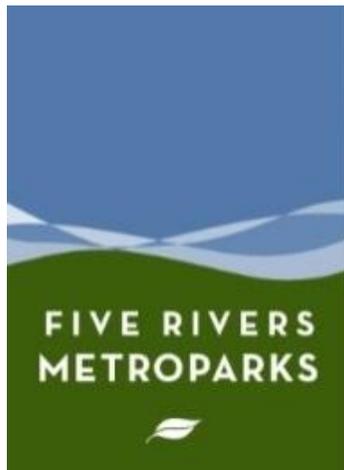


Wildlife Ambassador Volunteer Handbook



Updated 01/19/26 MBH

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ANIMAL CARE PROVIDER CHECK-OFF

<i>For Volunteer:</i>	
<i>Reviewer:</i>	
<i>Completed:</i>	

ORIENTATION

- Has all appropriate applications and documentation on file with Volunteer Coordinator
- Has watched Wildlife Ambassador Orientation
- Has review of manual & check-off sheet and passed quiz.
- Has completed hand-on shadowing of Animal Care for two sessions or more
- Has demonstrated ability to independently provide animal care in front of qualified observer.
 - Can safely pick-up and move turtles & snakes to and from enclosure
 - Knows the procedure & schedule for animal feeding and recording records
 - Knows how to note shedding and issues with shedding for the snakes; needing a “spa bath”
 - Knows the procedure for sanitation of water bowls and feeding dishes
 - Knows procedure for removal of fecal matter & leftover food in enclosures
 - Knows the proper procedure for feeding all raptors (what each eats and on what schedule) and how to record records
 - Knows location of animal food freezer & refrigerator / routine for setting out next day’s raptor food
 - Knows location of food placement for each raptor
 - Knows the procedure for disposal of leftover food taken from raptor enclosures
 - Understands the proper distance to maintain from the birds to ensure their comfort.
- Understands all concepts of the CORE message and can deliver the message to the public regarding the Wildlife Ambassadors when requested; CORE concepts of Wild Animal Ambassadors to always be included in-order
 - These wild animals can see us. They have very good eyes
 - Our Wildlife Ambassadors represent the 90% of FRMP’s 16,000 acres of land that are excellent homes for wild animals and plants because they are rich woodlands, prairies, wetlands and river corridors. When you support our levy, you are supporting all their homes.
 - Our Wildlife are also asking for help with having homes outside of parks because some wild animals and plants must move from place to place if you can take actions like establishing pollinator gardens or plant oak trees that will help.
- Can confidently and accurately speak to the public regarding the animal ambassadors & their needs in captivity & what they would need if they were still in their natural world:
 - Eastern Box Turtles
 - Black Rat Snakes
 - Raptors; American Kestrel, Eastern Screech Owl & Red Tail Hawk

- Can articulate why we need and maintain special education permits from ODNR and US Fish and Wildlife Agencies to allow us to have live animals and study skins/pelts etc. for use with presentations.
- Has good knowledge of the Wildlife Ambassadors at FRMP / where they came from & when; their individual story, health issues & diet.

- Initial Shadow/Orientation Date _____ by _____
- Second Shadow Date _____ by _____
- Successful Independent Demonstration of all skills
Date _____ by _____

Referred to Volunteer Coordinator Date _____ by _____

- Picture sent to Volunteer Coordinator by _____ Date _____
- Badge requested by _____ Date _____

07/2022 DH

Animals Currently in Our Care - Education Animals at Twin Valley Welcome Center and Adv. Central as of January 2026

