

For Creative Minds

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Compare and Contrast: Rehabilitators and Veterinarians

Rehabilitators and veterinarians both care for animals.

Veterinarians are doctors who can specialize in animals other than pets, such as wild animals, birds, reptiles, farm animals, and even zoo animals.

Rehabilitators care for injured, ill, and orphaned wild animals with the goal of releasing them back into the wild whenever possible.

Rehabilitators are not doctors. They learn to treat sick and hurt animals by working with veterinarians and master rehabilitators. They also study animal biology and medicine. They must study and pass tests; and, they must have special permits.

Looking at the photos below, can you tell which people are rehabilitators and which are veterinarians?



Animal Orphaned or Just Left Alone?

Animal parents raise their babies in different ways. Most reptiles never know their parents and survive on instinct from the minute they hatch. Most birds and mammals, however, do raise their young for a few weeks to a year. Human parents can hire babysitters to care for their young if they have to leave; but wild animal parents don't have critter sitters. Wild animals leave their young alone when they search for food. Sometimes baby animals are found alone and are taken from their nests or homes because humans think the animal has been orphaned; but usually, the mother will soon return. Read the following scenarios to determine if you think the animal has been orphaned or if the parent will return after finding food. Answers, and an explanation of what you should do for the animal, are found at the bottom of the page. If you have any doubt, please try to find the animal helper nearest you.



1. You find a nest of baby bunnies in your yard. The babies are nestled in the mother's fur that she has used to make the nest. You don't see the mother rabbit anywhere.
2. You see a fawn hiding in deep grass near the back of your yard. The mother deer is not around.
3. You find a baby squirrel with very thin fur and eyes that are still closed. You see the nest nearby and hear the mother chattering.
4. You see a fully feathered baby bird (fledgling) sitting quietly on the ground.
5. Near a busy road, you see an animal baby sitting by a mother that appears dead.

Answers: 1. Probably not orphans, keep pets away. Mother rabbits feed their young at dawn and at dusk. 2. Probably waiting for her mother. Leave her alone so that the doe can come back to feed and move her baby. 3. Probably fell, keep pets away and watch to see that the mother gets the baby and puts her back in the nest. 4. Parents are probably watching. Go behind a tree or your house and quietly observe. If the parents are nearby, you'll see them caring for the fledgling. Leave the bird alone and keep pets away. If the bird is a nestling and has fallen out of the nest, you may be able to place him back into that nest if he is unharmed. Then, watch for parents. 5. Orphaned. Call an adult to get the baby right away. Put him in a box and then call a rehabilitator.

Injured Animal True or False

Are these statements true or false?

1. If you pick up a bird to put him back in the nest, the parents will reject him.
2. Most bird parents will look for their missing young for up to four days.
3. It's illegal to keep most wild animals as pets.
4. Wild animals are usually scared of humans and see us as a source of danger and as predators. They become stressed if we pick them up.
5. Predators are attracted to anything that moves differently or makes noises. Wild animals will suffer in silence to avoid attracting predators.
6. Any veterinarian can care for an injured wild animal.
7. An adult turtle crossing the road in the spring is probably trying to find a place to dig a nest to lay her eggs.
8. Turtles stay within the same 5-mile area for their entire lives. If you move a turtle, she will always search for her home.
9. A healthy animal's best chance of survival is to stay with his family in his natural habitat.
10. Wild animals can give humans and pets diseases.
11. You should not try to feed a wild animal or provide a drink.
12. If an animal is bleeding, it's injured.
13. Feathered songbirds (fledglings) often fall when learning to fly. The parents will continue to care for them even though they are on the ground.



Answers: 1) False, the parents will care for their young if returned to the nest or area. 2) True, Wildlife Rehabilitators need special permits to care for most animals. 3) True, Wildlife Rehabilitators need special permits to care for animals, wildlife rehabilitators have the permits and the specialized training to care for wild animals. 4) True 5) True 6) False, while veterinarians do know a lot about True. If you are not sure the parents are nearby and you are concerned, you may put the bird in a nearby bush or on a tree branch and observe from inside the house for a few hours. If the mother sees you near the nest, she will not return. Keep pets away from the area.

14. If a partially feathered baby bird (nestling) is alert and opening her mouth for food, you can put her back in the nest. If she does not open her mouth for food or appears injured, she needs help.
15. Baby birds less than five days old don't have feathers yet (hatchlings). If they fall from a nest, call a rehabilitator right away.
16. A young rabbit is on his own if the fur is fluffy, the ears stand up, and he is the size of a tennis ball. Unless you see blood or injuries, you should leave him alone.
17. Baby raccoons, skunks, and foxes explore the world around them with their mothers watching nearby—even if you don't see the mothers.
18. Baby groundhogs might wash out of their burrows in heavy rain.
19. Opossums are on their own when they are about the size of a kitten (not including the tail). If you find one smaller than that and she is alone, she probably needs help.
20. Bat babies (called pups) are often found in the summer, having fallen from trees. They look just like the adults but don't fly very well. Young bats that have fallen probably need help. If you find bats in your house, call a rehabilitator for help. Do not ever pick up bats of any size with your bare hands.
21. Even young bears, bobcats, and mountain lions can be very dangerous. Report animal sightings to your local game commission but don't try to handle yourself.
22. Bird parents can pick up their young with their beaks.
23. Baby birds drink milk.
24. A bird hopping around on a branch can't fly.
25. If you need to get an animal to a wildlife rehabilitator, call the rehabilitator for directions on how to pick up, protect, and transport the animal with an adult's help.



1 (4) True 1 (5) True 1 (6) True 1 (7) True 1 (8) True 1 (9) True 2 (0) True 2 (1) True 2 (2) False, unlike mammals, birds can't pick up or carry their young. 2 (3) False, mammals are the only animals that drink milk. 2 (4) False, before birds learn to fly, they learn balance by standing and hopping on branches. 2 (5) True

As darling as wild animals may seem, they are not pets. To get the best care for an injured or orphaned animal, call a wildlife rehabilitator for advice. To find the animal helper nearest you, visit NWRWildlife.org or wildliferehabber.org; ask a local veterinarian for a reference; or even call your state Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Department, or Fish and Game Offices.