

Respect and Dignity in Wildlife Rehabilitation

by

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ABSTRACT

Wildlife rehabilitation as a practice in the United States exists in a complicated ethical landscape. The Wildlife Rehabilitator's Code of Ethics exists to guide the profession and states that rehabilitators must respect the wildness and maintain the dignity of an animal in their care. This thesis explores the question: How do the attitudes and actions of wildlife rehabilitators exemplify the ways in which they understand and enact respect for an animal's dignity and wildness while in their care? Additionally, in what circumstances do rehabilitators align and diverge from each other in their interpretation and demonstration of this respect? These questions were answered through a literature review, interviews with rehabilitators, and site visits to wildlife rehabilitation centers in the Phoenix metropolitan area. My results suggest that rehabilitators are aligned in their understanding of respect for wildness and dignity as it applies to the animals in their care that are actively undergoing rehabilitation. Rehabilitators achieved consensus on the idea that they should interact with the animals as little as possible while providing their medically necessary care. Rehabilitators began to diverge when considering the animals in their sanctuary spaces. Specifically, they varied in their perception of wildness in sanctuary animals, which informed how some saw their responsibilities to the animals. Lesser perceived wildness correlated to increased acceptance of forming affectionate relationships with the sanctuary animals, and even feelings of obligation to form these relationships. Based on my research, I argue that the Wildlife Rehabilitator's Code of Ethics should be revised to reflect the specific boundary that wildlife rehabilitators identified in the rehabilitation space and provide substantive guidance as to what respecting wildness and dignity means in this field.

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PREFACE

In the summer of 2012, I visited a wildlife rehabilitation center and sanctuary in Costa Rica, where my family and I were invited to see the animals in their care and even hold one of the small monkeys.



Photograph 1: Author at age eleven holds a small primate in her arms inside of a fenced enclosure at a wildlife rehabilitation center and sanctuary in Costa Rica.

Though I have forgotten the name of the center, the memory has stayed with me as being one of, if not the most, intimate interactions I have ever had with a wild animal. Warned not to smile or make too much direct eye contact, as primates interpret those as signals of aggression, I posed for a picture with my mouth shut and eyes down. I was emotionally moved by the work of the center and was simultaneously wowed and apprehensive that I could hold one of the monkeys and feed it bits of mango. As a child, I did not have the ability to work through the complexity of the wildlife rehabilitation space and my part in it, but I knew that I had intense mixed emotions.

In the conception of this thesis, I drew upon experiences I had as a wildlife rehabilitation volunteer and the ethical questions I confronted in this role. As I explored wildlife rehabilitation through an ethical lens, I remembered this experience in Costa Rica and how it set the foundation for my questions regarding respect, wildness, and ethics in the wildlife rehabilitation space.

Introduction

Wildlife rehabilitation centers exist at the intersection of animal welfare and conservation, education and entertainment, wildness and captivity. Wildlife rehabilitation is defined as, "...the treatment and temporary care of injured, diseased, and displaced indigenous animals, and the subsequent release of healthy animals to appropriate habitats in the wild" (Miller, 2012, ix). Wildlife are brought to rehabilitation centers because of injury, illness, confiscation, rescue from abuse, or for other reasons. The National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association, also referred to as the NWRA, estimates that its members treat approximately 500,000 animals annually and answer more than one million phone call inquiries annually (NWRA, 2008).

There are currently more than 5,000 state licensed wildlife rehabilitators in the US. The majority of wildlife rehabilitators are "community based," which signals that they are individuals and often operate out of their own homes or property. Larger wildlife rehabilitation centers also exist across the country and accept higher numbers of cases. The NWRA conducted a survey in 2007, which found that 64,000 birds, 39,000 mammals, and 2,300 herptiles (reptiles and amphibians) were treated by 343 NWRA affiliated centers that responded. Estimates of rehabilitation center intakes vary, but they all demonstrate a significant number of animals taken in each year.

Wildlife rehabilitators must navigate a complicated ethical landscape. At its core, the field operates with the ethical assumption that sentient animals are worthy of moral consideration and that it is a moral good to assist an animal that is injured or in pain. And yet, some ethicists argue that rehabilitation is not only a good thing to do, but that we have a clear moral obligation to assist a wild animal if it has been harmed as a result of human actions (Palmer, 2010). This obligation is not met neatly. The field has to contend with the animals in their care, how they should be treated, and what it means for an animal to be wild in the first place. Since practitioners coalesced in the 1970s, rehabilitators have been raising these questions. A code of ethics, established by the National Wildlife Rehabilitation Council and International Council for Wildlife Rehabilitation, serves as a guide in confronting ethical questions and guiding behavior. However, limitations of

professional codes leave room for interpretation. Sometimes, it's left unclear what a "good" practice looks like or how obligations should be met in practice. Through a multi-disciplinary literature review and a series of practitioner interviews and case studies, I aim to illuminate how rehabilitators at three well respected community institutions understand and enact respect for an animal's dignity and wildness while in their care.

A Brief History

The history of wildlife rehabilitation in the United States before the 20th century is little known and sparsely documented. Albert Schweitzer is often considered one of the earliest practitioners of wildlife rehabilitation known to history (Devaney, 2013). A physician, philosopher, and all-around polymath, Schweitzer was the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize laureate and during his life he was dedicated to humanitarian work (The Nobel Peace Prize, 1952). Part of his work was the building and administration of a hospital in present day Gabon, where he cared for humans as well as domestic and wild animals (Devaney, 2013). He built a reputation for his unshakable belief in the value of all life – human and non-human - and saw to the rehabilitation of many different animals. Although he appears to be largely forgotten by the modern environmental and conservation movements, he was influential during his lifetime. Schweitzer was recognized for his philosophy and work by naturalist and writer Rachel Carson, who dedicated her 1962 book, *Silent Spring*, to Schweitzer (Carson, 2002; orig. 1962).

Although Rachel Carson did not write about wildlife rehabilitation specifically in *Silent Spring*, she did influence American culture by considering non-human animal health and nature alongside the human health impacts of DDT. The popularity of *Silent Spring* is recognized as having helped launch the modern environmental movement in the United States (Cafaro, 2002). With the environmental movement gaining steam in the late 1960s, the stage was set for wildlife rehabilitation as a field to coalesce.

When the 1969 Santa Barbara and 1971 San Francisco Bay Arizona & Oregon Standard oil spills killed tens of thousands of seabirds, the public was distraught. Public VOLUNTEERS

and amateur rehabilitators rescued approximately 2,200 birds from the Santa Barbara oil spill. Unfortunately, there was no clear communication network among rescuers, nor were there any established guidelines for best practices for rehabilitating oiled birds, or wildlife in general (Newman et al., 2003). The isolated trial-and-error efforts of rehabilitators at that time led to a failure to save animal lives; there were zero recorded instances of rescued birds being successfully released (Newman et al 2003). Following the 1971 San Francisco Bay oil spill, 7,000 birds were rescued, though only 300 were eventually released (International Bird Rescue, 2022). These abysmal outcomes distressed many, and for some it became their mission to help wildlife rehabilitation through research and the creation of guidelines for best practices.

As a result of the 1971 San Francisco oil spill, the International Bird Rescue Research Center was founded to research best practices for rescued oiled wildlife and began a period of professionalization (Newman et al., 2003). A similar group of like-minded individuals formed the International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council (IWRC) in California in 1972 to help facilitate the sharing of knowledge and resources amongst rehabilitators (IWRC, 2021). This was done through the establishment of the *Journal of Wildlife Rehabilitation* and through the production of different guidelines and resources. Ten years later, the National Wildlife Rehabilitation Association was founded with the mission to further build a network for knowledge dissemination and importantly, to determine standards of care for wild animals. The IWRC and NWRA jointly published the first edition of "Wildlife Rehabilitation Minimum Standards and Accreditation Program," including the first code of ethics in 1989 (NWRA, 2021). Over the years, the NWRA and the IWRC have continued to revise and improve the minimum standards and code of ethics. Both of these bodies are influential in today's wildlife rehabilitation by publishing research and acting as networks to continue the sharing of knowledge and resources amongst rehabilitators.

Considering the Present

Wildlife rehabilitation today is largely more professional, better researched, and more effective than it was fifty years ago. The NRWA and IWRC published the latest revision of ethical codes for wildlife rehabilitation in 2012. The code of ethics consists of eleven guiding principles (see Appendix A). Of particular interest to this paper is code #8, which states:

“A wildlife rehabilitator should strive to provide professional and humane care in all phases of wildlife rehabilitation, respecting the wildness and maintaining the dignity of each animal in life and in death. Releasable animals should be maintained in a wild condition and released as soon as appropriate. Non-releasable animals which are inappropriate for education, foster-parenting, or captive breeding have a right to euthanasia” (Miller, 2012: v).

Respect for dignity and for wildness is not defined in the codes themselves. The vagueness of these terms allows for different interpretations. Though the codes are a solid foundation in guiding rehabilitators, there are areas where further guidance may be helpful. As with any area of animal care and wildlife practice, there is room for professional improvement. This need is perhaps most glaring in the online social media space, which has provided a platform for independent rehabilitators and larger rehabilitation centers to post their work online and make largely invisible work highly visible.

Social media posts from rehabilitators and the private individuals showing animals undergoing wildlife rehabilitation are an increasing source of professional and ethical concern. Many rehabilitation centers have a presence on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook (among others) and use them to increase awareness and raise donations for their rehabilitation work. However, tensions arise due to the dissonance between some depictions of animals undergoing wildlife rehabilitation and the ethical codes present in Standards for Wildlife Rehabilitation, which is meant to guide the field.

Posts showing animals undergoing rehabilitation can be created by centers or the public and exist with or without context. Some posts do provide context in varying amounts that clarify that the animals shown are undergoing rehabilitation. However, the addition of context does not create an ethically good post on its own. For example, on the social media app TikTok, an account called @beaverbabyfurrylove features a woman who frequently announces that she is a licensed wildlife rehabilitator and posts videos of a beaver that meanders through her household. The beaver is seen playing with plastic children's toys and making piles of household supplies, such as tissue paper packages, shoes, and toilet plungers, in the kitchen and bathroom areas (Figure 2). The rehabilitator explains that the beaver came into her care as a juvenile and will be returned to the wild once it has reached maturity and can survive on its own.

The comments on her videos are a mix of praise and disgust; there is praise for her hard work, but also criticism directed at the beaver playing with human toys and miscellaneous household items. Such critics call the beaver a pet or say that the beaver belongs in the wild. There is a clear tension here between rehabilitation as an act of welfare in the domestic sphere, which is usually regarded as a moral good, and the notion that this beaver is wild and should not be allowed to behave as if it were a household pet.



Photograph 2: TikTok from @beaverbabyfurrylove showing a beaver building a “dam” out of a rug, paper products, books, and a plunger in a household kitchen area. The caption, not shown, reads “I had to throw Beaves old Plunger into the damming pile mix. #fyp #notapet



Photograph 3: TikTok from @mytammylife showing a juvenile raccoon being pet by a human hand. The caption, not shown, states "This baby is under the care of a licensed wildlife rehabilitator. #raccoonsoftiktok #babyboy #foryou #rehab #boopthesnoot #Love #bottlefed #or

These are far from isolated examples. Various other TikToks, Instagram reels, and other visual media show wildlife rehabilitators scratching and cuddling wildlife (Figure 3). Such interactions between rehabilitators and wildlife are typically considered violations of rehabilitation best practices because they can lead to the wildlife imprinting on or becoming habituated to humans (Shier, 2016). Becoming imprinted on humans or habituated to captivity lessens an animal's likelihood of survival after release from rehabilitation (Kershenbaum, 2017). Although there are a limited number of situations in which such behavior may be acceptable or not harmful to the wildlife, e.g., cases in which the animals were already determined to be imprinted, that information or any detailed information is usually left out of the social media posts.