<i>Species</i>	<i>Date Acquired</i>	<i>Origin</i>
Box Turtle (Female) <i>PIT tag #- 069 069 308</i> <i>Myrtle</i>	summer of 1996	Englewood MetroPark by summer staff, has crooked spine
Box Turtle (Male) <i>PIT tag #- AVID-033 001 114</i> <i>CJ</i>	Before 2005	Five Rivers MetroParks Natural Area
E. Box Turtle (Female) <i>PIT tag # 069 821 119</i> <i>Terri</i>	January 17, 2018	Donated by John Houston after spending two years in his classroom. The permit has been transferred
Painted Turtle (Male) <i>Pit tag#- 033 001 517</i> <i>Frankie</i>	2006	Adventure Central, Public dropped off
Box Turtle <i>Pit Tag # AVID-097-577-565</i> <i>Michaelangelo</i>	Before 2011	Adventure Central, Five Rivers MetroParks Natural Area
Gray Rat Snake (male) <i>PIT tag # AVID-069-341-882</i> <i>JJ</i>	February 8, 2015	Donated by Earl Family, after they unknowingly purchased snake at a trade show in Ohio summer of 2012. We reported incident to ODNR and Officer Trent Weaver investigated the (March 2015) purchase with Earl family. No action is required by FRMP except to pit tag the snake which was completed 3/1/2016.
Gray Rat Snake (female) <i>PIT# 985-141-001-943-185</i> <i>Georgina</i>	October 26, 2019 Note, This animal has escaped from its pen due to human error Fall 2020 and was recovered in the spring of 2021	House Basement private landowner donation in Montgomery County
Eastern Screech Owl (female) <i>Juniper</i>	January 8, 2025	Animal Care Alliance, Richmond Indiana as a baby in 2024
Red-tailed Hawk (male) <i>Eragon</i>	August 22, 2022	Oaken Acres Wildlife Center, Illinois Kathy Stelford.



Eastern Box Turtle (C.J., Myrtle and Terri)

Fast Facts: This reptile has a high-domed shell (carapace) and a hinged bottom shell (plastron). The hinged plastron allows the animal to pull in its arms, legs, and head to seal itself away from predators. One way to tell a male from a female is that the male has bright red eyes. A more accurate way to tell the sex is to look at the plastron. Males have an inward dip in the plastron while the female plastrons are almost completely flat. Box turtles are omnivorous and will eat fruits, plants, and earthworms. These animals usually found on the forest floor. Life span is approximately 50 years and they are native to Ohio.

Handling Techniques: Support the turtle body with both hands and position your fingers beneath its feet so it feels secure. Allow guest to touch the carapace or back legs of the animal, if appropriate. Mention that they should avoid the head so the animal does not get frightened. Turtles can transmit disease organisms such as Salmonella to people, so make sure to have hand sanitizer available to guests or direct them to wash their hands when restrooms are easily available. These turtles are not known to bite.

Feeding and Enclosure Care: Turtles are fed on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday each week. Turtles are separated into plastic containers to monitor feeding. Place each turtle in the bins located in the turtle room. You can use the sprinkling can marked H₂O only from the turtle room to put water in each container with the turtle. Water on their back seems to simulate drinking, eating and defecating. You can soak them this way before or after offering food whatever fruit is available and at least two earthworms to each turtle. We often try worms first and dust the worms with vitamins. Earthworms and fruit are found in the small refrigerator in the back storage room. Turtles can also be offered mealworms or darkling beetles on occasion. Leave the turtles to eat for at least 20-30 minutes, checking on them periodically to make sure they do not escape the containers. After feeding, place turtles back into enclosure, record what was eaten and clean/sanitize the containers used. Break up and moisten enclosure bedding if dry. Pull out of bedding any obvious scat and discard. Empty water bowls, scrub them, refill them, and return them to the pen.

Life Stories:

Myrtle is our oldest and was found at Engwood. As of 2026 she is between 35 to 40 years old

Terri belonged to a science teacher and her permit was transferred to us when he retired. She is between 25 and 27 years old as of 2026

C.J. (short for Cuthburt Jones) was found at Germantown MetroParks before 2003 and as of 2026 he is 30 to 35 years old



Gray Rat Snakes (J.J. and Georgina)

We have a history of losing snakes. Always recheck the pens to ensure they are closed and the latches secured every time you are doing general animal care.

