



Wildlife Rehabilitation Mentoring

Guidelines for mentoring new rehabilitators in the rehabilitation and
release of orphaned Tasmanian marsupials

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What is mentoring?

Mentoring is the act of helping or guiding a less experienced person to understand and develop the skills and knowledge that will help them achieve their goals.

Why is mentoring important?

In wildlife rehabilitation mentors play a crucial role in the training and development of less experienced wildlife rehabilitators. After attending training courses some new rehabilitators may struggle in the practical application of knowledge when wildlife come into their care. Without ongoing support and assistance, an inexperienced rehabilitator may have unpleasant experiences and give up rehabilitation altogether.

A good mentor will guide a less experienced rehabilitator through every aspect of rehabilitation, from the preparation prior to receiving an animal, all the way through to successful release. Throughout this process a good mentor will ensure the welfare of injured and orphaned wildlife, and encourage the less experienced rehabilitator to stay engaged.

Novices and Intermediates benefit from mentoring through:

- Better outcomes for the wildlife in their care
- Opportunities for discussing issues in detail
- Confidence and self-appraisal through the opportunity to receive honest and constructive criticism
- Goal setting opportunities and support to achieve these goals
- Opportunities to develop strategic thinking
- Opportunities to develop good listening skills
- A more positive experience of wildlife rehabilitation

Advanced rehabilitators benefit from being a mentor through:

- Opportunities to improve animal welfare and provide better outcomes for wildlife
- Reaffirming and reflecting on rehabilitation experience and skills
- Opportunities to share rehabilitation knowledge, experience and skills
- Opportunities to contribute to the community through education
- Opportunities to gain an understanding of the viewpoints of newer rehabilitators
- Development of interpersonal and problem solving skills
- Exposure to a larger volume of animals that allow increased learning opportunities

What's involved in mentoring?

Mentors must be actively engaged and proactive in the mentoring relationship. New rehabilitators require close guidance until they become competent in the rehabilitation of each new species they take on. A mentor must make the effort to see the new rehabilitator and joey in person to ensure they are applying correct techniques, and check that the joey is thriving. Assessing the joey in person regularly will help to identify any early warning signs that an inexperienced rehabilitator will not yet be able to pick up on.

Mentors must have a good understanding of the 'basics' of wildlife rehabilitation, and be able to communicate these effectively. For example, when a new rehabilitator is struggling to bottle feed a new orphan a mentor must be able to demonstrate and explain bottle feeding skills that have become second nature. For example, the subtle difference in hand position, the position of the joey, the temperature of the milk, and environmental influences. Effectively communicating this valuable knowledge enables a new rehabilitator to differentiate between a joey refusing a bottle because it is satiated, or refusing for other reasons that may require further investigation.

Who should be a mentor?

Ideally a mentor should have the following:

Skills:

- Communication and interpersonal skills
- Ability to facilitate learning
- Understanding of the different learning styles
- Analytical skills
- Ability to actively listen and provide constructive feedback

Attitudes

- Passion for wildlife rehabilitation
- Willingness to share expertise and time
- Commitment to helping less experienced rehabilitators
- Commitment to providing a high standard of rehabilitation and release
- Respect and patience
- A good role model for best practice rehabilitation
- Willingness to keep up with the latest techniques and research on wildlife rehabilitation

Experience

- Extensive training and/or years of experience in wildlife rehabilitation

- Successfully rehabilitated and released a large numbers of wildlife from a broad range of species and life stages.

Beginning a mentoring relationship

At the beginning of the mentoring relationship, mentors and new rehabilitators should clearly define the expectations of their relationship. This should include:

- A discussion of how the new rehabilitator learns, and any barriers to learning
- Committing to an open and honest relationship
- Exchanging contact details and discussing the best ways to communicate
- Identify a second person who can act as a back-up mentor in an emergency situation where the primary mentor may not be available.

Note: different mentors may have different techniques for some aspects of rehabilitation. Following the advice of multiple mentors at the same time is not recommended. If trying multiple techniques – how will you know which technique was successful for future reference?

Mentors have different personalities and one might suit some people and not others. This is just human nature and doesn't necessarily reflect badly on either party. It is important to find a mentoring relationship that is mutually beneficial.

New rehabilitators who attend training courses have better rehabilitation outcomes than those that don't. Mentors should encourage new rehabilitators to attend training courses before they take on an animal. This is a time saving measure that eases the burden on the mentor. It means that a new rehabilitator will already have a general idea of what rehabilitation of a species involves, and have detailed notes to refer to.

A Basic Mentoring Guide for Partly Protected Joeys (Brushtails, Bennetts Wallabies and Pademelons)

Set Up and Preparation

Before taking on a joey for rehabilitation, a new rehabilitator must have a mentor, appropriate equipment, and enclosures. It is recommended that a new rehabilitator thoroughly research their species of choice in order to understand biological characteristics and rehabilitation requirements.

Upon receiving the first joey, a new rehabilitator should go through the initial stages in person with their mentor. This includes: the first health check,

checking enclosures and heat pads are set up correctly, the rehabilitator understands how to monitor and adjust the temperature of heat pads, preparation of oral rehydration fluid and milk replacement formula, teat selection and creating a hole the correct size in the teat.

A mentor should ensure the new rehabilitator has a solid understanding of basic techniques, as this will provide a foundation for them to build their knowledge and skills. It may have been a while since a new rehabilitator attended a training course, and a refresher in the theory may be required.

The First Feed

The first feed can be difficult for a new rehabilitator and the new orphan. A mentor should be present to demonstrate and provide guidance, including, holding the joey correctly, easing the teat into the mouth, how to encourage suckling, the amount of milk required, and the timing of feeds. A mentor should provide lots of encouragement and reassurance that feeding will become easier with practice. Following this, the mentor should provide a demonstration of toileting, and assist a new rehabilitator to refine their technique.