Social media posts are an easy way for the public to encounter rehabilitation and the questions these posts raise are not confined to the online space, but rather permeate the field of practice. Posts such as the ones I have cited illustrate that rehabilitation is a murky ethical space. In rehabilitation, there are unavoidable tradeoffs and unclear guidance on how to make ethical trade-offs and weigh morally challenging options. There is also an unclear guidance for how rehabilitators should be interpreting the ethical codes, especially what it means to respect the dignity and wildness of an animal in their care. The ethical uncertainty in the space must be acknowledged in order to better understand the variation in the field and to begin considering what would help to reduce ethical uncertainty, especially as we consider the future. I will return later to this topic in my literature review to understand the place of social platforms in regulating depictions of animals online.

Finally, it is evident today that anthropogenically caused climate change and climate-driven disasters are occurring with increased strength and frequency. Storms such as hurricanes or disasters such as uncontrollable wildfires are only two small examples affecting the United States in recent years (United States Geological Survey, 2023). As discussed at the outset, one of the core ethical commitments of rehabilitation is that humans have a moral obligation to assist wildlife harmed by human actions. If we assume responsibility for human-forced climate change and enhanced natural disasters, we must also assume that we have a

moral obligation to assist wildlife experiencing harm due to these disasters. Interestingly, the moral philosopher Clare Palmer has explicitly proposed wildlife rehabilitation as one possible method through which humans may be able to fulfill their duties to wildlife (Palmer, 2021). Wildlife rehabilitation offers what Palmer terms “rectificatory justice.” In short, it makes up for the harm that the animal has been caused by humans, either directly or indirectly. If wildlife rehabilitation is the method through which we decide to fulfill our moral obligations to animals, then the field should be interrogated to investigate what professional wildlife rehabilitation looks like and how the adherence to the codes of ethics manifests in respected community rehabilitation centers.

Primary Research Question

In this thesis, I aim to answer the following two questions:

1. How do the attitudes and actions of wildlife rehabilitators exemplify the ways in which they understand and enact respect for an animal’s dignity and wildness while in their care?
2. In what circumstances do rehabilitators align and diverge from each other in their interpretation and demonstration of this respect?

To answer these questions, I first conducted a literature review to understand the ethical landscape of wildlife rehabilitation more fully (this appears in the following section). I then conducted a series of semi-structured wildlife rehabilitator interviews and selected site visits to wildlife rehabilitation centers in the Phoenix metropolitan area. Using these centers as case studies, I aim to showcase what rehabilitation work looks like at a few well-respected institutions: 1) Liberty Wildlife, a rehabilitation center in South Phoenix focused on the rehabilitation of birds; 2) Southwest Wildlife Conservation Center, a rehabilitation center focused on the rehabilitation of large mammals; and 3) Arizona Bat Rescue, which is operated by one woman who specializes in bat rehabilitation.

Before considering wildlife rehabilitation work on the ground, it is important to understand in more detail the complicated ethical environment that wildlife rehabilitation finds itself in. In the following section, I will discuss the numerous ethical positions and professional codes that interplay in rehabilitation work. Additionally, I will take time to consider wildlife rehabilitation and its relationship to conservation.

Wildlife Rehabilitation, Ethical Codes, and The Conservation Conversation: A Review

Wildlife rehabilitation is ethically complex because it resides at the intersection of many different ethical perspectives and professional codes. In this field, animal welfare prevails as the most cited goal of rehabilitation work (Throne, 2009). It is seconded by conservation, a value system focused on the good or health of populations, species, and ecosystems that can conflict with the goals of promoting individual animal welfare. From both perspectives, professional codes exist to guide practitioners. The National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association provides its code of ethics specific to rehabilitation work but is also in conversation with the principles of the American Veterinary Medical Association and the Society for Conservation Biology's code of ethics. Additionally, ethical perspectives in this space can vary and include stances such as rectificatory justice, animal rights, animal welfare, and compassionate conservation. All of the above codes and perspectives will be discussed in further detail to showcase the rich and complex world of rehabilitation.

Because wildlife rehabilitation exists at the intersection of so many different fields, there is a unique code of ethics to help guide rehabilitators. The *Standards for Wildlife Rehabilitation*, a foundational manual for rehabilitators that has been adopted by several states and the United States Department of Fish and Wildlife, includes a code of ethics (Miller, 2012). The code of ethics represents the basic ethical standards for rehabilitators to follow. The code is a synthesis of several different areas of ethical concern and generally stresses that rehabilitators should provide care to improve welfare, abide by relevant laws, seek help from veterinary professionals when needed, encourage community support, and more.

Close analysis of the wildlife rehabilitator's code as the basis for ethical conduct in rehabilitation reveals a complicated normative environment full of questions regarding conservation, animal welfare, and moral responsibilities. As previously mentioned, I am particularly interested in principle #8, which states that rehabilitators must respect the dignity and wildness of an animal in their care (Miller, 2012). It is not exactly clear what it means to respect wildlife and the dignity of an animal in these contexts, nor what "wildness" is in this space. Also of interest is code statement #10, which reads "A wildlife rehabilitator should work on the basis of sound ecological principles, incorporating appropriate conservation ethics and an attitude of stewardship" (Miller, 2012: v). This provision is very interesting because it demands that rehabilitators also have an "appropriate conservation ethic" but it is not made clear what that would be. Especially challenging is the fact that wildlife rehabilitation sometimes appears in conflict with conservation efforts.

In an effort to find guidance, a rehabilitator could turn to the Society for Conservation Biology Code of Ethics (Society for Conservation Biology Code of Ethics, 2003). While many rehabilitators may also identify as conservationists, the wildlife rehabilitator's code of ethics and the Society for Conservation Biology's (SCB) code of ethics differ in significant respects. The obligation to individual animal welfare may at times feel incompatible with the conservationist's code of ethics, as expressed by the SCB. Statement #5 in the SCB code of ethics states, "Avoid actions or omissions that may compromise their responsibility to conservation and science," (SCB, 2004). Depending on one's understanding of their responsibilities to conservation and the biological unit they prioritize (i.e., individual organism, population, species, etc.), one might encounter conflict with the motives and goals of wildlife rehabilitation or the prioritization of individual animal's welfare. This is one reason why understanding rehabilitators' personal ethics in this space is important: it can elucidate how they perceive wildlife rehabilitation as contributing or not contributing to broader conservation goals, and how they see themselves fitting into (or not fitting into) the larger conservation movement.

As previously mentioned, rehabilitators are often required to be themselves or to have a veterinarian on staff, which adds the Principles of Veterinary Medical Ethics of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) into the mix. In most wildlife rehabilitation centers, wildlife rehabilitators and veterinary professionals work together to provide the best medical care to their animals. According to the AVMA, one pillar in their code of ethics is the prescription that “A veterinarian shall provide competent veterinary medical (extra word) care under the terms of a veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR), with compassion and respect for animal welfare and human health” (Principles of Veterinary Medical Ethics of the AVMA, 2023). Therefore, veterinarians, by nature of their profession, are held to an ethical code that prioritizes the welfare of animals and obligates them to treat animals of any condition, provided it does not interfere with human health. While their code largely overlaps with the rehabilitators code, it differs more significantly from conservationist professional codes. When acting in a role that fits under multiple code of ethics, there are a plethora of guiding principles, which may be helpful or difficult depending on the situation and if the codes of ethics are in conflict with one another in certain circumstances.

Professional codes of ethics, such as those described above, can help bridge the divide between moral philosophy and practice by providing an explicit and accessible value-based framework that gives professionals clear expectations and establishes ethical behavior standards in their field. Professional codes broadly are designed to reduce the tension between an actor’s desire for autonomy and the public’s demand for accountability (Frankel, 1989). Although they help to define groups and their values, codes are often vague in order to create general consensus, limiting their ability to help resolve true moral dilemmas (Beyerstein, 1993). Beyerstein claims that because professional codes are limited in their ability to solve real-world problems, professionals must pay attention to and rely on wider moral theory. In fields specifically related to the environment, one path is to follow the more pragmatic framework of “ecological ethics,” where professional codes feed into a system of larger consideration and are considered alongside the environmental ethics literature, the practical guidance of field workers,

scientists, and professionals, and animal rights considerations (Minteer and Collins, 2008).

Generally, increased understanding of moral theory and perspectives assists professionals in making decisions in situations of moral dilemma (Beyerstein, 1993).

Broader consideration is necessary to resolve the moral dilemmas that emerge in wildlife rehabilitation and, in the next section, I will begin to elaborate on the moral theories and frameworks present to rehabilitators. Wildlife rehabilitation practitioners overwhelmingly identify animal welfare as one of their core goals, followed by species conservation and ecosystem conservation (Throne, 2009). Each of these areas has different, but interrelated theory behind them.

Moral Theory

Wildlife rehabilitation has been both admired and criticized by conservation and animal ethicists due to having different underlying perspectives on animal ethics. Philosopher Clare Palmer's 2010 book, *Animal Ethics in Context* argues that humans do not have a moral obligation to assist wild animals, but that it is morally good and of good character to assist when one encounters injured wildlife. Palmer considers rights theory, utilitarianism, and laissez-faire perspectives on animal ethics to explain her reasoning. She concludes with the somewhat controversial perspective that what is owed to one animal is not owed to all because the history and context of an animal's life and relation to human actors determine whether or not there is a moral obligation to aid the animal. Special circumstances or relationships may exist that would require assistance. This is to say that an animal injured or attacked by another animal does not require humans to assist because the harm was not caused by a human. We do not have an obligation to rescue prey from predators. In contrast, a deer that has broken a leg from being hit by a car would require assistance because a human being caused the harm. If one accepts Palmer's argument, then it provides moral justification for the existence of wildlife rehabilitation centers.

Beyond individual human-wildlife conflicts, as mentioned above anthropogenic climate change is also rapidly increasing the number of animals that are experiencing harm. In the context of climate change, Palmer declares that “virtually all animal ethicists will agree that rehabilitating and restoring wild animals to their habitat after climate enhanced disasters is morally desirable, or even morally required” (Palmer, 2021). Which animals are owed the rehabilitation, however, depends on the normative perspective taken. Palmer breaks this into the categories of rectificatory justice and beneficence. According to the rectificatory perspective, if an animal has been harmed by direct or indirect human actions, that harm must be rectified through rehabilitation. The beneficence approach is similar, but emphasizes minimizing harm overall. This minimization of harm means that the animal’s future actions, particularly the harm it may cause other animals in the future and the potential harm its offspring may experience, are considered when deciding what action would best minimize overall harm. Those who believe in rectificatory justice will extend their view that animals deserve rehabilitation to all sentient animals, whereas those who believe in beneficence would likely not extend this care to predators of r-strategist species (i.e., species that have high numbers of offspring where the majority will likely die) because of their potential to cause their prey and future offspring harm (Palmer, 2021).

Although there is room for exception, wildlife rehabilitation centers and the people who volunteer for them largely exemplify the rectificatory justice approach when considering the animals that they will intake. Wildlife rehabilitation is all about minimizing harm that animals have experienced and the centers examined in this case study did not discriminate against predatory or r-strategist species. However, euthanizing a predator or r-strategist would likely “infringe on wild animal sovereignty.” The larger goal of assisting wildlife after natural disasters should not impose on the animal’s self-determination (Palmer, 2021).

Whether or not one agrees with Palmer’s arguments, it is undeniable that rehabilitators operate within animal welfare thought and frameworks as permitted by national, state, and local regulations. Animal welfare is a framework that prioritizes the wellbeing and humane

treatment of animals. It is similar to but different from animal rights, a framework that declares non-human animals to have a more significant moral standing and even legal rights, comparable in many ways to the basic rights afforded to human beings (Milburn, 2021; Singer, 2009). Because the rehabilitation organizations are motivated mostly by animal welfare, they generally will accept any animal that they have the capacity to care for and will prioritize its health and wellbeing. But as mentioned in the previous section, a concern for the inherent worth or dignity of the animal, hallmarks of the animal rights perspective, could produce a more complicated calculus, one where the moral obligation is not to interfere in the lives of wild animals, however well-meaning that interference may be (Regan, 1983).