Fast Facts: The black rat snake is the largest snake in Ohio, reaching lengths up to eight feet. More commonly it will reach a length of 6 -7 feet and approximately 1.5" in diameter. It is an excellent climber and often takes shelter in a cavity high up in the trees. It often enters abandoned or little used buildings such as barns or attics in search of rodents to eat. Releases a very foul odor from scent glands when captured. One of the most frequently killed species due to its size and general human fear. They can live up to 20 years.

Handling Techniques: Any snake has the potential to bite, so use caution when handling. Do not startle the snake and never pick up by the tail or head. Using slow movements, gently scoop the mid-section of the snake into your palm and lift slowly. Make sure to support the snake fully. Most snakes will travel hand to hand or around your arm. J.J. is very docile and much less active when handled. He will usually be coiled or wrap partially around your hand / arm and sit still. He is very calm when presenting. Gently hold him and guide him from hand to hand. All snakes can become very active at times with handling and presentation so be prepared for this. Use caution not to drop the snake. If you are bitten or drop the animal, contact your supervisor ASAP, and document the incident. Treat any wound as a cut, clean, disinfect and bandage. If snake is holding onto you, you may have to gently push its head towards the bitten area to unhook its teeth which angle slightly backwards toward its body.

Feeding and Enclosure Care: Give prepared hoppers and pinkies, weekly on Thursday. Food can be left overnight, and amount eaten recorded the next day. Warming the food under a light for a bit and using tongs to offer food to snakes often results in immediate feeding. These animals can go several weeks without feeding, so do not be alarmed if food is not eaten. Food not eaten should be removed the next day and placed in the freezer "gut bucket". Empty water bowls every day, scrub & disinfect them, refill them, and return them to the pen. If the snake has pooped in the enclosure, then move snake to a secure pen (i.e., by placing it in pillowcase with knot, and then in a closed tub) so that the enclosure can be swept and wiped with the papers changed before returning snake and securing pen.

Life Stories:

JJ was donated by a family that had bought him from a snake show and realized he was a native species, He is named after their son and as of 2026 is 14 to 16 years old



Georgina was found in a volunteers basement and we kept her per our permit for education purposes. As of 2026 we believe she is 9 to 11 years old

Red Tailed Hawk (Eragon)

Fast Facts: This large, majestic bird has a brown back and white breast. The tail of the adult is a brick-red color, hence the name. A good field mark is the band of dark stripes across the breast. Much variation is found in the coloration of this bird. Immature red-tailed hawks are brown-and-white striped. The red-tailed hawk is classified as a *buteo* -- a hawk that spends much of its time soaring and has broad wings and a short, fan-shaped tail. It is a large hawk frequently seen in Ohio. It has not suffered the severe population declines caused by DDT and other pesticides that have struck other species. These birds are extremely beneficial, and it is illegal to kill them. This hawk is a common permanent resident of Ohio year-round. Nationally, it inhabits woodlands, fields, plains, and deserts. The diet is quite variable, but consists mostly of mice, insects, and some other small mammals, as well as carrion. Their typical call is a loud descending scream.

Handling Techniques: DO NOT ATTEMPT TO HOLD HAWK UNLESS YOU HAVE BEEN TRAINED AND SIGNED OFF BY DOUGLAS HORVATH! When feeding, you are encouraged to keep an eye on the bird, stay about an arm's length away from him, not to handle the jesses or attempt to hold the bird until you are asked to do so by Doug. Training to handle the bird includes touching his jesses during feeding times. Do not assume you should do this unless you have officially started some training with Doug.

Feeding: Unlock enclosure with key labeled "shed/birds" on large volunteer key on whisk broom. Food for the current day is in the small refrigerator. Eragon gets thawed mice the number of which is curated by the staff. (Check White Board for Updates on Quantities.) Place the food on the large stump to the right of his outer perch as you face him. Except in Winder, dump/scrub the water containers when dirty with algae, add water daily as needed. During the freezing part of winter, we do not fill the water dishes. The hawk will obtain what water he needs through his food source. Scan enclosure for mice/rat remains including "guts and bones" and remove using plastic sandwich bag, found next to animal fridge. These go in animal care freezer in the "gut bucket". Visually assess health of the Hawk from your arms distance away. Talk with him if you'd like. During hot weather, you can bring a water spray bottle and mist him from a distance which he seems to enjoy.

