

Every life has value to the individual animal, its family, its species, its particular ecosystem, and to a greater web of life. Increasingly, the courts, states, and local governments are responding to the rights animals have for their basic wellbeing and protection from human benefits that affect an animal's wellbeing (Motavalli, 2003). In helping to restore a wild creature to health and releasing it back into the wild, we honor the creature's will to survive and reaffirm the value of all life (Humane Society of the United States, 1999). Wildlife rehabilitation is the caring for injured, ill and orphaned wild animals with the goal of releasing them to their natural habitat when appropriate (Minnesota Wildlife Assistance Cooperative, 2000). Rehabilitation services may include rescuing the animal from a detrimental situation, veterinary care, feeding, medicating, physical therapy, exercising, hospital care, and pre-release conditioning. Because rehabilitation often involves nonindigenous or exotic animals, releasing the rehabilitated animal is not always an option.

There is a correlation between the number of injured, orphaned and displaced animals and rapid urban growth into areas that formerly provided wildlife habitation. As rapid increases continue in housing and business development and rural community growth, the encroachment of people onto wildlife habitat often causes a clash between the needs of people (which may be perceived as incompatible with the needs of animals) and the needs of wildlife (Humane Society of the United States, 1999). Additionally, oil and gas exploration as well as the conversion of natural habitats into agricultural land places additional stress on

wildlife habitats (Humane Society of America, 2003). Wildlife may return to seasonal nesting or breeding sites that were once natural areas to find housing or other human development. Migratory routes for some animals may be interrupted by the division of land with fencing, agricultural activity or grazing by farm animals and other man-made or human-caused interference with the state of natural areas and wildlife habitat.

The KCF four-county area is a rapidly growing area with most of those counties experiencing a higher growth rate than the state average and Bandera County being the fastest growing county in South Texas (US Census Bureau, 1999). Because of the rapid growth in these four counties, housing and business developments are invading the natural areas that often have historically accommodated wildlife habitat. Additionally, the extreme weather conditions often affecting South Texas, such as floods or droughts, also place animals at risk for harm and increase the need for rescue and rehabilitation services.

For people that are moving into newly developed areas that encroach onto former wildlife habitat or migratory routes, the needs of wildlife may not be familiar to them. Wildlife rehabilitation services may include community education about dealing with orphaned, injured or ill animals. People may typically want to assist an injured animal but the imprinting onto a wild animal of a human feeding and caring for that animal may place that animal at risk for developing too much trust for all people. When released, animals affected by this human

imprinting may place themselves at risk for being harmed by not-so-animal-friendly humans. These animals may also develop an appetite food provided to them by humans but which may be harmful, and even fatal, based on the nutritional needs of some wildlife. Rehabilitation programs often provide education or rescue services to deal with humans who are unfamiliar with the needs of wildlife. In most states it is also illegal for people to keep wildlife (Humane Society of the United States, 1999). Only licensed rehabilitators are sanctioned to legally care for wild animals.

Another significant issue that affects the need for rescue and rehabilitation services is the proliferation of exotic animal ownership. According to the Humane Society of the United States, 90% of exotic and wild animals taken as pets die within two years (2003). Exotic animal ownership has grown dramatically in Texas. For example, 40% of privately owned large cats in the nation, or about 4,000, reside in Texas, second only to India in total tiger population (Sharp, 1998; Saving China's Tigers, 2003). The problem was exacerbated when the legislature took away regulation of exotic animals from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and gave it to local communities in 1997. It is believed that there are more captive tigers in the United States than those living in the wild in Asia (The Association of Sanctuaries, 2003). Most exotic animals are kept in a ranch environment. Although more recent data is lacking, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in 1988 estimated that 68% of all exotics were found in the Texas Hill Country (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 1988). Additionally, the proliferation of exotics is also seen in pet ownership. Exotic pets demand specific nutritional, habitation exercise, requirements that are often left unmet by their owners (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2003). The domestication of an animal is not simply a result of raising a wild animal in captivity, as animal instincts are deeper than the bond between the animal and its human owner (HSUS, 2003). Instead, domestication is the result of thousands of years

of interdependence and interrelations with humans.

Furthermore, exotic animals also introduce the potential to contaminate native animals and humans with disease. Reptiles and amphibians carry the potential to spread salmonella to humans that come into contact with them. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control states that approximately 93,000 cases of salmonella a year result from contact with reptiles. (Humane Society of the United States, 2003). Captivity for a wild animal creates enormous stress on the animal, making them further vulnerable to medical complications (HSUS, 2003). Additionally, most pet owners, as do many veterinarians, lack the expertise to provide appropriate veterinary care to exotic pets (USDA, 2000).

Finally, a significant issue that contributes to the need for wildlife and rescue and rehabilitation services in the KCF area is the use of primates and other animals for research purposes at local research facilities. Once animals finish their participation in research they may or may not be euthanized. For animals that are not native to the US, countries from which they came will not take them back and zoos are very selective and typically do not accept these animals either. The Humane Society of the United States acknowledges that animal research has yielded valuable data, but urges facilities to seek alternatives to the euthanization of "retired" laboratory animals (Humane Society of the United States, 2003). Animals used in research are often housed and cared for inappropriately and research may include some injury or debilitating effect on the animal. Again, wildlife rehabilitation services can play an important role in rescuing these animals or preventing their euthanization. Typically, zoos, research facilities, private owners, and other people that give up their wild animal to animal sanctuaries often do so without providing any funding to assist with the continued care of the animal.

Finally, wildlife sanctuaries that intervene with the rescue, rehabilitation and housing of wildlife should adhere to strict guidelines and principles

in order to have an effective and significant impact. For example, The Association of Sanctuaries, Inc. provides accreditation standards (2000) that include the following:

- Animals are not allowed to breed—due to the belief that animals should not be brought into existence other than to live in their natural environment,
- Use of animals in commercial activities is prohibited,
- The welfare of the animals is the primary focus and respectful collaboration with others on behalf of the welfare of the animals is essential,
- Sanctuaries accept lifetime responsibility for their resident animals.

While these guidelines may seem strict or limiting, programs that adhere to them ensure that the dignity of an animal is maintained. The KCF area has a number of sanctuaries, which include:

- Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation
- Primarily Primates
- Birds of Prey
- Wild Animal Orphanage
- Save a Snake
- Safe Harbour Pig Refuge

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