Gill Aitken, author of *A New Approach to Conservation: The Importance of the Individual through Wildlife Rehabilitation* represents a philosophy that prioritizes welfare of individuals as a philosophy and care practice. Many traditional conservationists consider the attention to the individual to be overly sentimental and impractical (Kirkwood and Sainsbury, 1996). Aitken (2004:115), however, refutes this by stating, "For the conservationist to remove all focus of attention from the individual is both disingenuous as well as dangerous. It severs us from the very roots of our capacity to care." We are emotionally moved by the appeals to individuals and moved by the stories and lives of individuals. As human beings, we can connect with individuals and be moved more than we are moved by larger conceptualizations such as species. This sentimentality may be frowned upon, but it can also be a show of how powerfully people desire to do good and help nature in their own way (Bekoff, 2007). Scientifically, individual animals are recognized by animal behaviorists as being important to their social groups and for carrying knowledge pertinent to survival (Safina, 2015). Though it can and perhaps should be balanced with other ethical perspectives, sentimentality is not ignorance and recognition of the value in individuals is not foolish.

Aitken goes so far as to posit that the consideration of animals should have been occurring all along in human history and that lack of consideration is the root cause of our inability to make effective conservation action. "It is precisely because we have neglected to consider the

importance of each and every relationship with the natural world that the need for conservation has arisen at all" (Aitken 2004: 117). This suggests a deeper consideration for animal species, populations, and ecosystems. It challenges our mainstream understanding of conservation ethics to reflect on our responsibility to consider our place in nature and how to respect it.

Wildlife rehabilitation's direct contributions to conservation are debatable, but one recognized impact is that these spaces create opportunities to learn how about wild animals and the dangers that humans impact on them. As Long et al. (Long et al., 2020:2) write, "The analysis of records from admissions to wildlife rehabilitation facilities has potential to be a useful technique for characterizing human-wildlife conflicts and disease trends that may be impacting local wildlife, as this method would not be as subject to the challenges of assessing wildlife health in the field..." Rehabilitators and veterinarians are able to record the data and what they learn through the procedures of their patients and scientists are able to measure the outcomes of wildlife rehabilitation. More broadly, the experience and knowledge gained from rehabilitation with common species can inform practices with endangered species. For example, "The ringed seal (very rare in British waters) that was treated at the Orkney Seal Rescue in 1993 owed its life, almost certainly, to the existence of the rehabilitation center and the staff's expertise in dealing with sick common and grey seals" (Aitken, 2004: 127). This is just one example of many, and rehabilitation can especially make a difference to small populations where each individual matters for the health and continuation of the species.

In contrast, many environmental scientists and philosophers believe that a species or ecosystem level approach to conservation is more appropriate than an individualistic approach. As previously mentioned, wildlife rehabilitators' second and third most cited priorities in their work are conservation and ecosystem conservation (Throne, 2009). Therefore, it is important to consider arguments and perspectives for systems of broader value and arguments against the prioritization of individuals.

JK Kirkwood, a specialist in zoo and wildlife medicine, is a popular critic of wildlife rehabilitation who argues that rehabilitation interferes with the natural cycles of life and death in

animals (Kirkwood and Best, 1998). Few, if any, philosophers would argue that no wild animal should ever be medically treated. Even though Kirkwood is a critic, he does concede that special considerations such as the popularity of the species or their conservation status can make rehabilitation more palatable. However, he does not believe that animals should be rehabilitated for reasons such as natural injury, hunger, or disease. In some ways, the arguments of Kirkwood and Best are not far from Palmer's considerations in *Animal Ethics in Context*. Regarding animals that are suffering from natural causes such as disease or starvation, Palmer would say we owe no moral obligation to assist if the animal is not suffering these due to human influence; Kirkwood and Best likewise say that we should not assist. Disease and starvation, they argue, are a natural part of the life cycle and not every animal makes it from birth to adulthood before dying.

However, this may be a simplification of complex disease dynamics as they relate to land use change. By land use change, I am ultimately referring to human influence and harm, even if it is more indirect and challenges the laissez faire approach. It is unclear how, if at all, critics view disease and hunger as human impacts. Kirkwood will go as far as to say that caring for animals' suffering as a result of natural processes is as damaging as "shooting the fit" (Kirkwood and Sainsbury 1996). Though this Darwinism isn't necessarily wrong, wildlife rehabilitators often will take in any animal in need of care without discriminating between anthropogenic and non-anthropogenic caused ailments.

Kirkwood and Sainsbury (1996) also criticized wildlife rehabilitators for diverting money from more traditional conservation initiatives. While this could be true, Aitken states that not all money is transferable. Aitken argues that those who are motivated to donate to an animal welfare-based organization may not be inclined to donate to conservation initiatives, which are sometimes not in line with animal welfare values. Aitken also pushes against the notion that rehabilitation is inherently separate from conservation and maintains that contributions to rehabilitation can in fact aid and work toward conservation efforts.

Considering the tensions between traditional conservationists and wildlife rehabilitators, rehabilitators face difficulty when they attempt to reconcile the wildlife rehabilitator's code of

ethics and grappling with the demands of an “appropriate conservation ethic.” For example, what is an appropriate conservation ethic in general, and what is an appropriate conservation ethic for a wildlife rehabilitator to hold? These are not easy questions to consider and there is likely no single correct answer to them. Critics argue that wildlife rehabilitators are not conservationists because of their prioritization of animal welfare. However, many rehabilitators report caring about conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems, with many rehabilitation nonprofits including conservation in their missions (Throne, 2009).

Rehabilitators and animal welfare activists may feel ostracized by conservationists who prioritize landscapes or species conservation over the welfare of individuals or small populations. In this area, compassionate conservation has emerged as a new ethical framework that could almost be considered a compromise. Compassionate conservation is an attempt to reconcile the value systems and practices of animal welfare and conservation science. It is being promoted as a possible identity fit for many wildlife rehabilitators who also identify as conservationists (Teachout, 2014). Many of compassionate conservation’s commitments seem to apply well to the work of wildlife rehabilitation. In compassionate conservation, the welfare of animals is prioritized as much as the health and conservation of the population or species as a whole (Wallach et al., 2018). As Wallach states, “In practice, a compassionate conservationist works to develop, apply, and prioritize nonlethal and noninvasive strategies that benefit wildlife collectives without causing intentional suffering to wildlife individuals” (Wallach et al., 2018: 1261). Under the compassionate conservation framework, it is generally agreed that animals would not be killed except for humane euthanasia to end suffering. While this ethic could be appropriate and provide a conservation identity for wildlife rehabilitators, it can also clash with the concerns and realities of conservation scientists’ practice. Indeed, Wallach and other compassionate conservationists have been criticized by other conservation scientists, such as Oommen et al. (2018:786), who write, “As practicing conservationists, biologists, and social scientists, we argue that conservation needs to be responsive to the complexity of real-world situations. Theoretical platforms for conservation that ignore empirical practice and political contestation are unlikely to be just, effective, or

sustainable.” Compassionate conservation does in fact challenge many common conservation practices such as culling invasive species and so runs afoul of the principle to avoid unnecessary animal suffering.

A more pragmatic and mediating approach, however, acknowledges the value of compassionate conservation and the realities of managing wildlife populations and ecosystems. Some may advocate for “more compassionate” conservation. “Only explicit consideration of animal welfare in decision-making can ensure that conservation organizations do not unnecessarily compromise the well-being of individual animals” (Sekar and Shiller, 2020:630). This approach acknowledges that harm should not be done if it can be circumvented but acknowledges the perceived need in conservation to cull animal species or population for the overall good of conservation initiatives or health of the ecosystem. It is also this explicit consideration that allows for the deeper consideration to conservation solutions regarding invasive species or atypical species conflicts.

Social Media

As mentioned in the introduction, social media is an ever-growing method of introducing the public to wildlife rehabilitation. In the online space, wildlife rehabilitation depictions are unregulated and there is not a clear standard that posts need to stand up to. It is important to consider how the relevant professional codes and moral theory do or do not reach the online space. In this section, I will briefly describe the relationship between the codes and social media as well as platform policies regarding animal depictions. I will return to these policies and their implications in the discussion of results.

Environmental or conservation ethics help inform people of what to do or feel in difficult situations involving our relationship to other species and the landscape. In a time where many people receive their knowledge and explore the world, including nature and animals, through social media posts, these ethics need to be applied to the online space. In the Minimum Standards for Wildlife Rehabilitation, many topics are covered and thoroughly described;

however, there is not an overarching standard or guidance for social media posts or interactions (Miller, 2012).

The portrayal of wildlife rehabilitation on social media is important because it is how the public can learn and form impressions about rehabilitation and it can also potentially influence their perception of wildlife. Without guidance, rehabilitators are left to create their own set of guidelines or to operate without any guidelines at all. This creates an online environment where rehabilitators conflict over what they consider to be appropriate social media posts. Questions begin to rise such as: What does it mean to, “[respect] the wildness and [maintain] the dignity of each animal in life and in death” in an online setting (Miller, 2012: v)? What is an appropriate setting (home, facility, nature) to show the wildlife in? Should violations of animal rehabilitation best practices be tolerated in online spaces? How can or should wildlife rehabilitation be regulated in an online space?

Wildlife on social media can be traced back to the early 2000s with the invention of YouTube and the later popularization of sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and most recently, TikTok. The use of social media is a smart practice because the utilization of social media has only developed in the past few years, with 69% of Americans getting at least some of their scientific information from social media in 2018 (Fischer et al., 2023). Although the online space is different from real life, it is commonly acknowledged that people have a responsibility to maintain their ethical codes in online platforms.

While animal ethics prescribes many different in depth looks into animal dignity and respect, online platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok are hardly as nuanced with their regulations. Twitter’s rules and policies state that “...you can’t include violent, hateful, or adult content within areas that are highly visible on Twitter, including in live video, profile, header, or List banner images. If you share this content on Twitter, you need to mark your account as sensitive. Doing so places images and videos behind an interstitial (or warning message), that needs to be acknowledged before your media can be viewed” (Twitter, 2022). Some content is explicitly not permitted such as violence, adult content (nudity), and hateful

imagery. There is no further information available about wildlife on Twitter or their policies on portrayals of wildlife.

Instagram is another popular social media site with an explicitly visual focus. The Instagram community guidelines do not have any information or policies specific to wildlife. Therefore, portrayals of wildlife cannot be removed unless they violate a different condition such as depiction of violence. The Instagram help page has one article pertaining to wildlife. They state, “We also encourage you to be mindful of your interactions with wild animals, and consider whether an animal has been smuggled, poached or abused for the sake of tourism. For example, be wary when paying for photo opportunities with exotic animals, as these photos and videos may put endangered animals at risk” (Meta, 2022). This page also does not include any further information on inappropriate interactions with wildlife that would apply to the realm of wildlife rehabilitation centers, outside of the rules of no violence or gratuitous gore. It does not consider what further constitutes an appropriate or inappropriate interaction with wildlife.

Facebook, which is owned by the same parent company as Instagram, has regulations regarding animals within its commerce policies. The policy states “Listings may not promote the buying or selling of animals or animal products, or land in ecological conservation areas (Meta, 2022). Additionally, they have policies against posting slaughters without context, and animal to animal fights that expose innards or dismemberment, except in the wild.

TikTok, the most recent social media site to become popular, presents some of the most specific guidelines regarding wildlife and animals. TikTok mentions wildlife in their community guidelines by stating, “Do not post, upload, stream, or share: ...Content that promotes the poaching or illegal trade of wildlife” and “Content of animals that depicts: the slaughter or other non-natural death of animals; dismembered, mutilated, charred, or burned animal remains; animal cruelty and gore” (TikTok, 2022). While these are the most specific guidelines, they still do not take an explicit take on wildlife interactions or arguably inappropriate depictions of wildlife.

