



British Wildlife Rehabilitation Council

Position Statement on the Use of Wildlife in Educational and Fundraising Activities

Summary

This code of conduct outlines the BWRC's position on the use of wild vertebrate animals in educational and outreach activities. The scope of this position statement includes all living wildlife during rescue, assessment, treatment, and rehabilitation, as well as animals considered unfit for release that are retained in permanent captivity for their lifetime. It is intended to provide clear and unambiguous guidance to ensure that the wellbeing and welfare of wild animals is recognised and respected at all times during the rehabilitation process.

Scope

This statement refers to all living wild vertebrates held at Wildlife Rehabilitation Centres (WRCs) in the UK. For the purposes of this code, we define educational and outreach events as:

- Any activity that involves transporting any living wildlife species to a location different from the address of the WRC (e.g., schools, colleges, fetes, private or public residences, village halls) for any period of time.
- Internal events in which non-WRC staff/volunteers are invited or pay to enter WRCs (open days, private functions, etc.) and are able to gain access to animals directly (touching, stroking, petting, etc.). Visitors to WRC premises should not have direct sight of any patients or captive residents.

Founding Principles

One of the central goals of wildlife rehabilitation is to ensure that the welfare of any wildlife casualty is maintained at the highest level possible at all times. Central to this principle is 'keeping wildlife wild,' minimising interactions between WRC staff and wildlife to what is necessary for their needs, treatment, and biology. Any activity that is not deemed essential should be minimised or avoided to reduce habituation and stress.

Position Statement

The BWRC does not support the use of living wild animals in any public or private exhibitions or displays, regardless of whether they are external or internal. This policy is in place to ensure the welfare and well-being of the animals.

Legal and Ethical Considerations

Legal Framework

1. Animal Welfare Act 2006

- Section 9: This section outlines the duty of care to ensure that the welfare needs of animals are met. These needs include a suitable environment, a suitable diet, the ability to exhibit normal behaviour patterns, being housed with or apart from other animals, and protection from pain, suffering, injury, and disease.
- Section 4: This section makes it an offense to cause unnecessary suffering to any animal. It emphasises the importance of preventing harm and ensuring the humane treatment of animals at all times.
- Section 3: This section states that an animal is considered protected when it is under the control of a person, whether on a permanent or temporary basis. This includes animals that are not normally domesticated but are under the control of a person for any reason.

2. Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

- Licensing Requirements: Under Section 10 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, a license is required for keeping certain species for educational purposes. This ensures that the handling and care of these species meet specific welfare standards.

Ethical Considerations

1. Respect for Wildlife

- Educational activities must promote respect for wildlife and their natural habitats. This includes strictly avoiding any handling or use of wild animals. Handling can cause significant stress and disrupt their natural behaviours. Activities should be designed to educate participants about the importance of welfare alongside conservation and the ethical treatment of animals without direct interaction.

2. Minimising Stress and Harm

- Any interaction with wildlife should be carefully managed to minimise stress and harm to the animals. Handling wild animals should be strictly prohibited unless absolutely necessary for their welfare, and only trained professionals should be involved in such cases.

3. Educational Value

- The use of wildlife in educational activities should have clear educational value. Activities should be designed to foster a sense of responsibility to animal welfare and stewardship towards the natural world without involving direct contact with wild animals.

Future Legislation

1. Licensing of Animal Welfare Establishments, Activities, and Exhibits

- The UK government is currently consulting on proposals to license animal welfare establishments, activities, and exhibits. This consultation aims to develop a National Model for the regulation of animal welfare, extending licensing to currently unlicensed animal-related activities and updating the licensing framework for other licensable activities. It is important to stay informed about the outcomes of this consultation and any resulting legislation, as it may impact the use of wildlife in educational settings.

Alternatives to Live Animals

Digital Media

1. Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR)

- VR and AR technologies can create immersive experiences that allow participants to explore wildlife and natural habitats without the need for live animals. These technologies can simulate close encounters with animals, providing educational content in an engaging and interactive way.

2. Educational Videos and Documentaries

- High-quality videos and documentaries can effectively convey information about wildlife, their behaviours, and conservation efforts. These can be shown during educational sessions or made available online for broader access.

3. Interactive Websites and Apps

- Websites and mobile apps can offer interactive learning experiences, such as virtual tours of wildlife reserves, interactive quizzes, and educational games. These platforms can be designed to provide comprehensive information about different species and conservation issues.

Interactive Displays

1. Exhibits and Installations

- Museums, zoos, and educational centres can create interactive exhibits that use models, dioramas, and multimedia displays to educate visitors about wildlife. These exhibits can include touchscreens, audio guides, and interactive elements to enhance the learning experience.

2. Holographic Displays

- Holographic technology can create lifelike 3D images of animals, allowing viewers to observe them in detail without the need for live specimens. These displays can be used in educational settings to provide a realistic and engaging experience.

3. Educational Workshops and Seminars

- Workshops and seminars led by experts in wildlife conservation can provide valuable information and insights without involving live animals. These events can include presentations, discussions, and hands-on activities using digital tools and resources.

Fundraising

1. Online Campaigns

- Crowdfunding platforms and social media can be used to raise funds for wildlife rehabilitation. Online campaigns can reach a wide audience and engage supporters through compelling stories, videos, and updates, all in compliance with BWRC policies.

2. Virtual Events

- Hosting virtual events, such as webinars, online auctions, and virtual tours, can be an effective way to raise funds and awareness. These events can be promoted through social media and email marketing to attract participants and donors.

3. Merchandise Sales

- Selling merchandise, such as clothing, accessories, and educational materials, can generate funds. Products can feature wildlife-themed designs and educational content to raise awareness and support for the cause.

Additional Notes

- The inclusion of living wildlife in educational or outreach/fundraising events can present very mixed messages to the public.
- Unlike zoological establishments, which are licensed to display captive live wild animals for the purposes of conservation and education, a WRC's primary role is to rehabilitate injured/orphaned wildlife and return them to the wild. During this process, the welfare of any animals in their care or captivity has to be prioritised.
- One of the key educational messages that wildlife rehabilitators aim to provide is that wild animals are wild, and not pets. They require specialist care from experienced professionals within an appropriate environment. We can reinforce this message by ensuring that live animals are not directly used in any outreach or education activities.