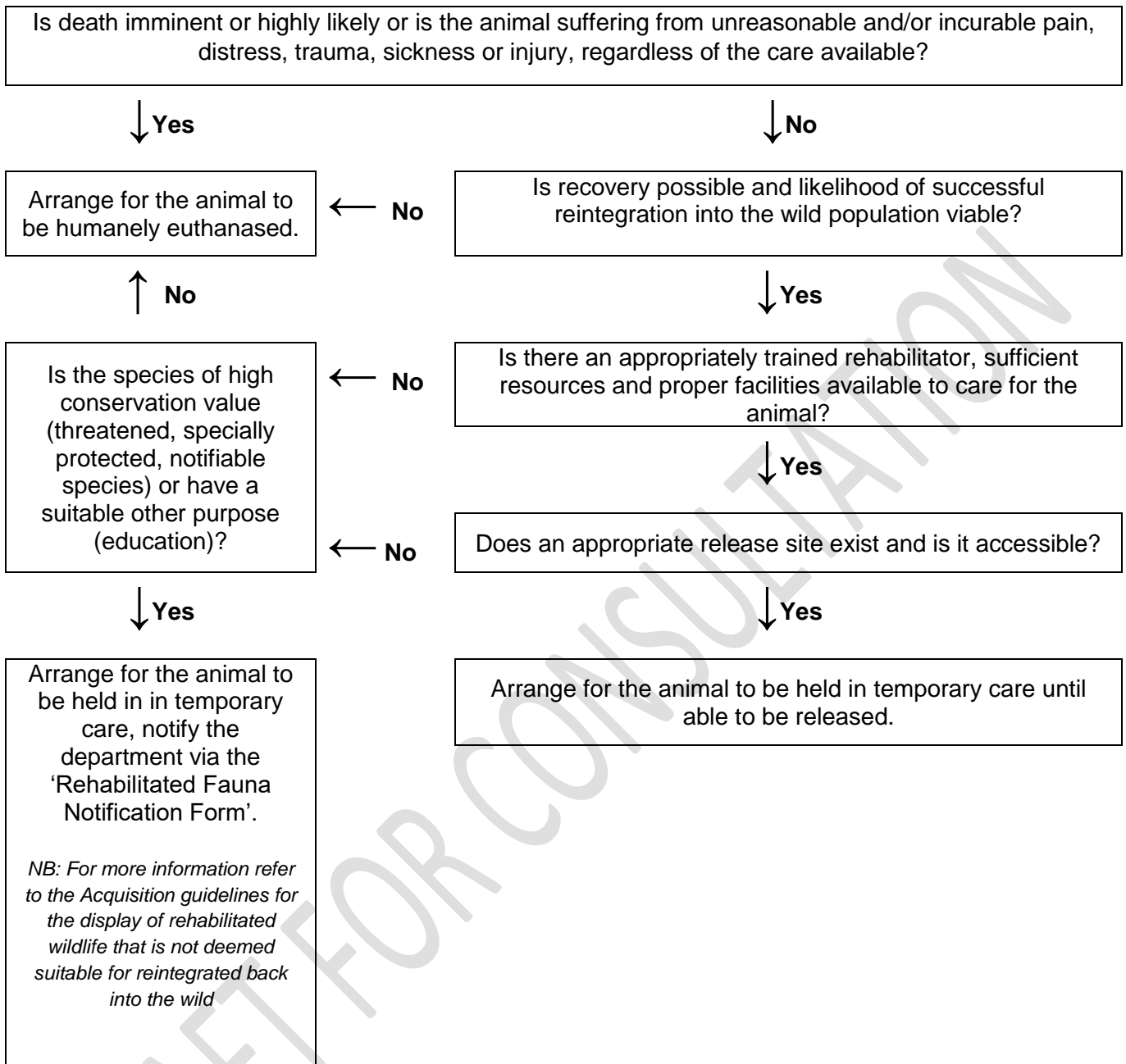


Figure 1: Decision-making framework for the management of fauna in Western Australia that is the property of the State and has been admitted into care for the purpose of rehabilitation.



Rehabilitated Fauna Notification Form

Please complete ALL sections and forward to DBCA: wildlife.protection@dbca.wa.gov.au.

Further information may be obtained from the Wildlife Protection Branch, wildlife.protection@dbca.wa.gov.au, or 9219 9840.

1. Contact Information			
First Name			
Surname			
Residential address			
Phone contact No.			
Email			
Fauna possessing (other purposes) licence - Rehabilitation	Licence No.		Expiry date
2. Species Information			
Species			
Sex			
Age (neonate, juvenile, sub-adult, adult)			
Date found/taken into care and by who			
Address/location where fauna was found			
Reason for fauna being possessed (include details of injuries, diseases, mobility, abnormal behaviour etc.)			
Address of where the fauna is being kept			
Reason for fauna not being suitable for reintegration into the wild (provide reason)			