Check cage structure to make sure there are no holes, tears, problems, etc. with cage. Lock enclosure. Take the next day's bag of mice/rats from animal care freezer and put in animal care refrigerator to thaw for next day. Record in Animal Care Book in what eaten and removed from cage, and all notes on the hawk behavior, appearance, and manner.

Life Story:

Eragon is with us because he is missing part of his left wing and is blind in his right eye. We got him from Illinois in 2022. As of 2026 he is between 13 -15 years old



Eastern Screech Owl (Juniper)

Fast Facts:

Eastern screech-owls are dichromatic, meaning they come in two distinct color morphs. They are either uniformly gray or uniformly rufous (orange), with darker streaking on the body. Both color morphs allow for camouflage against the bark of trees. Distinguishing features of the screech owl include its small size, prominent ear tufts and large yellow eyes. This is a common, permanent resident in Ohio. It lives in towns, orchards, and small woodlots. When disturbed or frightened these birds assume a very erect, slender, "frozen" position with the ears especially erect. Their diet consists of mainly mice and large insects, but they will also feed on other small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and birds. The song is an eerie, trembling wail and a soft trill.

Handling Techniques: *DO NOT ATTEMPT TO HANDLE the owl UNLESS YOU HAVE BEEN TRAINED or under staff supervision or signed off by Douglas Horvath or his Designee. You are encouraged to look inside the nest box to insure she is in the enclosure don't place your head directly under box due to bird tendency to poop, always close bottom of box back up ensuring jesses are not caught in the "hinge".*

Feeding: Unlock enclosure with key labeled on the whisk broom. Food for the current day is in the small refrigerator. Juniper gets 3 mice every day which is adjusted periodically. (Check White Board for Updates on Quantities.) Place the food on ledge wall opposite of her door inside the enclosure. Except in Winter, dump/scrub the water containers when dirty with algae, add water daily as needed. During the freezing part of winter, we do not fill the water dishes. The Owl will obtain what water it needs through its food source. Scan enclosure for mice/rat remains including "guts and bones". Be sure to check on top of the box next to the door as you enter.

Life Story:

Juniper was found with her next mates in the spring of 2024 with an eye infection that had spread throughout the nest. To save her life they had to remove her left eye. She came to live with us at the beginning of 2025 and as of 2026, she is two years old. Juniper is fully flighted and will need to be watched for escape.

Sanitation

Some things to remember:

- No tub, container, or water/food bowl should be washed with soap. Animals are very sensitive to soap and soap residue. Exposure to soap can make them sick or cause death.
- Tubs, container, or water/food bowls can be sanitized with a diluted bleach solution but ONLY if that object has thoroughly rinsed three times and drying is also recommended. The bleach solution is labeled in a spray bottle. The mixture is one capful of bleach, then fill the rest with water.
- Poop/Urine contact elevates the chances of an animal getting sick or having infections. Humans also have an increased chance of infection when exposed to excessive fecal matter. If you notice poop/urine, clean it as soon as possible from ALL animal enclosures. Be sure to wash your hands.

Snake Cages/Enclosures

- Snake enclosures should be checked each day for poop or urine output. If poop/urine is present, the cage/enclosure should be cleaned and the paper changed. To sanitize, remove everyone from cage/enclosure and spray with diluted bleach solution. This solution should sit for at least 5 minutes to kill bacteria. After waiting, wipe clean and dry with paper towels - MAKE SURE YOU DO NOT LEAVE DROPS OF THE BLEACH SOLUTION IN THE ENCLOSURE. Allow the cage/enclosure to sit an additional 5-10 minutes to ensure evaporation. Water bowls should be scrubbed each day, changing the water when low. As the snake drinks, crawls through its water dish it develops a film on the surface of the water. If the snake has pooped in the water bowl it should be cleaned and sanitized with fresh water added.
- If a snake has been transported in a pillowcase and defecates in the bag, the bag should be washed as soon as possible. DO NOT put the bag away without cleaning it. Turn the bag inside out and wash bag out in sink using a small amount of sprayed dilute bleach. Make sure to rinse bag completely. Hang bag in the animal care area to dry.

