



British Wildlife Rehabilitation Council

Code of Conduct for the Use of Images of Wildlife Casualties in Social Media Posts

Background

A vital aspect of many wildlife rehabilitation centres (WRCs) is active engagement with the public in order to seek ongoing support and donations, as well as educating the public. Social media has greatly facilitated the ways by which WRCs can engage with the public. Images of wild animals in care are often used to provide updates on the status of specific casualties, raise awareness of important issues, attract attention to posts, and solicit support. They serve as a valuable tool for communicating with the public. It is important that any images of animals in care that are to be used in social media posts are taken:

- in a manner that presents the professionalism of the wildlife rehabilitation (WR) sector;
- clearly promotes the highest standards of welfare and husbandry;
- do not damage public perception of wild animals and their conservation value.

The purpose of this Code of Conduct is to provide clear guidance for wildlife rehabilitators on taking and using images of wildlife casualties. The rationale for the eight principles included in this code is provided at the end of the document.

A note of the use of images for clinical reasons.

The BWRC recognises the value and benefits of using imaging technology in the assessment, diagnosis, and monitoring of wildlife casualties in WRCs. This code of conduct is focused only on those images used in social media posts, although the principles detailed below apply equally to the use of images taken for clinical reasons where possible.

General principles

- 1.** Animals should not be removed from their enclosure or place of rest solely for the purpose of taking images or filming;
- 2.** Appropriate PPE should be worn by all persons visible in any posts, especially anyone in direct contact with the animal;
- 3.** Where possible, handling of animals for the purpose of taking images should be minimised, using only gentle restraint.;
- 4.** Animals in images should be presented in their normal body posture unless images are taken during a veterinary procedure or initial physical assessment;
- 5.** Images used in social media posts should have a clear explanation of what the image(s) show, and ideally the reason(s) for including the image (e.g. education, financial assistance etc.)
- 6.** Hand-reared animals should be presented in a clear and professional manner i.e. it is clear that they are being reared professionally and not kept as pets. Appropriate PPE should also be worn.
- 7.** The use of imaging technology / cameras to record images or film wildlife casualties should be associated with a clear Standard Operating Procedure and risk assessment to reduce the inherent risks of cross contamination.
- 8.** Images that include wildlife casualties should ideally be taken in the WRC environment only (with the exception of recording releases). Images taken of the location and context of rescues (e.g. for gathering evidence, educational purposes) should not be taken in priority of providing immediate care and assistance to wildlife casualties.

Our rationale underpinning the Code

Handling and the representation of wildlife in images

Current best practice in the WR sector is to actively minimise handling of any animal casualty during their residency. Direct physical contact between conscious wildlife casualties and humans is likely to be one of the most stress inducing events that is experienced by them in their lives. Handling stress is also additive to any stress being experienced due to their recent trauma. For these reasons no animal should ever be handled for the sole purposes of taking images.

Animals in images should be presented in their normal body posture. Mammals, reptiles and amphibians should not be held suspended in the air without firm support and / or in a manner that radically alters the animal from its typical resting body posture. It is not appropriate to present images of mammals that are being held by the scruff of the neck with or without support, unless during their capture or during the process of a physical assessment.

It is essential that images of wildlife casualties convey the message that all wildlife needs to be kept wild. Images of people handling wildlife in a manner associated with handling pets, such as overhanding, cuddling, stroking etc. are not acceptable at any time.

Where possible, key messages that wildlife rehabilitation requires the input of highly

knowledgeable, experienced and trained professionals in partnership with registered vets and veterinary nurses, should be emphasised.

The use of PPE when handling animals in images

It is especially important that all social media images from WRCs portray the highest standards of health, safety, and professionalism, recognising that all wild animals are potential sources of infectious and zoonotic diseases. As with any veterinary or health assessment undertaken in a WRC, the appropriate PPE should be worn at all times when handling a wild animal, including for the purposes of recording images/filming. It is expected that those in direct contact with any animals in any image released or available to the public should be wearing such PPE. Taking images in the WRC should be associated with a clear SOP and risk assessment. This is needed to ensure that all parties are aware of the routes of cross contamination when using camera technologies in proximity to sick and injured wildlife.

A note on the use of “Selfies” in WRCs

A wildlife 'selfie' is an image or video of someone intentionally posing with a wild animal, as opposed to a photograph taken during an assessment or rescue where contact is necessary and not solely for the purpose of taking a photograph or filming. Wildlife “selfies”, whether they are taken with animals in the care of a wildlife rehabilitation centre, with exotic pets or in the wild have a detrimental impact on public understanding of how to behave or interact with wild animals. The popular wildlife selfie trend, for example, leads to members of the public holding onto young birds and posing with them perched on their fingers or shoulders on social media, further encouraging others to do the same.