

## **Small Wildlife**

### **What is changing with the way you deal with small wildlife?**

We already ask people calling the RSPCA about sick and injured small animals to take the animal directly to the vet but a large number are still collected by our frontline officers. From 3 April, we are providing the public with the support and advice they need, through new web pages and a dedicated phone line, to take small, sick and injured animals to vets or approved wildlife rehab centres directly. This applies to wild mammals smaller than a rabbit, such as hedgehogs, small rodents like rats and mice, squirrels and others. It will also apply to wild birds, smaller than a pigeon, in future, once the Government changes its guidance on handling sick birds due to Avian Flu. Every time a wild animal is helped by the public it frees up our vital specialist frontline officers to get to more animals suffering from abuse and neglect. We are the only charity in England and Wales which does this vital work and this is where we must focus our specialist skills. Together we can all do our bit for wildlife and help more animals.

### **Why are you stopping dealing with small wildlife?**

We will still deal with wildlife which has been the victim of cruelty or larger wildlife that is not safe for the public to handle - this will only apply to small, sick and injured wild animals. Our main priority is animal welfare; asking the public to transport small, sick and injured wildlife directly to a vet will get them the help they need in the quickest possible time, rather than waiting for hours for our hard-pressed rescuers to arrive. We deal with more than a million calls a year, that's one every 30 seconds, and we only have 362 officers covering England and Wales. We have to prioritise the cases where our highly trained officers' specialist skills can be best used - those involving animals that are suffering from cruelty and neglect. We also work with our amazing Animal Rescue Volunteers who support our frontline officers taking animals to get the care they need. By working together we can reach more animals, more quickly and get them the help they need.

### **What if the local vet won't deal with the animal?**

The vital animal welfare work we do wouldn't be possible without the support of vets. Vets, like the RSPCA, have animal welfare at the heart of everything they do. All vets are members of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and this sets out certain expectations, such as how vets should respond to injured wildlife being presented to them. They should provide emergency treatment. We know that vets are under a lot of pressure at the moment and may be busy with other unwell animals, so please always phone ahead before taking an animal and be understanding if you have a wait, or if the vet is not able to promise to provide updates. Some vets may limit access to their buildings due to bird flu, but they should still see the bird outside.

### **Who will pay for the animal if I take it to the vet?**

Vets will provide emergency treatment to wild animals at no cost. If further complicated treatment is required then they may work with wildlife rehabilitators, but very careful consideration has to be given as to whether this is in the animal's best interest and whether that animal will be able to be released back into the wild.

### **What happens if I can't take an animal to the vet?**

Every time a wild animal is helped by the public it frees up our vital specialist rescuers to reach animals suffering heart breaking cruelty and neglect, a job no other charity does. Unfortunately, we are unable to reach every animal and we have to prioritise our officers' specialist skills for complex cases of cruelty and neglect. We cannot use our frontline rescuers to transport small sick and injured wildlife to the vet so we need the public to help us with those animals and help them get the care they need quicker. If you cannot take the animal yourself, we ask that you speak to neighbours or friends and family who may be able to support you. Local neighbourhood groups, such as Facebook groups and Next-door groups or other community engagement forums can be a very useful way to access transport help in your community. So many people already help us in this way and by working together we can reach more animals and get them the help they need.

### **What if I have a disability or I am sick?**

If a member of the public is vulnerable and has not got anyone else to support them, we may be able to help in certain circumstances, through our volunteers.

### **What do I do with sick birds?**

Under current Government guidelines, members of the public are advised not to handle sick birds. For this reason, we are not asking the public to collect small birds at this time, and to go to our website for advice instead. When Government guidelines change, and it is safe to do so, we will be asking the public to collect sick and injured birds, smaller than a pigeon, as well as small, sick and injured mammals.

### **What do I do with a sick or injured grey squirrel?**

Grey Squirrels are not native to the UK and are considered an invasive species in law. This means that if they are moved and taken into care, they cannot legally be released and sadly have to be euthanased. We don't agree with this, but we have to act within the law. A grey squirrel should only be contained and taken to the vet if they are at risk of suffering. Unfortunately, vets will be required by law to euthanase grey squirrels brought to them.

### **What do I do with bats?**

Bats are complex animals who need careful handling. If you find a sick and injured bat, please contact the Bat Conservation Trust.

### **What do I do with bats if the Bat Conservation Trust is closed?**

The Bat Conservation Trust has information on its website about what to do with bats if they are unable to put you in touch with a volunteer.

### **What happens if I find larger wildlife?**

We are only asking the public to take small, sick and injured wildlife to the vets that can be safely handled without specialist protective clothes or equipment. If you find wildlife larger than a rabbit or pigeon, go to our website to find advice on what to do and, where appropriate, our specialist rescuers may be able to help. Visit our website for more advice about what to do when you find an animal in need.

### **What do I do if I suspect the small wild animal has been abused?**

The RSPCA's specialist officers are skilled in dealing with wildlife, pets or farm animals who are the victims of cruelty, abuse and neglect. If you suspect that a small wild animal has been subjected to abuse, visit our website to find out how to report it.

### **Is it safe for me to handle wildlife?**

We are only asking people to handle small, sick and injured wildlife which can be safely handled without specialist protective equipment. These are wild animals smaller than a rabbit such as, but not limited to, rats, mice, squirrels and hedgehogs. If you have gloves available we advise people to wear them, but if not, they can be picked up with a towel and placed with a towel in a secure, high-sided box. Always wash hands after handling wildlife. People may like to consider keeping a kit in their car, including a suitable box, towel, gloves, and sanitiser which they can use if they encounter sick and injured wildlife.

### **Will the animal be put to sleep?**

The sad reality is that when a wild animal is so sick or injured that it needs people to take it to get veterinary care, many are simply too poorly to survive. In the vast majority of cases, the kindest outcome for these animals is being put to sleep to end their suffering. Even if this is the outcome, the public will have done an incredible kindness for those animals who have not been left suffering for too long. This is a difficult job for vets to do, so we ask that members of the public respect the vet's decision, which will always prioritise the animals welfare.

### **I thought the RSPCA dealt with all animals - do small wildlife not matter?**

Small wildlife is incredibly important to us, which is why we are asking the public to join the rescue and help us rescue more animals. This allows us to focus on situations where our specialist skills are needed, for example small animals that are trapped and can't be released. So many people already help us in this way and by working together, we can reach even more animals and get them the help they need.

### **Can't your volunteers pick up these animals?**

We have more than 200 volunteers who do amazing work helping to transport animals to get the care they need and we are recruiting even more this year. Where vulnerable callers are

unable to take an animal themselves, our volunteers may be able to step in. We are setting up local networks of approved rehabilitators and volunteers who can support people in their area.

### **Where do I direct the public/supporters for help?**

Signposting to all injured animals pages: <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/wildlife/injured>  
(or [www.rspca.org.uk/injuredanimals](http://www.rspca.org.uk/injuredanimals))

Birds general/signposting: <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/wildlife/birds>

Baby birds: <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/wildlife/birds/baby>

Bats: <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/wildlife/bats>

Hedgehogs general/signposting: <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/wildlife/hedgehogs>

Rabbits/hares general/signposting: <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/wildlife/rabbits>

Rats/mice general/signposting: <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/wildlife/rodents>

Squirrels general/signposting: <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/wildlife/squirrels>

Report cruelty or neglect: <https://www.rspca.org.uk/utilities/contactus/reportcruelty>