Bird Enclosures

- In the summer, to combat algae, water bowls need to be scrubbed daily. Fresh water should always be added/replaced. During freezing winter weather, we turn the water dishes may be turned over to allow ice to melt out of them. Occasionally staff will fill them as a supplemental offer of water and allow them to freeze and thaw with the weather. Typically, the birds will gain the water they need at that time through the food resource they eat.
- Cleaning up of food remains is important in keeping the enclosure sanitary. When cleaning water bowels, old water can be poured on spots of whitewash on the walls or gravel. If whitewash is on a hard surface (wall, wood plank, rock or stump), then use scrub brush to help clean the area. If you notice an excessive amount of whitewash in the bird cages, please let staff know so that a deep cleaning can be scheduled. It will be appreciated when this deep cleaning happens that all volunteers assist with these tasks as well. These will be scheduled on the calendar.

Box Turtles

- The bins used to feed the turtles should be scrubbed and sprayed with diluted bleach after use.
- Water bowels should be monitored daily and cleaned if any sign of poop or urine is present. If bleach solution is used to clean, then make sure the bowel is thoroughly rinsed three times and drying is also recommended before placing back into the enclosure.
- If poop is noticed in the moss in the enclosure, it should be removed immediately.
- Moss in the display enclosure should be removed and replaced as necessary. Notify staff when this is done and make a note in the animal care book.
- Always keep the moss in enclosures moist which also helps the turtles skin moisture.

Recording Animal Feeding/Weights/Behaviors

DO's

- DO record exactly what was eaten
- DO record exactly what was NOT eaten
- DO record behavior observations (i.e., chirpy, active, sleepy, inactive, nervous, hiding, basking). These can help the next person coming in assess the health of the animal
- DO notice when the animals are being used for outreach programs as their behavior may be the result of handling and use. Animals in use are noted on the small white board in animal care room.
- DO record weights at least every three weeks. Lead Animal Care Providers will do weighing of all animals. The only animal a volunteer may not weigh is Ruby unless approved by Douglas Horvath.
- DO record when a snake sheds; note if the snake has leftover skin which hasn't shed and may need assistance with a water bath or "spa bath". You will need to be shown how this is done before you attempt to give a snake a bath.
- DO record anything you feel is important - more information is better than less. Please use space in the Animal Care Binder as it's important to document as much as you see or think. Also make notes in ongoing Animal Care Journal by binder. If you have concerns, please notify a staff member (on Emergency Sheet) right away. It may be nothing but you may be seeing something which could develop into an issue sooner than later. You are the eyes and ears and care givers for FRMP Animal Ambassadors. You are the people seeing them daily. Let's keep communication going for better health of these animals.

DON'Ts

- DON'T forget to record what was eaten - ***MOST IMPORTANT***
- DON'T forget to make notes of appearance, behavior, and manner of these animals. It's better to have more information than not have what we should be noting and miss something.
- DON'T forget to turn all lights back on over the aquariums and enclosures if you turned them off. If the light was on and you turned it off, turn it back on, if the light was off don't turn it on, some of the "red" heat lamps on over the snake and painted turtle are used only as needed to maintain temperature. New pens are warmer than the historic pens.
- DON'T need to record when using animals for programming in binder unless something happened during use regarding behavior or injury. But always note date and what animals you are taking to programs on the white board so others know why they are gone.
- DON'T hesitate to call for help if you feel an animal is behaving in a way that could become a health issue. See the Emergency Sheet for names and numbers.