Overall, current popular social media sites have comprehensive policies against showing wildlife or animals in situations of violence or extreme gore but lack policies that

further regulate the depiction of inappropriate interactions with wildlife. This possibly reflects a lack of consensus among wildlife or conservation advocates about what appropriate portrayals of wildlife are online. Per *Standards for Wildlife Rehabilitation*, rehabilitators should "...[respect] the wildness and [maintain] the dignity of each animal in life and in death" (Miller, 2012: v). Violations of the wildlife rehabilitators' code of ethics and best practices in online spaces, such as imprinting on babies by cuddling them, are unfortunately prevalent on social media and there are no regulations that can be used to report the content.

Study Methods

To answer my primary research questions about the ethical interpretations of wildlife rehabilitators, I have drawn on the existing literature regarding the history of wildlife rehabilitation, rehabilitation practice, applied animal ethics, various professional ethical codes, and depictions of animals in media. Through a synthesis of a wide range of literature, I have explored the ways in which respect for wildlife and our duties to wildlife are understood in an academic or philosophical sense.

In addition to analyzing literature, I conducted a series of interview with staff who work for or people who volunteer at wildlife rehabilitation centers in order to understand how on-the-ground practice demonstrates respect for wildness and dignity. To achieve this, I also had to interrogate how rehabilitators classify the animals in their care with regard to wildness. Wildness is not a defined adjective; therefore, I allowed volunteers to define whether the animals in their care are wild or not and see how their understandings of respect change with changing understandings of wildness. I conducted interviews with professionals and volunteers at three case study sites: Liberty Wildlife, Southwest Wildlife Conservation Center, and Arizona Bat Rescue. These sites represent centers of different sizes, opportunities for public engagement, opportunities for education, and different animals in their care. All are licensed in the state of Arizona and are recognized on a map of rehabilitation facilities on Arizona Game and Fish's website (Arizona Fish and Game Department, 2023). These are not the only

rehabilitation facilities in the valley, but they were chosen for their upstanding reputations and responsiveness to interview inquiries.

Liberty Wildlife is a wildlife rehabilitation center and sanctuary located in Phoenix, Arizona. Founded in 1981, its mission is “To nurture the nature of Arizona through wildlife rehabilitation, natural history education and conservation services to the community” (Liberty Wildlife, 2023). Although they specialize in the rehabilitation of native raptors, Liberty will accept any non-domestic animal into the center for rehabilitation, making their care very diverse. In 2022, they took in 11,111 animals for rehabilitation with the help of roughly 300 volunteers and a small staff. They boast that their release rate is above 50%, which they maintain is above the national average (Mosby, 2023; Liberty Wildlife, 2023). The sanctuary portion of the center is open to the public, creating a space for community education and engagement.

Southwest Wildlife Conservation Center (SWCC) is a wildlife rehabilitation center and sanctuary located in northern Scottsdale, Arizona. The center was founded in 1994 and specializes in southwest mammal rehabilitation. Their mission states that SWCC “... rescues, rehabilitates, and releases injured, displaced, and orphaned wildlife. Wildlife education includes advice on living with wildlife and the importance of native wildlife to healthy ecosystems. Educational and humane scientific research opportunities are offered in the field of conservation medicine. Sanctuary is provided to animals that cannot be released back to the wild” (Southwest Wildlife Conservation Center, 2023). The center boasts a 70% release rate over all and a 98% release rate among baby mammals that are in taken. This is in line with the national average mammal release rate of 72% (Throne, 2009). The center maintains a close relationship with Arizona Game and Fish, who partner with them to host events such as webinars and bat netting events. They also partner with US Fish and Wildlife and serve a host site for the Mexican Gray Wolf species survival plan (Southwest Wildlife Conservation Center, 2023). This deep level of partnership helps demonstrate that SWCC is exceptionally well respected and stands out from the smaller community-based rehabilitators.

Arizona Bat Rescue is an independent, at-home rehabilitation operation in Mesa, Arizona. Founded in 2022, AZ Bat Rescue rehabilitated 61 bats in its first year of operation. Its mission is “to give Arizona bats a place to rest and heal so that they can go back into the wild. We also strive to teach everyone we can about how amazing bats are and all of the ways we benefit from living with them” (Arizona Bat Rescue, 2022). It does not act as a sanctuary, nor is it open for the public. Though its scale is much smaller, it is also well respected in the rehabilitation community and by its peer organizations.

Volunteers and staff were recruited to participate in the study via a recruitment email. Some snowball effect recruiting did take place, as the email was forwarded on by staff to their volunteers and contacts in the field. Respondents were asked to participate in a voluntary interview for a duration of 30-60 minutes in which they would be asked about their experience as a volunteer for a wildlife rehabilitation center.

Interviews were recorded via Zoom with participant consent and were transcribed via Zoom and corrected for accuracy by hand. Interview recordings and transcripts were stored in a secure Dropbox private to myself and Professor Ben Minter.

Interview questions were designed to collect information about the interviewee and their relationship to wildlife rehabilitation (see Appendix B). Questions purposefully aim to elicit information about the daily work interviewees complete and information about their emotional relationships to wildlife in their care. Under the assumption that these institutes are aligned with the NWRA’s code of ethics (specifically code #8), then the interviewee’s answers should reveal how their attitudes and actions exemplify their working understanding of respect for the dignity and wildness of an animal in their care. Besides the questions to collect basic information, the questions were chosen as appropriate in the flow of conversation. Not all questions were asked in all interviews to maintain brevity and to recognize that some volunteers would hold different knowledge than others due to their differences in experience and volunteer position.

Interview and Observation Results

Throughout my interviews, I sought to understand what the work of the wildlife rehabilitators looked like and how their attitudes and actions form what it means to respect dignity and wildness from their perspective and experience. I also was interested in interrogating their understanding of wildness in this context, because I had to know their definition of wildness in order to understand how they could respect it as part of their practice. I was also seeking to find if any volunteers experienced ethical conflicts with the work they were performing at the centers. The interview data are rich, demonstrating a consistent passion in volunteers for animal welfare and the environment, but also revealing where volunteers experienced ethical dilemmas in their work.

A total of eleven interviews were conducted. The interviewees comprised of three volunteers from Liberty Wildlife, five volunteers from SWCC, and two volunteers who volunteered at both Liberty Wildlife and SWCC. The founder of Arizona Bat Rescue was also interviewed and had previously been associated with both Liberty Wildlife and SWCC. Additionally, one paid staff member from SWCC was interviewed. Staff from Liberty Wildlife declined to be interviewed, citing their already heavy workload at the center. However, they did support my project by allowing me to attend their public hours at no cost.

I will begin by exploring the results relating to the attitudes and actions of wildlife rehabilitators and how they exemplify the ways in which they understand and enact respect for an animal's dignity and wildness while in their care. I seek to answer this question by first understanding the volunteers' moral reasons for rehabilitation work, then by examining volunteer training, and finally through examination of the different stages of rehabilitation and sanctuary that an animal may experience.

Underpinning each mission statement of my case study sites is an ethical belief that rehabilitation is needed instead of alternative animal or conservation efforts. The moral underpinning for volunteers was almost unilaterally aligned with the idea of rectificatory justice. When asked about their motivations, volunteers frequently expressed that animals are being harmed by humans both directly and indirectly - and therefore humans have an obligation to help

them when they are injured. Examples of direct harm can be accidental, such as hitting an animal with a vehicle, or purposeful, such as committing animal abuse against wildlife. Indirect harms can span a much larger range, but usually stem from human impacts on the environment, such as human encroachment decreasing animal habitat. As Kim Holmes, an intake window volunteer at Liberty Wildlife put it: "I think that we have an obligation as humans, because we are taking up so much space. Now that we're encroaching on all this wildlife space, we have an obligation to make sure that if an animal is injured, we find the right care for it." Similarly, Todd Newberger, a relatively new volunteer and Arizona resident told me, "I moved into their habitat. I'm just trying to help them have a better life. Kind of since I stole their land." This justice approach is trying to rectify the harm done to animals by others or by human impacts on the environment. No volunteers expressed beliefs that were strongly aligned with beneficence, the counterpart to rectificatory justice that proposes their obligation is to lessen total pain and suffering such as through the non-treatment of carnivores who upon release will kill prey.

Having established the missions of the wildlife rehabilitation centers and the underlying moral motivation, I will next examine how these missions are realized in practice and how the work shows how respect for wildness and dignity is understood and enacted for animals in their care. I will begin by examining the different roles that volunteers can take on in rehabilitation settings and what their training for those roles looks like at my case study sites. Volunteer training is where the rehabilitation work begins, even before the animals are introduced, and is how volunteers learn to understand their role in rehabilitation. After discussing volunteer training, I will examine rehabilitation work by providing snapshots of what respect for the dignity and wildness of an animal looks like at the different stages of rehabilitation that an animal might experience.

Licensee/Volunteer Training

Depending on the role of a volunteer or staff member, their work can vary drastically. The majority of my interviewees worked in roles where they performed animal care, educated the public on tours, and rescued and transported the animals. Several volunteers have worked in

multiple roles or simultaneously volunteer in multiple roles. Even between the centers themselves, two volunteers worked at both Liberty Wildlife and Southwest Wildlife. The founder of Arizona Bat Rescue, a one-person operation, was formerly associated with both Liberty Wildlife and SWCC. This helped maximize insight into work at all of the rehabilitation centers and reflects that the rehabilitation community is locally tight knit.

In this section, I will briefly describe the training process as expressed by my interviewees. The amount of training required to receive a rehabilitation license in the United States depends on state law, which varies across the country. Typically, licensing requires an education component, work experience component, and/or the ability to pass a knowledge exam. In the state of Arizona, a licensee must be 18 or older, have 6 months of full-time rehabilitation work experience or be a licensed veterinarian, and must pass an exam about the taxa of animal they will be rehabilitating (Arizona Fish and Game Department, 2023).

One interviewee, Hally Cokenias, is the licensee of Arizona Bat Rescue. Her work and position is unique because, in contrast to the other interviewees who are classified as sublicensees, she is fully responsible for maintaining her license with AZ Game and Fish. She has a history of volunteering with bats and attending in-depth training workshops, which demonstrates excellence curated through experience and education. Her journey to obtaining her license began with her working as a volunteer at Liberty Wildlife and SWCC, where she volunteered rescuing and transporting bats to these centers. More formally, she and her partner attended formal training classes hosted by Bat World, an accredited bat sanctuary in Texas that offers online and in-person workshops on bat rehabilitation skills. This training was described by her as being "...a very intense couple of days" where they learned "...all sorts of things, including amputations [and] putting bats under anesthesia...." As the licensee, she must have more rigorous background education and experience than a typical volunteer at a center. Her dedication to traveling and receiving in-person instruction from one of the best bat rehabilitation centers in the country demonstrates a dedication to professional development and providing quality care.

Between Arizona Bat Rescue, Liberty Wildlife and SWCC, there are hundreds of volunteers engaged in rehabilitation work in the Phoenix metropolitan area. Volunteers do not have to meet the same licensing requirements as the actual licensee, however it is important that they are appropriately trained. Volunteers experience an orientation and training for their specific roles. Training largely depends on the different roles the volunteer might fill. For example, the training to be a hotline volunteer who can work remotely will look very different than the training for the animal care volunteers and different from all of the other unique roles present.

Before training for their specific role, volunteers experience some form of orientation. At SWCC, volunteers receive a two- to four-hour onboarding training led by a staff member. Interviewee Robin Wilson is the event and volunteer coordinator staff member at SWCC. She leads the volunteer onboarding at SWCC and stated “We go through our volunteer handbook, which is quite extensive, that talks about rules and regulations and protocols and things that are required to be a volunteer here...If I just hand it to somebody, they may or may not read it”. This demonstrates that their training and manuals are taken seriously and volunteers are held to the standards outlined in them. Liberty Wildlife also has a volunteer orientation that reviews the organization and its mission before volunteers can start working. Liberty also has a volunteer manual that lays out the appropriate protocols for different situations. Volunteer orientation in this space helps to keep volunteers accountable for maintaining a safe environment for themselves and the animals.