A mentor should show a new rehabilitator effective record keeping, to not only assist with the mentoring relationship, but as a useful tool for monitoring and detecting early warning signs (behaviours, smells etc.) that can indicate illness or disease. This can be provided to the Department as demonstrated evidence of experience in wildlife rehabilitation.

The Rest of Week One

The first week is the most difficult for the new rehabilitator and the new orphan. Experienced rehabilitators know that this is when many things can go wrong. It is recommended that a mentor observe the very first feed on day 1 (as outlined above), one feed on day 2, one feed on day 4, and one feed on day 7.

Assessing a joey regularly allows a mentor to pick up on any early warning signs that a new rehabilitator doesn't have the experience to detect, and to step in and provide more intensive care if the animal isn't progressing as expected. It also allows a mentor to observe the new rehabilitators techniques and refine or re-teach if needed.

A week is also an adequate time to assess whether the orphan and the new rehabilitator are a good match. If the joey requires a more experienced rehabilitator it is better to identify this early to prevent unnecessary stress for the new rehabilitator (and the orphan). The joey can be passed on to a more experienced rehabilitator, and a more suitable joey can be allocated to the new rehabilitator.

Two Weeks and Beyond

It is recommended that a mentor and new rehabilitator see each other in person during the second week to reassess the joey, check the documentation, and discuss any issues. From this a mentor should decide on a schedule for future face-to-face contact, based on how they feel the new rehabilitator and joey are progressing.

A mentor should initiate this contact initially to ensure the joey is thriving. Contact should be regular enough to pick up on subtle changes in the joey to prevent them from turning into a much larger problem.

A Note on Feedback

Some new rehabilitators may not be used to receiving feedback. Wildlife rehabilitation is complex and takes many years to master – it is not something that can be learned overnight. Issues will arise, and these should be viewed as a learning tool, not as a failure on the new rehabilitator's behalf. Even the most experienced rehabilitator has made mistakes along the way. There is also no such thing as a silly question – better to have asked the question than deal with the consequences of not asking later.

Mentors need to be sensitive about their feedback, and find delivery techniques that work for them.

Some examples include:

- focus on the situation not the person
- use the 'feedback sandwich' model
- give detailed recommendations on how to improve
- deliver the criticism in terms of 'competent' and 'not yet competent' or 'working towards' – this can be helpful for removing any emotion or judgement.

It is important to be patient, provide encouragement and reassurance, and remember how difficult it was when you first began wildlife rehabilitation.

Mentoring is primarily an educational relationship that may blossom into friendship, however this should not prevent a mentor from providing feedback to the less experienced rehabilitator.

Checklist for Mentors and New Rehabilitators

The following checklist has been developed to assist with the initial stages of mentoring a new rehabilitator. It may be helpful to also provide them with a copy of this list.

Note: When providing guidance to new rehabilitators it is important to explain the reasoning and importance behind each step so that the new rehabilitator understands why it is necessary.

Checklist For Mentors of New Wildlife Rehabilitators	Tick when complete
<i>Prior to receiving first joey (can be addressed without face-to-face contact)</i>	
Construct suitable enclosures prior to receiving a joey (inside and outside) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Allows for natural behaviors - Provides shelter - Prerelease provides space to adequately prepare for survival post release - All stages of development are addressed 	
Locate suitable release site (and an alternative in case it falls through) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides suitable habitat - Limited risk of harm - Has a population of that species present - Understands that only wildlife that originates in the area should be released there 	
Obtain all supplies needed (milk replacer, oral rehydration fluids etc.)	
Understanding of natural behaviors for the species they intend to rehabilitate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Natural diet in wild - Understanding of needs in captivity 	
Understanding of zoonosis and the importance of quarantine and hygiene practices	
Understanding of the importance of reducing stress throughout rehabilitation	
<i>Upon receiving first joey (must be face-to-face)</i>	
Conduct an initial assessment including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Correctly identify species - Correctly sex a joey - Weigh a joey (and measure the foot and tail if applicable) - Inspect for injuries and parasites (treat with 	

assistance) - Assess body condition and demeanor (with assistance)	
Assess for dehydration and undertake treatment (if necessary) - Ensure new rehabilitator understands different techniques for assessment - Ensure new rehabilitator understands different techniques for treatment - Ensure new rehabilitator has instructions on how to prepare oral rehydration fluid	
Evaluate enclosure set up and modify if necessary	
Demonstrate appropriate temperature control	
Develop care plans together, including: - How much to feed and when - How to transition to a new care plan	
Correctly mix milk replacement formula (Wombaroo® is recommended)	
Correct techniques for bottle feeding, including: - teat size and teat hole size, - when to replace teats, - milk temperature - correct positioning of the body and joey	
Demonstrate and assist new rehabilitator with toileting technique	
Undertake record keeping	
Demonstrate ways to provide sunlight on a daily basis	
Understanding of when to seek mentor assistance, and when and where to seek vet assistance	
Other aspects that may be of assistance	
<i>After the release of the first joey (may not require face-to-face)</i>	
Evaluate the entire process (focus on positive delivery) - Discuss effectiveness of techniques - Discuss effectiveness of enclosures - Discuss what might be changed next time (if anything)	
Discuss any aspects that the new rehabilitator is unsure about	
Provide encouragement and positive feedback	

Mentors Need Their Own Mentors

It is important for all mentors to take a collaborative approach to mentoring, to develop their skills together and learn from each other's experiences. Mentoring is not something that should be done in isolation, and a mentor should have their own mentors who can provide support throughout the mentoring process.