What To Expect From Our Animals?

Bird

- ***Eragon*** is harder to handle and generally nervous. Only those who are experienced and extensively trained are allowed to handle Eragon. He will either stay out on his perch in the sun or under the overhang. Talking to Eragon is a good way to get to know him. *DO NOT approach Eragon or be within arm's length of his perch or him unless you have been trained and are certified to handle him.*
- ***Juniper*** Has proven to be an easy bird to handle. She will stay in her box most of the time only coming out to eat between dusk and dawn. She has not yet tried to fly out of the door unless being caught for programs but we still need to monitor her carefully while entering and exiting her enclosure.

Turtles

- ***C.J.***, the box turtle, is an escape artist and will try to escape the tub when he is done feeding. He usually eats quickly and then gets bored and climbs on the sides of the Turtle tub. He is used extensively with our Animal Ambassador Outreach programs and is a very popular turtle. He is wonderful to handle, very calm and gentle.
- ***Myrtle***, the box turtle, likes to hide and is a good demonstration of how a box turtle retreats into their shell. Myrtle will be the slowest to finish eating and may take her as much as 40 minutes eat. She is shy and used often for Outreach Programs due to her nature to retreat inside her shell. She is very calm and quiet however when used with C.J. will often be ready to walk off with him during a program.
- ***Terri***, the box turtle is very animated and is small. She is a good one to bring to preschool programs as her size and lack of red eyes is less likely to scare the children. Terri does try to escape her enclosure but has very little luck as the walls are too big. She is fast for a turtle so you need to watch her closely during programs so she doesn't escape off the tarp.

Snakes

- ***JJ***, the Gray Rat Snake, just joined the animal ambassador team in February, 2015. He is about 8 years old and handles very well. He is calm and less active when handled. He will generally curl up on your palm or wrap gently around you hand / arm and just rest. He is a favorite to work with because of his calm nature. He is used extensively for Outreach Programs with all age groups inside the park and at offsite locations.

- ***Georgina***, the small Gray Rat Snake, is a very fast snake continually in motion. Since she is relatively new and we are in the process of taming her, she has occasionally bitten staff and volunteers when being handled. While the bite is small, the skin may be broken. If someone is bitten, please report it immediately to a supervisor. Make sure if you are not checked off on handling her to have a person who is with you. The more she is handled the tamer she will be.

Window On Wildlife (WOW) Care

Step 1. Unlock the shed. The combination of the shed is 7275. Arrange the numbers from left to right, push in the lock, then pull out to open.

Step 2. Bird seed is kept in trashcans in the shed behind the Welcome Center. Use a 5 gal. bucket and fill about 3/4s of the way full with seeds. Make sure to securely close the lid back on top of the trashcans holding the seeds after done filling the bucket. Bring a scoop with you.

Step 3. Make your way to the front of the welcome center. There is an entrance to the WOW area by the end of the fence.

Step 4. Check for fallen or broken bird feeders, fallen bird baths, stones in the pond or branches out of place. Take broken feeders inside and alert staff when able. Pick up bird bath if fallen and move out of place branches to the brush pile behind the WOW area.

Step 5. Fill empty feeders and check on suet cake. Replace suet cake if necessary.

Step 6. Check fountain to be sure it's running. (late spring through early fall task. Video to be added soon)

Step 7. Return bucket and scoop to the shed, check trashcan lids and lock the shed doors. The lock will not lock unless the numbers are not in the combination setting.

Permits & Monitoring

All live wild animals and bird study skins and mounts, nests and eggs at Five Rivers MetroParks are reported to either or both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Ohio Division of Wildlife. If a park visitor asks you about keeping these native animals as pets, please let them know that it is illegal to do so without these types of permits. This is one of

the hardest questions we get asked, as we are not modeling the behavior that we want the public to follow. Our message is that these are still wild animals; not pets. We treat them as ambassadors who represent the need to conserve their habitat homes and to address people's fears of them so they are not senselessly killed or removed from their homes to become pets. That's why we have them here at FRMP and they are unreleasable because they are either injured or have been held in captivity long enough to make returning them illegal. Reptiles have also been specially PIT tagged as required by law and to assist with keeping records. All of our Wildlife Ambassadors require lots of special care which is laborious and they also require special permits with reporting requirements. Please take the time to address the public's questions on this point if they allow you the time as this is an important concept.