Volunteer training varies, depending on the role volunteers have, but most interviewees described their training as being thorough. Rescue team member training consisted of learning some theory and how to use their tools, as well as shadowing an experienced member of the rescue team. Education volunteers at SWCC describe their training experience as beginning with them receiving a script and shadowing experienced education tour guides. Over time, they begin to memorize different parts of the script and will work until they have the whole script memorized and understand the protocols required of this position. Education volunteers at Liberty must partake in Liberty’s five-week education team training program, where volunteers learn how to be

engaging speakers about the backstories of the sanctuary birds and how to handle them. Animal care training also usually occurs under the guidance of an experienced team member. Once shown the ropes, volunteers are expected to be largely independent, but know whom to ask when questions arise.

Wildlife Rehabilitation on the Ground

In this next section, I explain in detail what volunteers are doing in their roles, and I organize this by following the typical chronology of an animal entering a wildlife rehabilitation center. The chronology of an animal entering a center is rescue, intake, rehabilitation, and either release, death, or sanctuary. I will follow this same chronology to examine the work from start to finish and how the work demonstrates respect for the wildness and dignity of an animal in their care. Though an important part of rehabilitation, I will not strongly focus on release in this thesis due to a lack of interview data on that process. Demonstrating respect for wildness in particular can become murkier when examining the sanctuary portions of the wildlife rehabilitation centers, specifically at Liberty Wildlife and Southwest Wildlife, because the “wildness” of the animals is understood differently by different interviewees.

Rescue and Intake

Wildlife rehabilitation largely begins with animals either being brought to the facility by a community member or being rescued by volunteers. Both Liberty and SWCC have rescue hotlines that community members can call to report injured wildlife and connect with a volunteer to learn the appropriate next steps to take. The SWCC hotline is staffed 24/7 every day of the year. The Liberty Wildlife hotline is staffed from 8:00am-8:30pm. In all cases, volunteers help to assess the situation, inform callers of the appropriate next steps, and can send out their trained rescue teams if needed. Because the Arizona Bat Rescue is much smaller, the way to arrange a rescue is to connect with the founder directly on her personal cell phone.

When it is determined that a rescue is needed, hotline volunteers will communicate this over the platform Slack. Rescuers are mostly sent to retrieve animals that are too large or dangerous for someone with no training to handle. Rescues are usually completed by one rescuer, except when somebody is in training. Animals they might rescue include large birds, javelina, bobcats, and coyotes among others. The largest and most dangerous animals, such as deer, mountain lions, bears, and wolves, are handled through collaboration with Arizona Game and Fish and are brought to SWCC, since they specialize in large mammals.

Interviewees express that the actual act of rescue should occur with minimal amount of stress to the animal that is possible. Commonly used tools for capture/collection and transportation include nets, catch polls, and kennels. After an animal has been contained in a box or kennel, the rescuers will transport the animal to their facility. Liz Finch, a volunteer tour guide at SWCC, reported that "...when [you're] driving, [you] are told to turn the radio off. Don't talk to the animal like 'It's okay' because you just don't want them to get accustomed". Adherence to the strict rules against speaking or having human voices around the animal avoids imprinting or habituation of the animal to humans. Preventing imprinting will arise again in many other volunteer roles, making it one of the biggest concerns of volunteers. This is foundational to understanding a hard boundary that interviewees agree upon and it forms an important point about how they interpret and respect wildness. I will further reflect on this concept after examining how it appears in more volunteer roles.

After an animal has been caught, contained, and transported to the rehabilitation facility, it undergoes an intake process. The intake process is the collection of information about the animal and how it came to the facility. Appropriate paperwork is completed and kept for annual reporting as part of their licensure.

Animals coming into Liberty Wildlife will enter a triage room, unless they are suspected to have a contagious disease, in which case they will be transferred to an isolation room. At SWCC, animals are taken into the animal clinic for examination to assess their illness or injury. Arizona Bat Rescue has some volunteers who assist with the transport of bats. Hally Cokenias, the

rehabilitator there, will rescue, intake, and assess in rapid succession since she is an individual practitioner and all of the work falls to her.

After intake, medical examination of wildlife will occur to assess their condition. Here, a separation is made between the animals that will enter into rehabilitation and those that will be euthanized. The rehabilitators' code of ethics states that animals have a right to euthanasia if they cannot be treated or if they are non-releasable and unfit for "education, foster parenting, or captive breeding" (Miller, 2012: v). Euthanizing is relatively common in wildlife rehabilitation centers because many of the animals that enter the facility have extreme injuries. Veterinarians and medical teams will assess if an animal can be treated and what its quality of life would be if it survived. Although this topic is sensitive, all interviewees maintained a positive view on the practice of euthanasia to relieve pain. As Daphne Tyler, an animal care and rescue team volunteer at SWCC put it:

"I think the reality of rescue and what the public doesn't see is that probably about half of the animals that we rescue are humanely euthanized because their injuries are too significant. It is sad, for sure. The way we look at it, though, is that it's better that we were able to give the animal less pain, and a quicker end to their pain than they would have if they were laying in the middle of the road or by the side of the road. Every rescue is a good rescue, whether the outcome is life or death."

In this way, wildlife rehabilitation does subscribe to the idea that they have an obligation to end the suffering of an animal when they feel confident that the suffering will only increase or be prolonged. At Liberty Wildlife and SWCC, medical assessment of this caliber and consideration of euthanasia is left to staff and veterinarians, not to volunteers. None of my interviewees were able to speak about personally making decisions to euthanize animals.

A more contentious point, with regard to euthanasia, is the use of euthanasia to prevent possible disease spread inside the facilities. Interviewee Marie Provine, who volunteers at both

Liberty Wildlife and SWCC, reported that Canada geese entering into Liberty Wildlife with avian flu were being euthanized to prevent the disease from spreading to other animals. Additionally, she reported that, to her understanding, lovebirds were recently afflicted with a disease that can affect humans. Marie explained "...every love bird that we had, and we had about twenty, is gone. They've euthanized every single one, and every love bird that comes in is immediately euthanized. Even if it's perfectly healthy...." Although this is emotionally difficult, especially at an institution that prioritizes individual welfare, it is a show of utilitarian ethics. If they allowed for birds inflected with avian flu to continue coming into the facility, they would risk transmitting the disease to the other animals present and could lose many more animals. With regard to the lovebirds, rehabilitators are protected both in the wildlife rehabilitators code of ethics and the AMVA veterinary principles from having to treat animals at the expense of risking human health. Though there are not explicit rules or guidance in the code of ethics about which diseases constitute which responses, the rehabilitation centers have adopted utilitarianism (maximizing the good of all potentially affected individuals, both human and non-human) as their guiding moral principle while making these decisions.

An animal that is determined to be well enough to go through rehabilitation will be prescribed a treatment plan. These can be as complex as undergoing surgeries, x-rays, and physical therapies to being very simple, feeding the animal a healthy diet and providing it a space to rest and recover. All animals receive high levels of care regardless of their species abundance or aesthetic value. Marie Provine, again, describes the thinking:

"What really impresses me is that some little scrawny, not very attractive, pigeon will come in. Baby pigeons are really ugly. I hate to say it, but they really aren't pretty. There will be as much effort to save that pigeon as there would be to save a beautiful, great horned owl that everybody would love and admire. They're just medical people and they look at all these animals as salvage this animal if you can, it doesn't matter what it is. Now, we occasionally get a golden eagle or a Bald eagle. A bird that's endangered will

probably get another level of care, and there will be more involved. There'd be more effort to make sure everything comes out right, but a pigeon or a rabbit can be operated on and have X-rays taken. I mean it's just very catholic with a small c."

Her quote suggests that all animals who arrive for care have their medical assessments and treatments taken very seriously. There is roughly equal treatment in the care provided for the different types of animals, with their aesthetic value not considered. Species status, such as endangerment, may influence their work by increasing involvement, but all animals are entitled to high levels of care. This culture reflects a level of respect for the animals, not because they are beautiful or beneficial, but because they have inherent dignity.

Daily Animal Care

After diagnosis, animals start receiving routine care. Although what this looks like differs from facility to facility and from animal to animal, in this section, I'll provide a broad overview of animal care duties and experiences of animal care volunteers. What they all share in common is a respect for the autonomy of wildlife and acknowledgement that respecting the animal's wildness means limiting physical affection.

At Liberty Wildlife, the daily care team cooperates to take care of the animals that are in the ICU, where animals go after they have been assessed by the medical team, the isolation room, the rehabilitation mews (a term used in falconry for an enclosure for birds of prey), the interactive room, and the education-side mews. Teams of volunteers will work on a consistent day of the week and be on, for example, the "Wednesday team" in order to provide care every day of the week. The daily care team arrives early in the morning, usually around 6am. Because the majority of animals are located outdoors, and these centers are in the Phoenix area, the work can become overwhelmingly hot much of the year if it is not started early in the morning. The exception to this being the owl team, who provide daily care to the nocturnal owls in the evenings.

The standard protocols for volunteering with the animals undergoing rehabilitation can be strict. Protocols and rules, such as no talking and no handling of the animals, are implemented in order to prevent the animals from imprinting on humans or from associating human voices with being fed. This is for the purpose of maintaining the animal's independence and ability to survive without reliance on humans. Marie Provine described that when she works with juvenile birds during the spring she is, "...very careful not to speak, and we wear camouflage, and I generally wear sunglasses and a hat." Use of camouflage and other items that hide the face assist in breaking up the human form, making it more difficult for a baby to accidentally imprint. Nancy Melling, a volunteer from SWCC, told me that she sometimes works in the baby trailer, where rules are similarly very strict to prevent imprinting. She reports that, "...Because bobcats and coyotes imprint very easily, we wear a mask to try to show them we're like a cat or coyote...We always work so they don't get used to human touch because you don't want them to end up in a cage the rest of their life. That's not a place for them. They should be out in the wild." Nancy Melling provides useful context to understand the consequences of an animal imprinting. If they imprint, they cannot be released. If they imprint, they fall into the category of non-releasable animals that can be considered for euthanasia if they are unsuited for education, foster parenting, or captive breeding. That is why it is so imperative that animals are not imprinted upon while undergoing rehabilitation.

Compared to Liberty Wildlife and SWCC, the Arizona Bat Rescue is much smaller and more representative of the average wildlife rehabilitation operation in the United States. The Arizona Bat Rescue represents individual rehabilitators with home operations and the immense amount of work time they dedicate to the care of animals. Hally Cokenias, who operates this rehabilitation practice, describes some of her daily activities:

"During baby season I'm feeding babies every three to four hours around the clock. I'm pretty much not sleeping. I'm napping and feeding them. Keeping them alive is a lot of time, probably about like sixteen hours a day, maybe a little bit more. That's June to

August and the rest of the time I probably spend between two and five hours a day taking care of the bats. So that's feeding them, dealing with any medical issues like wound care and any kind of illnesses, and just checking them out and making sure they're okay. Then, of course, there's cleaning, prepping food, and getting them fed again."

Arizona Bat Rescue exclusively rehabilitates bats, which are biologically less vulnerable to imprinting on humans. However, that does not particularly increase the amount of handling or touching of the bats; bats are primarily handled when being fed and for physical examinations and treatments. Hally described her handling of bats as "restraining them, and then giving them their food, and then putting them back." The handling is succinct and for the benefit of the bat's care. Additionally, she describes a degree of handling in their medical treatment: "Some bats I'll do physical therapy [on] if they've had a wing injury. I'll kind of be, you know, pulling out their wing and moving it around so the muscles don't lock up." Although bats are less vulnerable than most animals to imprinting on humans, Hally reported that bats should still be handled as little as possible. This aligns that imprinting is not the sole reason that animals are not handled for affection, but rather that rehabilitators respect the dignity and wildness of wildlife by maintaining minimal interaction even when there is less biological risk of imprinting.

