

Recommendations for Transporting Wildlife

Note to public: If you choose to assist a wild animal that appears to be in need of help, it comes with some risk of being bitten, scratched or otherwise injured. You also place yourself at some risk of exposure to a variety of diseases and parasites that may be transmitted from animals to humans. Please protect yourself from injury by not handling the animal directly, even with gloved hands. Instead, wildlife rehabilitators usually recommend that people gently scoop an animal into a cardboard box, pet carrier or other sturdy container. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after coming into close contact with animals and disinfect or discard any materials used in the process.

If you work in the natural resources field or are involved in wildlife rehabilitation, sooner or later you will be faced with a situation in which the transport of a live wild animal is necessary, whether it is to a veterinarian, a wildlife rehabilitator, or a release site. When transporting wild animals, it is important to remember that most wild animals view humans as a threat and experience high levels of stress while in their presence. Therefore, every effort must be made to minimize stress for the animal during transport. In addition, the animal being transported is most likely already in a compromised physical state (e.g., sick, injured), which can be further exacerbated by stress.

The following are recommendations to help limit the stress experienced by wild animals during transport:

- Animals should be contained in a **well-ventilated container** with **no sharp or protruding objects** that could cause injury.
- **Do not use wire cages to transport birds.** A sturdy, covered cardboard box with pencil-sized holes punched into it provides a great transport container for most wild birds. Wire cages can cause serious injury and feather damage. Pet carrier doors and windows can be covered with cloth or cardboard to keep birds from getting a wing, leg or bill caught in the mesh.
- **Provide a thick layer of ravel-free non-slip material on the bottom of the transport container**, such as artificial turf or carpet pad. This provides a secure footing for the animal which helps limit stress caused by trying to stand and maintain balance on a slippery surface. There should be no loose strings or loops in the material which can cause strangulation or the animal to become entangled.
- **Limit visual stimuli** for the animal by covering the transport container with a sheet, towel, blanket, etc. Always allow for adequate ventilation when covering an animal or container.
- **Limit auditory stimuli** in the transport vehicle. Do not play loud music or expose the animal to excessive talking or traffic noise and wind through open windows.

- **Limit exposure to noxious fumes.** Do not smoke while transporting an animal in your vehicle. Do not place the transport container where exhaust fumes may be venting.
- **Do not transport animals in the trunk of a vehicle or in the uncovered bed of a truck.** The trunk of a vehicle does not offer enough ventilation and may become too hot. Transporting an animal in the back of an open vehicle would expose the animal to the elements, harsh winds, excessive noise and potential injury from objects that may fly into the transport container.
- **Do not allow other animals to approach the transport container.** Keep dogs from sniffing or charging at the container as this will be very stressful for the caged wild animal and may cause it to injure itself further. If transporting multiple wild animals, make sure visual barriers are in place before putting containers close together.
- **The lid, door or other opening to the transport container should be secured** to prevent the animal from escaping.
- The transport container should be **placed securely in the vehicle** to prevent excessive movement during transport.
- **Avoid unnecessary delays** while transporting animals. Avoid side-trips, such as running errands or visiting friends, which would prolong the time the animal spends in transport. Since transport causes stress for the animal involved, it is imperative to get to the destination as soon as possible (while, of course, maintaining speed limits and traffic laws).
- **Do not take photographs** of the animal. The bright camera flash and exposing the animal to needless manipulation and visual stimuli during the process of taking photos can be stressful.
- **Avoid excessive handling** of the animal.
- **Avoid direct eye contact** with the animal, as most animals view eye contact as a challenging or threatening gesture.
- **Do not attempt to feed or offer water to the wild animal.**
- **Limit handling of all wild animals in transport.**