If an official from either of the above departments were to ask to see these permits, there are copies available at the Twin Valley Welcome Center, with additional copies on record within the park.

Who To Call In An Emergency in this order

Doug Horvath, Education Coordinator

Home 937-833-1419

Mobile 937-701-5042

Office 937-277-4835

Joshua York, Education Coordinator (Cox)

Office 937-277-4178

Mobile 513-465-0123

Chris Landis, Germantown Park Manager

Office 937-277-4159

Mobile 937-974-7748

Mary Beth Hobson, Education Specialist

Mobile 937-477-1858

Dr. Brian Lokai - Veterinarian

Office 937-433-2160

PLEASE NOTE: This procedure only applies to our captive education animals. For other issues and emergencies with animals, please use the Special Situations Addendum to this Handbook.

Radio Procedures For The Welcome Center

When to use the Radio:

1. Can't turn the alarm off
2. There is a medical emergency
3. Lost person Alert
4. There has been a Break-in

How to use the Radio:

1. Leave the radio on its current channel. It is already on the Ranger channel.
2. The handset of the radio is to the left of the radio box.
3. Press and hold the "talk" button on the handset. The handset will beep to let you know when you can speak.
4. After it beeps (and while still pressing the button) you can talk.
5. When you are finished, let go of the talk button and wait for a response. You must press the button each time you want to speak.

What to say:

Volunteer: "Twin Valley Welcome Center Volunteer to a Ranger."

Ranger: "This is ranger (*ranger's identification number*) Go ahead."

Volunteer: "My name is (*name of volunteer*) and there is (*states problem*). I am at (*states location at the Welcome Center*)." (ex. *My name is Mary Beth Hobson and there are a pack of rabid canaries wearing clown wigs here at the Welcome center. I am hiding in the office of the center with an antler and a broom. I need help!*)

ADDENDUMS TO WILD ANIMAL AMBASSADOR HANDBOOK

Addendum #1 – How to answer questions about wildlife from patrons and the community at large.

**** Refer them to www.wildohio.gov/staywild or 1-800-WILDLIFE****

They were born wild, let's keep them wild...

In the spring and early summer, when wildlife reproduction is at its peak, you may have the good fortune of observing baby animals in the wild. Often, the babies you see will be unattended by a parent. Unless something seems amiss, keep your distance, and leave them alone. Human intervention is always a wild animal's LAST hope for survival, NEVER its best hope.

Is the animal really an orphan?

Wildlife parents are very devoted to their young and rarely abandon them. Many species are raised by only one parent (the mother), and she cannot be in two places at once. This means that baby wildlife must be left alone several times during the day or even most of the time while the mother ventures off to find food for herself and her young.

The best thing to do is to keep your distance and keep children and pets away from the young animal. This is to protect both humans and wildlife. Wild animals can carry parasites or diseases that can be harmful to humans and pets. Wild animals also defend themselves by scratching or biting.

What do I do if an animal is truly abandoned or injured?

If you see open wounds or other injuries, or you know in fact that a young wild animal has lost its parent, consult your nearest [Wildlife District Office](#) or [local wildlife rehabilitator](#). Do not attempt to capture or feed wildlife until proper, expert guidance is provided to you. Also, limit contact with the animal to reduce stress and the possibility of it becoming habituated. Taming a young animal will make it unreleasable in the wild. It is illegal to keep wildlife without a rehabilitators permit. Rehabilitators go through extensive training on how to raise and treat young and injured wildlife. Leave it to the professionals and you'll greatly increase the animal's chance of survival.

Other points to consider

Why should we keep wildlife wild?

