



## Guide for New Volunteers

Welcome to **FKWBC**! We are excited that you have chosen to volunteer your time to help us care for Florida's native wildlife! The rules and information contained in this guide are meant to explain what it must be like to be a wild patient recovering at a wildlife hospital and how we can best keep you, our patients and staff, safe. Though FKWBC's mission is to aid injured, sick and abandoned wildlife for release back to the ecosystem, sometimes injuries are too severe and this is not possible. While we wish and strive to save every animal arriving at our door, state and federal agencies dictate guidelines for euthanasia. Euthanasia is always heartbreaking, yet it is sometimes all we can offer to an animal who is suffering and who has been shattered beyond repair.

In the outside world, wild animals keep themselves immaculately clean, are far from their own excrement, and are strong enough to find their own fresh food. Being a patient at a hospital is for a wild animal the equivalent of being "kidnapped by aliens." The art of wildlife rehabilitation is to echo the more familiar natural world while minimizing exposure to stressful or unfamiliar stimuli. In spite of our best efforts, the food we offer is foreign, our patients have been separated from family and friends, and they are being bombarded with unfamiliar sights, sounds, vibrations and odors from the moment they are rescued until the moment they are released. Imagine being a hawk and only ever eating live prey that you have hunted yourself; suddenly, you are being fed dead food that has been refrigerated! Imagine being housed indoors, in a hospital with a ceiling, for the first time in your life, unable to see the sky! Imagine how stressful it must be. Everyone who shares the hospital space with our patients can help minimize their stress. Remember, wild animals mask their pain and suffering. They do this not because they aren't suffering or feeling pain, but to protect themselves from predators who look for any sign of weakness. Please be conscious of this as you spend time among patients. **Sounds you make, colors you wear, things as subtle as your body language may be alarming to wild patients. Our patients do not know we are here to help them.** Something as gentle as a smile or eye contact from you may be misinterpreted by them. From their point of view, they are trapped here and we are all predators whose next moves may be to hunt and eat them. Their injuries, pain, and lack of mobility while here only add to this stress.

**While many of the tasks we all help with may not be exciting or involve direct hands-on contact with the animals, they all bring comfort and healing to the animals in our care.** Have you ever been in a hospital? You can imagine what it is like to be in dirty sheets, unable to eat the food you prefer, constantly being disturbed by nurses and doctors, having your sleep disrupted, and having roommates that are bothersome. Helping the animals here primarily means attending to their dignity, keeping them clean, allowing them rest. None of us would like a camera

crew showing up to take a picture when we are in a hospital feeling sick, tired, and suffering from pain. Please consider this as you interact with them.

**Though our staff is constantly interrupted by incoming emergencies, don't be shy. Feel free to ask again and again "how can I help?," "where am I most needed?"** If you complete a task that frees a trained rehabilitator, we will save more lives. If you reach a point when you are no longer willing to perform some of the dirty tasks, let us know. Though we will do our best to accommodate you, it adversely affects the hospital and the staff if everyone here isn't willing and able to roll up their sleeves for all tasks. Even ten minutes counts in a wildlife clinic. Those ten minutes may mean we arrive to a pelican hit by a car before the next car hits him. While it may be fun to go watch a rescue or chat with a rehabber about your day, remember we have our patients' lives in our hands, something we take very seriously. We will try to teach you all we can, but keep in mind we are trying to focus on our patients in an effort to take better care of them. In addition, we will invest more time in volunteers who contribute more time to our patients. On some days, it may be more important for you to clean a dirty cage than enjoy riding along on a rescue. Try to put our patients' needs first, at least for the time you are here. We do want you to get the most you can out of your time here. Be sure to let us know if you are assigned a task you are uncomfortable with or unable to do. **FKWBC retains the right to dismiss any volunteer whose activities or behaviors during service to the hospital are deemed inappropriate, or not within the best interests of the hospital, the patients or the sanctuary.**