It is imperative to recognize that rehabilitators in all of the case study sites establish and maintain strict boundaries between themselves and their animals in rehabilitation regarding shows of affection. One daily care volunteer at Liberty Wildlife, Danielle Krieger, described to me how emotional restraint is difficult but required for quality rehabilitation work:

"It is really, really hard resisting that urge to cuddle with these animals but you really have to remind yourself that they are wildlife...They don't understand the cuddling. They don't understand that compassion, that empathy. They don't get that, and we don't want them to get that. We want them to stay afraid of us, because that's what's going to keep them safe out in the wild."

By her account, it is the duty of a rehabilitator to maintain restraint with shows of affection toward their animals in rehabilitation including cuddling and petting. Adherence to these boundaries protects animals during their recovery, allowing them to maintain their independence and ability to be released. However, it also extends beyond that, as seen through the work of Arizona Bat Rescue, where those boundaries are still maintained even though bats are uniquely not vulnerable to imprinting on humans. The consensus of volunteers on this issue reveals that maintaining a boundary between the rehabilitator and the animal is imperative and forms one of the key ways in which they demonstrate respect for an animal's dignity and wildness.

Daphne Tyler (SWCC) further emphasizes the expectations in rehabilitation and begins to prod at differences and nuances in the sanctuary portion of the centers. She reported her experience as a daily care volunteer working in the rehabilitation space compared to the sanctuary space:

"We're not allowed to talk at all back there. Not at all. We're not allowed to interact with them at all. We're not allowed to give them any enrichment or anything that would be construed as human involvement, because we really want them to hate us, or at least be afraid of us. When we clean, the animals in [the rehabilitation] enclosures are very different from the ones that we can interact with because they're there for the whole time."

While animals undergoing rehabilitation are treated with a lack of affection and strong separation between the volunteers and the animals, Daphne Tyler sees a difference between the rehabilitation animals and the animals in the sanctuary portion of SWCC. Because the sanctuary animals are not going to be released, she sees a difference is the acceptability of interacting with them. This distinction between acceptable interaction in rehabilitation spaces versus sanctuary spaces at the same center leads into the next space that will be considered: sanctuaries.

Public Facing Sanctuary Experiences

Up until this point, the animals and interactions being considered have been related to animals actively undergoing rehabilitation. At all three case study sites, there are animals that are not undergoing rehabilitation, but rather are sanctuary animals and will live out their days at these facilities. At Liberty Wildlife and SWCC, these sanctuary animals can be seen by the public during the former's Open Hours and the latter's guided tours. The Arizona Bat Rescue, in contrast, is not open to the public. The animals in the public facing sanctuaries create a more complex calculus when considering what it means to respect wildness and dignity, largely because the wildness of the animal themselves appears to be perceived differently.

While some volunteers staunchly believe that the animals not undergoing rehabilitation are just as wild as the animals undergoing rehabilitation, others believe that the former are inherently less wild for a range of reasons. Being imprinted and having more docile behavior toward humans in particular are seen as top reasons why sanctuary animals are less wild than their counterparts in the rehabilitation area. This pattern was recognized in both the interviews and site visits to Liberty Wildlife and SWCC.

The variation in understanding wildness in the sanctuary setting is evident with some volunteers believing that wildness exists on a spectrum and that the sanctuary animals are less wild than their counterparts in rehabilitation. Whereas I previously described volunteers restricting themselves from showing affection to animals in rehabilitation, volunteers feel affection is more acceptable toward sanctuary animals. In reference to affection restrictions, Marie Provine (Liberty Wildlife and SWCC) stated "... I just think, if you've gotten beyond that point with an animal that you're not going to release then you might as well treat it with some love and affection, because it just seems kind of heartless." This sentiment suggests that becoming a sanctuary animal creates permission for affection to occur and actually changes the ethical responsibility of the caretakers.

Kim Holmes (Liberty Wildlife) echoed this sentiment, and made an explicit differentiation between the rehabilitation and sanctuary animals and how their wildness is different in her view:

“On the education side are the animals that stay at Liberty. They’re used for education purposes and can’t be released. It’s okay to talk to them and interact with them. Not touch them, but like to talk to them a little bit more. On the wild side, the rehab side, we do not talk to those birds like they’re pets; We’re trying to keep them wild if that makes sense?”

This point of view posits that volunteers have an obligation to keep rehabilitation wild and that they do not have that same obligation to refrain from affection with sanctuary animals. This sentiment was clear amongst several of the interviewees, though the exact nature of the difference between the wildness of the rehabilitation animals and the reduced wildness of the sanctuary animals was not clear. The spectrum of wildness is undefined in this space and raises the question of how perceived wildness influences how volunteers interact with the wildlife.

In contrast, several other volunteers expressed the belief that there was no difference in the wildness of the animals in rehabilitation compared to the animals in the sanctuary. As Daphne Tyler (SWCC) put it:

“They’re always wild. They’re not domestic. Domestic animals have tens of thousands of years of conditioning to be domestic, and so they are domestic. These are wild animals. They may be habituated and comfortable with us, but their behavior still exists... You know they may have some behaviors like they seem like they’re happy to see you, or whatever that may be. A lot of it is due to seeing the same people over and over. They know we bring treats. Every animal, whether it’s domestic or wild, if you feed it, is going to be friendly to you; Until you don’t have any more food for it. I definitely see them as wild.”

The variation present in the perceptions and interactions with the rehabilitation and sanctuary animals is important to recognize. Because there is no one definition of wildness, there

is no right or wrong perception in this space. Although, concerns about interactions, especially as they relate to imprinting, play into the perceived requirement to maintain wildness. Additionally, the professional codes of ethics in this space do not provide specific guidance on how respect for wildness and dignity changes between these spaces. This theme will continue to be further explored in the next section specifically focused on the public facing sanctuaries.

As mentioned above, at Liberty Wildlife and SWCC, there is a dedicated sanctuary space that is open to the public. To understand respect for wildness and dignity in the sanctuary space, I observed the public hours at Liberty Wildlife and went on a guided tour of SWCC. Again, Arizona Bat Rescue does not operate as a formal bat sanctuary and does not have a public facing component; Therefore, it was not observed. In the following section, I will share my observations about Liberty Wildlife and SWCC with the intent to record the atmosphere and notable interactions between volunteers, guests, and animals that relate the ideas of respect and dignity.

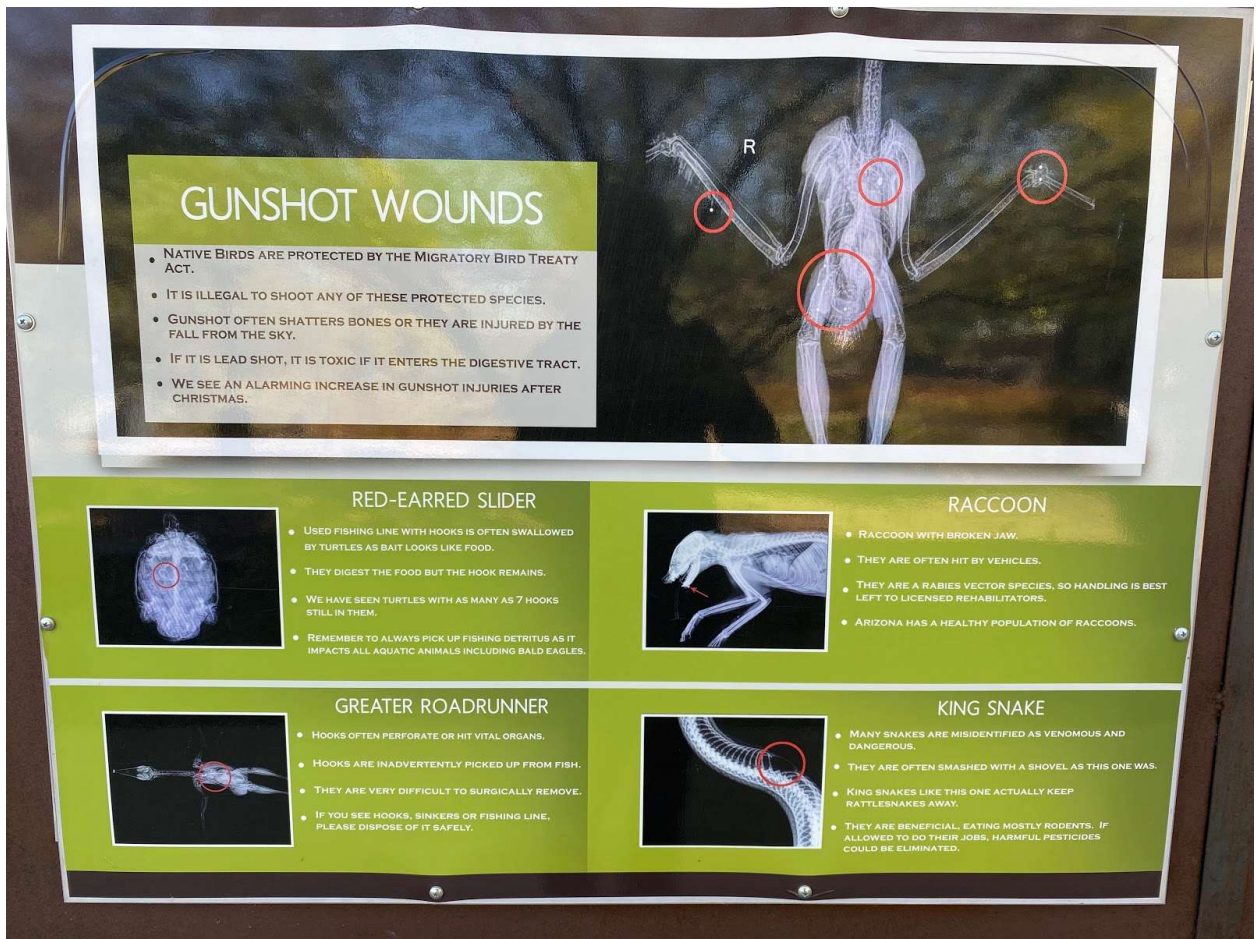
Liberty Wildlife Public Hours

Liberty Wildlife's public hours showcase their animal ambassadors and the ways in which the volunteers interact with them. The public hours are a designated time when the education, or sanctuary, side of the facility is open to community members for a small fee. During the open hours, volunteers offer several different talks and ways to interact with them and the ambassador animals. On the day I observed, there were several keeper talks scheduled along with an eagle experience and the Winged Wonders show. Outside of these activities, volunteers were also stationed around the facility with different ambassador birds and were available to answer questions from visitors.



Photograph 4: Photo of the schedule of events at Liberty Wildlife on Sunday, November 27, 2022.

The organization of public hours at Liberty is casual and allows for guests to have the freedom to engage as much or as little as they would like with the education materials and the volunteers. Educational information is posted around the facility and describes their work in detail; however, it is not formally introduced to guests and may be missed by those who skip reading the signage.



Photograph 5: Signage at Liberty Wildlife describing rehabilitation work and identification of injuries through X-ray.

The volunteers at Liberty Wildlife engage in diverse ways with the ambassador birds, as I will illustrate with two specific examples: The interaction during the keepers' talk at Junior's Pavilion and a less formal interaction between a volunteer, his ambassador bird Rio, and the public.