A baby wild animal's best chance for survival is with its mother.

- 🦋 Wild animals are born to live their lives in the wild, not in a house or a cage.
- 🦋 The best option for a wild animal is to learn normal behaviors from their own species in their natural environment. An animal that has become habituated to humans cannot be returned to the wild.

- 🐢 Once they grow, wild animals are active and independent, which can make them dangerous and destructive.
- 🐢 Wild animals can be highly stressed by sights, sounds, and smells from people and pets, especially when in proximity. Stress can cause health problems and even death.
- 🐢 Wild animals have complex nutritional needs not easily met in captivity. Nutritional deficiencies can leave an animal deformed for life.
- 🐢 Wild animals can carry diseases and parasites, some of which are transmissible to people or pets. Some diseases, like rabies, can cause serious health problems.

A little about turtles:

There are 11 species of turtles in Ohio. The box turtle is Ohio's only terrestrial (land-dwelling) turtle. But all female turtles lay their eggs on land.

- 🐢 The months of May and June are peak nesting season for Ohio's turtles. The female turtle buries the eggs and leaves them to hatch on their own. After hatching, young turtles are completely independent and self-sufficient

I found a turtle, what do I do?

Leave it alone if:

- 🐢 The turtle is healthy and uninjured. Old injuries that have healed, including a missing limb or eye or previously cracked shell, are commonly observed in wild turtles and are not a sufficient reason for rescuing a turtle.

If you move or rescue a turtle:

- 🐢 When you rescue a turtle, document the location with as much specificity as possible. Within reason, this is the location where the turtle should be released. Turtles often use the same areas for nesting, overwintering, and seeking out mates. How exactly these patterns are formed is poorly understood, but recent research is finding ever more complex turtle life histories. This fidelity to a specific area can often lead to the failure of translocated turtles to establish home ranges in unfamiliar habitats, eventually succumbing to death associated with dispersal and exhaustion. In addition, translocation of turtles has been implicated in the spread diseases. Not all infected turtles will show symptoms and new diseases are constantly being identified.
- 🐢 Do not move the turtle to a "better spot" or different location. Removing turtles from areas that you deem "unsuitable" will eventually result in the loss of populations. constantly rescued and relocated.
- 🐢 Release turtles as soon as possible. The longer a turtle spends in captivity, the greater the chance it has to be exposed to diseases. Living in captivity may also interrupt natural cycles such as overwintering, breeding, and nesting.
- 🐢 Be on the lookout for turtles on the roadway, especially during the months of May and June when turtles are looking for nesting sites. If it is safe to do so, you can help a turtle cross the road. Be very mindful of your safety and the safety of other drivers, and do not attempt to stop traffic. Move it in the direction in which it is traveling. If you turn it around in the opposite direction the turtle will likely make another attempt to cross the road.

- 🐢 Take extra caution with snapping turtles. Snapping turtles can be large, heavy, have a very long mobile neck and can bite very hard. Use a shovel or board to scoop up and carry the turtle or use a sturdy stick to push and scoot a snapping turtle, across the road.

Contact a licensed wildlife rehabilitator if:

If you find an injured turtle, call a licensed wildlife rehabilitator as soon as possible. Do not put the injured turtle in water. The turtle may not be able to keep its head out of the water and could drown.

How can I help prevent harm to turtles?

- 🐢 Be on the lookout for turtles on the roadway, especially during the months of May and June when turtles are looking for nesting sites. If it is safe to do so, you can help a turtle cross the road. Be very mindful of your safety and the safety of other drivers, and do not attempt to stop traffic. Move it in the direction in which it is traveling. If you turn it around in the opposite direction the turtle will likely make another attempt to cross the road.
- 🐢 Always keep your pets under control and watch them when they are outdoors, especially in the spring and summer when they could easily find baby wildlife.
- 🐢 Do not make a wild turtle your pet! Understand that wild animals are born to live their lives in the wild - not in a house or cage. Also, raising a wild animal in captivity is illegal unless you have a state permit.

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