

## **Release Criteria**

**Category : General Wildlife Info**

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A good rehabilitator agonizes over the following release criteria. You should be losing sleep like the rest of us, if you haven't met each of the requirements. If you answer no to any of the following (with the exception of appropriateness for species), you should seriously reconsider your decision to release.

Is it cautious of all humans and pets? (Death is imminent if it approaches either out of desperation or hunger)

Is it in 100% physical condition (no handicaps or missing limbs) or has fully compensated for it's "imperfections"? (completely recovered from any infections, and is parasite and mite free)

Has it been acclimated outdoors for at least two weeks?

Has it been reared and socialized with others of it's species? (Improper socialization will result in rejection, or attacks from members of it's own species.)

Is it familiar with the release site? (Soft releases: animal has been housed in the area which it will be released. Can return to cage for protection and food if necessary. Is familiar with the day and evening activity of other wildlife in the area.)

Has it been provided the proper diet with necessary supplements (protein, carbos, fat)? (Improper ratios of calcium:phosphorus can result in fractures following release) (If it's body can't sustain the imminent bumps, falls and collisions that occur during the first week of release, it won't survive)

More importantly, do you know what the proper ratios of protein, carbohydrates, fat, calcium:phosphorus are for that species? (shame on you)

Has it had access to it's natural foods and learned how to forage during captivity? (there are no rodent blox or Esbilac in the wild; does your opossum know to look under rotten logs for bugs?)

Is it familiar with natural substances and occurrences it will find after release? (will release be the first time it experiences blowing leaves, rain, etc.?) (Do your squirrels know that not all branches will hold their weight and could snap out from underneath them?)

Is the release environment appropriate to the species?

Have you evaluated the release site for possible overpopulation of same species or high predator or roaming domestic pet activity?

(What are the animal's chances that it will be chased out of area by it's own species or attacked by a cat; are there large numbers of birds of prey?)

Is the time of release appropriate to the species? (bunnies: pre-dusk; herons: just before high tide; opossums: evenings when alert; squirrels: mid-afternoon; songbirds: when their wild counterpart species are most active)

Will a backup food source be available for an extended period of time?

Is it familiar with the materials and sites it should seek for shelter and protection in the wild? (will your bunny run out in the open, or under brush when frightened? Are you providing additional nesting boxes for squirrels at the release site? )

Does it know not to stay out in the open? (was it given adequate covered areas in cage to hide?)

Are the weather conditions favorable for at least 5 days? (no rain, high winds or temperature extremes)

Is the community receptive to that species? (releasing domestic ducks on a community lake without permission is a problem waiting to happen)

Is the animal mature and cautious enough for release? (not all animals emotionally mature at the same rate; being "brave and outgoing" is a characteristic that immature juveniles have which will inevitably put them in a dangerous situation)

Are you releasing it because the animal is ready? (or because you want to go on vacation, have guests coming, are burnt out, etc....What makes it ready now that didn't apply before?)

Has it had an opportunity to hear the distress calls of it's own and other species? (or will it be the only one still sitting around when everyone else runs for cover?)

When appropriate, release orphans with an adult of same species.

When appropriate, release in small groups.

## BIRDS

Have migratory birds had access to view overhead sky and stars?

Has it had at least two weeks of flight practice?

Is it waterproofed?

Are birds of the same species in the area?

Will it be accepted by it's own species? (male cardinals, mockingbirds, crows, etc., may be chased out of the area by the resident bird or flock) (swans view an unfamiliar swan as an interloper) (crows, swans, pigeons, etc, should be released in groups)