- **Please, do not handle or feed any wildlife patients unless you are asked to do so by the rehabilitator.** Our patients' food and how it is offered are carefully planned to aid in a delicate recovery. Please, resist the urge to **lift privacy linens to peer into cages**. You could startle a patient and cause vomiting, feather breakage or even re-break a healing fracture. Patients' doors are covered to reduce stress **AND** to prevent injury to staff and volunteers by birds with sharp beaks or talons. **Quiet conditions must be maintained in rooms where animals are housed.** (No talking loudly, no yelling to someone in another area, no playing the radio loudly so it can be heard in any animal areas, cell phones and pagers on vibrate, etc.) We all remind each other to do this☺!
- **DO NOT Approach any cage marked "Authorized Staff Only."**
- **DO NOT go into restricted outdoor habitats unless you are asked to do so.** There are cages in the area that are for animals which are being prepared for release and human contact must be kept to an absolute minimum.
- **Please show up when you say you will.** As we expand the volunteer program, we will have a sub list available to help cover for you, should you have to cancel. If you can't come in, please call ahead of time so we can handle the needs of our wildlife inpatients as well as new emergencies. Your attendance record will help us provide references for you in the future. Volunteer shifts are a minimum of 3 hours, between 8 am and 5 pm, 365 days a year. If you move, please provide us with your new address and telephone number.
- **Please have a current tetanus shot.** If you have any special medical conditions check with your doctor before you begin volunteering. Volunteers who become pregnant should check with their doctors before continuing, and must notify staff.

- **When you arrive, remember to sign in on the volunteer log.** We will keep this on file so that we can provide references for you or to help write letters of recommendation☺. If you are a new volunteer, check with the rehabilitator on duty or receptionist for job assignments. Read notes posted in various places at this facility; they provide important information and are there to help you. We are thrilled when you ask how you can be helpful!
- **Always wear gloves when cleaning cages, washing dishes, or handling dirty laundry or animals.**
- **We recycle.** Place recyclable items in appropriate bins we have provided.
- **For safety reasons, closed shoes are required; sneakers or boots are fine, but no open-toed sandals or flip-flops. Do not wear stripes, spots, or the color red.** Please wear old clothes that you don't mind getting dirty. Do not wear perfume or cologne. What smells good to you is foreign and may be frightening to wildlife.
- **For your health and safety, there will be no eating in animal rooms.** Please have snacks or lunch in the (feeding station, on the boardwalk or beach, or at the table behind the hospital) where there are benches available for your use. Please clean up after yourself – do not leave dirty dishes in the sink. If you use dishes, wash them and put them away. A “human” refrigerator is available to store drinks and food if you bring them. Please label them with your name.
- **Guns, knives, & other weapons are not allowed on the property. If your judgment or performance is affected by alcohol, drugs, or prescription medications, we prefer that you not participate.**
- **Return tools and other equipment to their correct storage location when you are finished using them.** Just ask us if you don't know where such locations are.
- **If you are a minor, please indicate this on your application.** We will need an emergency medical treatment permission form signed by a parent.
- **Do not remove any feathers or other items from this property without permission from the director.** It is illegal to possess any feathers, bones, skins, shells or other animal parts from native wildlife without a special educational display permit.
- **Smoking is permitted outdoors only, away from habitats.**
- **We recommend that cell phones and beepers be left in your vehicle.** Buckets full of disinfecting agents and splashing are common within wildlife hospitals and are likely to damage electronics should you choose to carry them. If you choose to carry them, please set your ringer to vibrate and remember photos are not allowed in the clinic.
- **Please understand that volunteers start at entry level and advance with time and knowledge.** The more time you give to the organization, the more experience and fulfillment you will get.

- **Thank you so much for being here!** We need your help, and the hospital will operate more smoothly if you observe these guidelines. Please let us know if you have any special skills, such as carpentry or fundraising. If you have any ideas, we would like to hear them - we encourage initiative!

FKWBC is licensed by Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service to care for sick, injured and orphaned native Florida wildlife and migratory birds. It is illegal to rehabilitate wildlife without permits from these agencies. The licensing process insures that wildlife is cared for by people who are knowledgeable about their needs, such as nutrition and cage requirements, and have experience with medical care and access to veterinary care as needed.

Special permits are also required to keep non-releasable wildlife for educational purposes, and to possess feathers, turtle shells, animal skeletons, or other parts. We are required to follow the rules set up by these agencies as conditions of our permits. Even if we disagree with the rules, we must follow them to be allowed to continue to care for these animals.