The volunteers' relationship with Junior exemplifies deep affection and also the anthropomorphizing of animals. Junior is an imprinted black-crowned night heron that was brought to Liberty in 2018. The keeper talk with Junior was very casual and the volunteer mainly answered questions from the guests in lieu of giving a formal talk. The volunteer brought a bowl full of small cut up fish to hand feed to Junior and coax him toward the front of the enclosure. To

coax him, she called his name repeatedly and cooed at him like one does a newborn baby. Throughout the talk, the volunteer praised Junior for staying at the front of the enclosure. One of the notable things the volunteer told us was that every volunteer who is assigned to Junior knows to bring him a stick. Not just any stick, but a long, skinny stick with no leaves. They do this because they quickly realized Junior loves sticks and will use them to build his nest in the corner of the pavilion. Because he is imprinted, it also helps keep him occupied and out of the way of volunteers while they clean. Their obvious affection for Junior, and the comical lengths to which volunteers will go to keep him happy, illustrates affection as one way to respect a sanctuary animal.

In slight contrast, a different volunteer, who was stationed at the entrance with his ambassador bird, Rio, demonstrated that respect can include a more muted affection. The volunteer described Rio's story to visitors with a focus on his biology. Rio, he explained, is a zone tailed hawk who arrived at Liberty in 2007 after falling out of the nest and breaking his leg. Once at Liberty, Rio received a proper diet and medical care, but still cannot support his own weight. Rio, who had been standing on the volunteer's arm, then made a misstep and lost balance, perfectly emphasizing his condition. The volunteer took a minute to help Rio gain his balance and told us that Rio was upset he had lost his balance in front of a crowd. His feathers were puffed in a show of his momentary stress.

A final notable interaction between volunteers and the ambassador animals occurred during the Winged Wonders show. During this time, several ambassador animals were brought to the outdoor amphitheater and attached to tethers. This allowed them to fly between different posts in the amphitheater without being able to fly away from the sanctuary. The animals were encouraged to fly to different posts by the volunteers who used a combination of frozen mice and hand signals to encourage the birds to fly to certain posts. The volunteers explained that this type of show allows the public to learn about these animals and see them in flight while also giving the animals who can fly a way to exercise. This type of demonstration was unique to Liberty and not replicated at SWCC.

In contrast to the way interviewees report rehabilitation animals to be treated coldly, the sanctuary animals at Liberty Wildlife were treated and talked about with affection. All of the animals in the sanctuary were named and had unique personalities that the volunteers recognized. This affection was expressed through physical closeness, with birds perching on volunteers' arms and shoulders. To be clear, physical interaction did not breach into cuddling or petting behavior. Overall, Liberty Wildlife appears to be making a strategic choice to focus on showcasing the animals as individuals in an effort to emotionally connect visitors to nature.

Southwest Wildlife Conservation Center Public Tours

Southwest Wildlife Conservation Center exhibits similar, but distinct interactions between the volunteers and the animals and understandings of wildness. Something unique to SWCC is that a number of their animals did not originally enter SWCC for rehabilitation but were saved from being euthanized due to being nuisance wildlife.

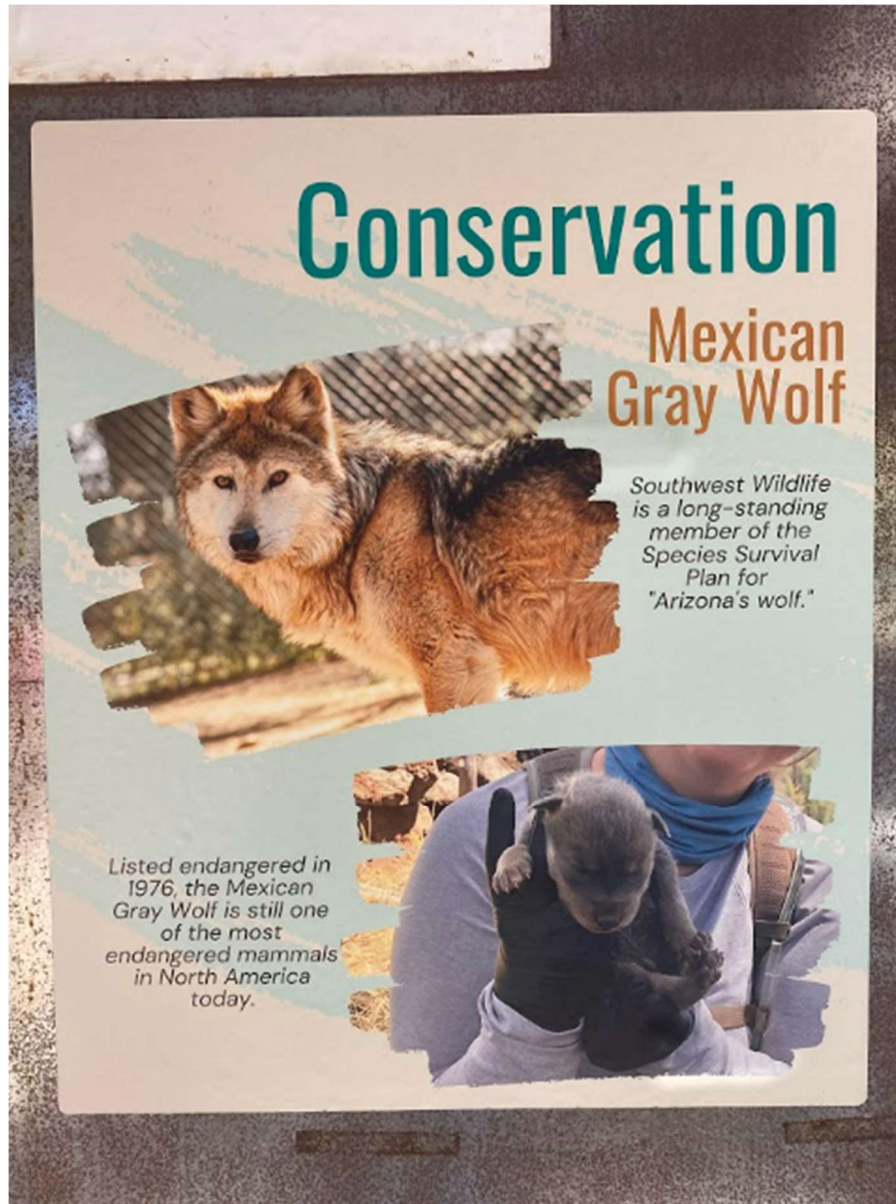
To visit SWCC, one must register in advance for a tour of the sanctuary. When the whole group arrives for the tour, the volunteer tour guides begin by delivering a speech about the founding of the organization, its mission, and the context that the animals on the tour are all unable to survive in the wild and therefore are cared for in the sanctuary. When speaking about the animals, the guide expressed explicitly that SWCC cares for them and loves them.

When in the sanctuary, all guests must always remain with their tour guide. The tour guide stops at nearly every animal enclosure to explain how each animal came to live in the SWCC sanctuary. Each stop has a rehearsed speech, supplemented by whatever behavior the animal is exhibiting that the tour guide can speak about.

When considering respect for the animals, comparisons between the rehabilitation centers and zoos arose. One tour guide (Liz Finch) told me that, "If any of the animals that are on the tour route start to show signs of distress, they will take them off of the tour route...they're not going to make them a monkey in a zoo for lack of a better phrase." This comparison demonstrates that the sanctuary is seen as taking better care for the wellbeing of the animals

than some zoos. This statement draws attention to the fact that level of respect for the animals in rehabilitation centers, zoos, or other places of animal captivity exist on a spectrum. The idea of variation and a spectrum of respect will be elaborated on further in the discussion section of this thesis.

When on the tour at SWCC, the tour guide made comments which intensified the association between imprinting, independence, and wildness. On the tour, the guide introduced us to a javelina named Charm. Charm was found when they were a juvenile and brought home by a couple who chose to raise Charm alongside their dogs. Being so young, Charm imprinted on the couple's dogs. The tour guide made specific mention of how cute and adorable it would be to have a javelina as your pet, but then spoke out and asked "but is that javelina wild? No, it's imprinted." This comment represents a clear dichotomy between being wild or being imprinted. The sentiment that they are mutually exclusive represents yet another perception of wildness in this space, adding to the variation amongst volunteers.



Photograph 6: Signage at the SWCC tour waiting area that describes their affiliation with the Mexican gray wolf species survival plan.

Further complicating the sanctuary space are animals, such as the Mexican gray wolves at SWCC, that are housed in the sanctuary, but are not undergoing rehabilitation or necessarily impaired from surviving on their own. SWCC is a holding facility for Mexican gray wolves as part of their species survival plan (SSP) which is operated by U.S. Fish and Wildlife. This is similar to

other SSP plans that occur in zoos. Their placement in the sanctuary space and on the tour route could challenge the notion that sanctuary animals are less wild than their counterparts in rehabilitation. Or at least, it adds another point onto the spectrum of wildness as they represent a captive animal, but one that could survive on its own outside of SWCC.

Overall, the tour guides at SWCC approached the tours with the intention to help guests form emotional connections to their animals in the hopes that it will help them learn to coexist with and not harm wildlife. Introducing each animal by name and explaining their personal journey successfully elicited emotional responses from other attendees. This practice seems to be the rehabilitators' approach to conservation in contrast to a facility like the Phoenix Zoo, which educates guests about a species conservation on a more macro scale.

Death

Often, animals in rehabilitation may not survive through to their release. Animals may pass for any number of reasons related to their illness, injury, or related to the regular biological functions that kill animals in nature. Deaths during rehabilitation are most likely to occur with the smallest animals, such as the baby quail at Liberty Wildlife, who are sensitive to the elements and pecking order fights.

The use or disposal of animals after they die can provide insight into how each case study site exemplifies respect for wildness and dignity in death. There is variation among the sites, but overall, they demonstrate that respect for an animal in death looks like a neat disposal or a use that helps further rehabilitation or science. What happens to an animal after it has passed can vary depending on the size, IUCN red list status, or the level of personal relationship to that animal. Small animals that are common are likely to be disposed of by placing them in the trash receptacle. Larger animals, like the animals at SWCC are sent to be cremated. Some of the sanctuary animals are rumored by volunteers to be buried on the SWCC property, as it is privately owned. Other animals, such as bats at Arizona Bat Rescue, may find themselves being frozen and used to practice surgical procedures on or sent away for scientific studies and

collections. AZ Bat Rescue particularly mentioned having a connect with ASU and sending her frozen bats to ASU's collection.

Discussion and Conclusion

In an attempt to understand how rehabilitators' attitudes and actions exemplify the way they understand and enact respect for an animal's dignity and wildness while in their care, I have examined the professional and moral guidance they may rely on as well as their on-the-ground work. My research, interviews, and site visits have revealed that there is one boundary that rehabilitators consistently reach consensus on: Interactions with animals undergoing rehabilitation must be limited to what is strictly necessary for their medical care. Beyond this boundary, there is considerable variation in how rehabilitators understand wildness and therefore how they respect it, especially when moving into the sanctuary space. Variation existed across the different sites, between areas within the sites (rehabilitation versus sanctuary), and among volunteers working in similar roles. Interviewees reached consensus, however, in their belief that wildlife rehabilitation contributes to conservation. As mentioned in the literature review, rehabilitation's relationship to conservation is contested, making this an interesting point for discussion. I will explore these areas of consensus and variation and their implications in this final section.

There was variation in the rehabilitation protocols across Liberty Wildlife, Southwest Wildlife Conservation Center, and the Arizona Bat Rescue. Universal agreement was only attained on one core protocol, which was that animals undergoing rehabilitation were to be exposed to humans as little as possible while receiving their necessary medical care. While undergoing rehabilitation, respect for an animal's dignity and respect for an animal's welfare are nearly ubiquitous and equivalent. However, respect for an animal's dignity is able to extend beyond its welfare needs, as reflected by maintenance of professionalism while handling bats at Arizona Bat Rescue, even though risk of imprinting is not a welfare concern. In most other facets of their work, volunteers demonstrated that there are numerous different ways to demonstrate respect for the animals in their care. In particular, respect for wildness was highly variable

because volunteers differed in their perception of wildness in the rehabilitation space. The way in which volunteers perceived the wildness of the animal in their care informed what they perceived to be best welfare practices and, for some volunteers, changed what they saw as their moral responsibilities toward the animals.