FKWBC is a nonprofit 501(C)3 organization. We are not funded by the agencies that license us, but by donations, grants, and events. Volunteers can help with fundraising too!

**Those who wish to pet and baby wildlife love them,  
but those who respect their natures  
and wish to let them live their natural lives,  
love them more.**

**(Edwin Way Teale)**

**If you do not understand the quote above, we can explain, but if you do not agree with the above quote, volunteering at FKWBC may not be for you.** Our facility is unique among animal hospitals. Our patients are not pets; they do not want contact with us and they fear us. Also, unlike our pets, they do not understand we are trying to help them. The exceptions are the orphaned infants, who are too young to know better, and will accept anyone who feeds them as “mama.” However, unless we teach them before they are released that humans are the predator (enemy), and not a source of food and companionship, they will not be properly equipped to survive and we will not have done our job.

We are not here to baby wildlife or make them pets. We are here to heal their wounds and send them back to the wild where they belong. To truly love wildlife is to make decisions based on what is best for the animal, not what we personally want. Many of those decisions are difficult because we cannot save them all. Our area is home to a wide variety of native species of wildlife, but their habitat is shrinking as development expands. They need our help to survive. We hope you will choose to help by volunteering at FKWBC.

**Zoonoses = diseases that are transmissible from animals to humans**

You can protect yourself from contracting a zoonotic disease by following simple rules. Wear gloves when dealing with dirty laundry or cleaning animal habitats. Ask us for a fresh pair should you rip or tear them. Wash your hands. Throw your clothes in the washing machine as soon as you return home from the Center. Don't handle your mobile phone, drink or snack without washing up first. If you bring personal items to the hospital or Sanctuary, keep them out of the animal zones. Few diseases move easily between animals and humans unless there is saliva to saliva, blood to blood, saliva to blood, or saliva to feces contact.

**Rabies** - a viral disease that affects mammals by destroying the central nervous system.

**Baylisascaris** - an intestinal parasite that commonly infects raccoons. Infection is caused by consumption of microscopic eggs from the feces of an infected animal. Infection in humans and other wild animals causes neurological disease since the worms tend to migrate through the nervous system and brain. This is one of many reasons why raccoons make terrible household pets.

**Salmonella** – a type of bacteria that commonly inhabits the intestinal tract of many species. Infection may result when feces-contaminated food is consumed, or from handling certain animals such as turtles. Most infected animals show no symptoms, but occasionally animals and humans will exhibit vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal discomfort.

**While these diseases are serious, you can protect yourself if you remember to wear gloves, wash your hands, and change your clothes when you return home from FKWBC.**

<b>Remember, for the animals' sake:</b>
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1. If you open it, CLOSE IT!
2. If you turn it on, TURN IT OFF!
3. If you unlock it, LOCK IT!
4. If you break it, REPAIR IT!
5. If you can't fix it, CALL IN SOMEONE WHO CAN!
6. If you borrow it, RETURN IT!
7. If you use it, TAKE CARE OF IT!
8. If you make a mess, CLEAN IT UP!
9. If you move it, PUT IT BACK!
10. If it belongs to someone else, GET PERMISSION TO USE IT!
11. If you don't know how to operate it, ASK SOMEONE WHO DOES!

It is important to remember that this is a volunteer organization, and there are many different people here every week. If you will put tools and equipment away when you have finished using them, less time will be taken up by the next volunteer looking for them. As a non-profit organization, we rely on donations from the public and local companies to survive. We cannot afford to replace equipment that is broken due to careless use. It may have taken us many weeks of phone calls and letter writing to get the equipment donated. Please be careful when using tools and equipment.

None of our patients want to stay here. IF YOU OPEN A DOOR – YOU MUST REMEMBER TO CLOSE IT!!! For an animal who escapes before she/he is ready for release, be it an orphan that was raised by our center or an adult not fully recovered from its injuries, the chances of survival are very slim.

If you don't finish the job you start, or if you do not do it correctly, there may not be another volunteer coming in to do it for you. This means that in addition to medical care of the patients, record keeping, bookkeeping, fund raising, public relations, and other responsibilities, the rehabilitators will have to finish it.

We want you to enjoy your time here. All of the work done here, even if it is not directly related to animal care, is necessary to keep the entire organization running smoothly and is essential to our ability to care for and release native wildlife.