Interestingly, there is no singular definition of wildness in the rehabilitation space or in animal conservation more broadly. However, “wild” is generally taken to mean that an animal is non-domesticated and living independent of human assistance. Rehabilitation centers are spaces where wild animals enter and are temporarily, and sometimes permanently, assisted by humans. As such, they become liminal spaces where the concept of wildness is murky. In this space, volunteers are seeing different animals as more, less, or equally wild as others based on their behavior and the temporary or permanent nature of their stay.

Based on my interviews, wildness can be imagined as a spectrum: Wildness in the rehabilitation context is bookended by an imprinted sanctuary animal on one end and an independent animal in nature on the other. In the middle of the continuum exists non-imprinted sanctuary animals, rehabilitation animals, foster animals, and animals housed with the facilities but not associated with their rehabilitation work (e.g. the Mexican gray wolves at SWCC). With the spectrum of wildness being highly variable and personal to the volunteers, many different types of interactions end up falling under the broad category of respecting wildness.

Respect in the sanctuary space is especially interesting because some volunteers believed that their responsibilities to the animals changed from the rehabilitation space to include providing them with more affectionate relationships. One volunteer, who will remain anonymous, stated “I think, depending on the animal, and how happy they'll be, it would be more okay to form relationships with them for their well-being.” At the core of this difference, as reflected by this quote, is the animal's well-being. The relationships and actions do not change for the benefit of the volunteers, but for their perceived benefits to the animal's welfare. To be clear, volunteers expressed these relationships as allowing them to talk to or appropriately handle the animals. These relationships did not violate the previously mentioned boundary between humans and

animals engaging in actions like cuddling, which could be dangerous for the humans and violate the dignity of the animals. Even though there is divergence among rehabilitators, it is present because they all seek to provide the best care to the animals in the way they understand it.

The NWRA code of ethics is vague and open to interpretation because there is a desire for consensus among professionals on the codes. However, the openness allows for such varying interpretations that it raises concerns. Other rehabilitators outside of this sample could interpret respecting dignity and wildness in ways that cross the unofficial boundary between appropriate and inappropriate interaction with the animals that interviewees in this sample identified.

Lack of consensus among rehabilitators and lack of clear guidance from professional organizations prevents the identification of inappropriate human-animal interactions beyond the glaringly obvious. By glaringly obvious, I mean depictions that would likely be covered, for example, by existing social media policies for sensitive content. Unable to clearly identify inappropriate interactions in the puzzling rehabilitation space, rehabilitators and guiding organizations cannot condemn potentially inappropriate treatment of animals by rehabilitators, including online. This limit is currently being magnified, as shown through the depictions of animals on social media platforms referenced at the beginning of this paper. It is therefore important that this field consider if they are content with there being diversity in the way people interpret respect for dignity and wildness, or if they believe more explicit and restrictive guidelines are called for.

Despite shortcomings, volunteers maintained an attitude of superiority when comparing their sanctuaries to some other institutions that hold non-domesticated animals in captivity. They expressed that they saw the public facing side of their work as being more conservation focused than entertainment focused, compared to for-profit animal themed businesses. Liz Finch (SWCC) stated, "As far as the general public goes, [SWCC] is not the kind of place where you come take a photo with the baby tiger, which is why I volunteer there, and not at Out of Africa..." For context, Out of Africa is a non-AZA accredited zoo in Arizona that has numerous close animal encounters available for purchase. In contrast to SWCC, she feels that wildlife entertainment at these for-

profit zoos has only a “thin veneer of conservation and education...” Another tour guide volunteer from SWCC, Darlene Sitzler, told me that she is often asked about how their work compares to *Tiger King* (a Netflix docuseries about The Greater Wynnewood Exotic Animal Park and its owner, Joe Exotic). “He was there for the money,” she told me. It should be noted that The Greater Wynnewood Exotic Animal Park has closed since the airing of the docuseries and the animals were confiscated by the United States Agriculture Department and brought to multiple accredited wildlife sanctuaries across the country (Daly, 2021). Sanctuaries are distinguished as trusted places where animals confiscated from abusive situations by US agencies can be brought for medical care and rest. Interviewees felt strongly differentiated from other animal institutions because of their recognized focus on welfare and conservation.

Importantly, these rehabilitation centers and sanctuaries not only serve injured wildlife, but they also serve wildlife that have been illegally kept or abused by humans. A significant number of SWCC’s sanctuary animals were brought to them after being confiscated from people’s homes where they suffered physical abuse. One particularly memorable example from the SWCC tour was the story of a litter of coyote pups that were found after a man purposefully placed them inside of a cardboard box and then into a dumpster. At Liberty Wildlife, eight buntings were highlighted in the aviary keeper talk; they had been confiscated from a bird fighting ring in Nevada. Unfortunately, these stories of confiscation were relatively common during Liberty Wildlife and SWCC’s public experiences. To clarify, even if wildlife are not experiencing abuse, it is still illegal in the state of Arizona to keep native wildlife as a pet.

Although this thesis does not aim to determine whether or not wildlife rehabilitation centers contribute to conservation, it is notable that rehabilitators are aligned in their perception that they do so. From touring Liberty Wildlife and SWCC, I observed that their focus is on educating people about how to coexist with wildlife and appreciate them in the hopes that it will prevent the animal abuse and hunting and brings many animals into their care. Other interviewees saw more direct conservation contributions related to their rehabilitation work.

Interviewee Danielle Kreiger (Liberty Wildlife) explained her philosophy on how animal releases contribute to conservation:

“I feel like [the animals] being released helps conservation because it balances out the ecosystem. It balances out how the world is supposed to work... Making sure that they're released out there and keeping everything balanced is what's going to help conserve everything else as a whole.”

To Danielle, there was a more direct contribution to ecological balance and therefore conservation in addition to education efforts of the center. Though there were shared sentiments among interviewees that wildlife rehabilitation contributes to conservation, interviewees saw that contribution in different ways. As mentioned in the literature review, the measurable contributions of wildlife rehabilitation to conservation are unclear. Upon examination of these spaces, I argue that whether or not they contribute to conservation is less important than recognizing the moral good they contribute in rectifying harms toward animals.

Referring back to the work of Clare Palmer, wildlife rehabilitation could be one of the core methods through which humans will fulfill their obligations to animals in the future. Anticipating increased disruption due to climate change and climate enhanced natural disasters, there will be an increase in the number of animals experiencing indirect but clear human harm. These animals will be needing attention and require an increased number of rehabilitation centers and increased capacities at existing centers. Now is a perfect time to evaluate if the current wildlife rehabilitator's code of ethics provides enough professional guidance to guide rehabilitation into the future. I maintain that the code requires revision now and should be frequently revisited to maintain its relevance over time, especially as the human-wildlife relationship changes and develops.

Now is also the time for actors in this space to evaluate if they are content with the state of the field, or if a second wave of professionalization, similar to that seen in the 1970s, is necessary. Since wildlife rehabilitation professionalized with the founding of the IWRC and NWRA

in the 1970s and 1980s, the field has remained largely stagnant. Research has improved the ability of rehabilitators to understand and meet the needs of wildlife better, but the systematic organization and guiding ethical codes of wildlife rehabilitation centers have largely remained the same. The field could soon be approaching an inflection point where reflection on the current state is necessary to determine if the field can fulfill its mission of rescuing injured wildlife at a larger scale.

As a final conclusion, I recommend that actors in this space, particularly the IWRC and NWRA, should consider a revision to the wildlife rehabilitator's code of ethics. I suggest editing code #8 to specify that respecting an animal's dignity in rehabilitation means interacting with the animal as little as possible while still providing necessary care. Based on the attitudes of my interviewees, they are at a consensus on this boundary. Such an edit could maintain consensus, which professional codes must do, and create a formal boundary that could be used to guide rehabilitators and critique interactions with the intention to improve ethical behavior and animal welfare. Further, code #10, which maintains that rehabilitators should incorporate appropriate conservation ethics, sparks a final reflection. It is pertinent to remember that wildlife rehabilitation is, at its core, an animal welfare institution. While there are anecdotal and perceived contributions to conservation, there is yet to be concrete scientific evidence that rehabilitation measurably contributes to conservation goals. In a space experiencing ample ethical conflicts with conservation, I recommend the honest embrace of wildlife rehabilitation as a deeply individualistic welfare practice instead of attempting to reconcile the practice with broader conservation values. Further research surrounding rehabilitation post-release outcomes and human-animal relationship formation during sanctuary interactions could help enlighten if wildlife rehabilitators' approaches to conservation have an impact. However, even if no positive impact is ever found, wildlife rehabilitation provides a moral good through actionable rectificatory justice and does not need to reconcile itself with the broader conservation field to be respected.

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APPENDIX A

WILDLIFE REHABILITATOR'S CODE OF ETHICS

1. A wildlife rehabilitator should strive to achieve high standards of animal care through knowledge and an understanding of the field. Continuing efforts must be made to keep informed of current rehabilitation information, methods, and regulations.
2. A wildlife rehabilitator should be responsible, conscientious, and dedicated, and should continuously work toward improving the quality of care given to wild animals undergoing rehabilitation.
3. A wildlife rehabilitator must abide by local, state, provincial and federal laws concerning wildlife, wildlife rehabilitation, and associated activities.
4. A wildlife rehabilitator should establish safe work habits and conditions, abiding by current health and safety practices at all times.
5. A wildlife rehabilitator should acknowledge limitations and enlist the assistance of a veterinarian or other trained professional when appropriate.
6. A wildlife rehabilitator should respect other rehabilitators and persons in related fields, sharing skills and knowledge in the spirit of cooperation for the welfare of the animals.
7. A wildlife rehabilitator should place optimum animal care above personal gain.
8. A wildlife rehabilitator should strive to provide professional and humane care in all phases of wildlife rehabilitation, respecting the wildness and maintaining the dignity of each animal in life and in death. Releasable animals should be maintained in a wild condition and released as soon as appropriate. Nonreleasable animals which are inappropriate for education, foster-parenting, or captive breeding have a right to euthanasia.
9. A wildlife rehabilitator should encourage community support and involvement through volunteer training and public education. The common goal should be to promote a responsible concern for living beings and the welfare of the environment.
10. A wildlife rehabilitator should work on the basis of sound ecological principles,

incorporating appropriate conservation ethics and an attitude of stewardship.

11. A wildlife rehabilitator should conduct all business and activities in a professional manner, with honesty, integrity, compassion, and commitment, realizing that an individual's conduct reflects on the entire field of wildlife rehabilitation.

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APPENDIX B
SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Basic Information

- What is your name and what organization do you work for?
- How long have you been volunteering or working in wildlife rehabilitation?
- What made you interested in volunteering/working here?
 - If volunteer: What is your occupation?
 - What is your educational background?
- What department(s) or what role(s) do you volunteer in?

Understanding Respect and Dignity

- Can you walk me through what a typical volunteer shift looks like for you?
 - What environment are animals kept in?
- When and why are animals handled?
 - Who does the handling?
 - What training do the handlers have?
- In what ways are the public allowed to interact with the animals?
 - Can the public touch any of the animals? If so, which?
 - Do they receive any training?
- What do you do when an animal passes away?
 - How do you feel when an animal passes?
- In what circumstances is an animal put down?
 - Who makes the decision to do so?
- When do you know an animal is ready to be released?
- Why is the work you do important?

Understanding wildness vs domesticity

- What do your carnivorous or omnivorous animals eat?
 - Where do you source the meat/fish from?

- Can you tell me about the wildlife that aren't in your care, but that frequent the facility?
- Are all animals eventually released?
 - Why might an animal not be released?

Social Media

- Do you follow your organization's social media? Which platforms?
- Have you ever been given instructions or guidelines for posting wildlife rehab on your social media?