



## RIDEAU VALLEY WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

### Foster Program

While it is not legal for the general public to care for wildlife, the Rideau Valley Wildlife Sanctuary (RVWS) can foster animals once they are healthy. RVWS is responsible for the actions of foster caregivers – fosters work under and must follow the conditions of our wildlife rehabilitation licence.

Fosters care for wildlife in their own home as we do at the center. RVWS provides training, ongoing support and supervision, as well as formula and all caging. We welcome donations to cover the cost of formula, and ask that foster volunteers provide solid foods (e.g. rodent block, fruit, vegetables), food dishes and bedding.

Depending on the age of the animal, the commitment varies from 2 to 10 weeks, with 1 to 7 formula feedings per day. Once experienced, it takes about five minutes to formula feed one animal. The number of animals in a litter ranges from one to five. Animals must be housed in cages in a warm, quiet room not used by the household and away from pets. Most of the animal care occurs between April and October.

Once squirrels are weaned (about eight weeks of age), they are either returned to RVWS for release or, if you have an appropriate release site, moved to an outdoor cage in your backyard for a minimum of two weeks to acclimatize to the environment. During this time, animals are fed solid foods and water daily. Release simply involves letting the animals go and putting their nesting box at least 10 feet high in a tree in your backyard. Most animals will start building their own nest right away, but some might use the nesting box for several weeks or as a back-up nest. During release, we ask that fosters scatter food daily until the animals are no longer dependent (e.g. several weeks).

Fostering wildlife can be a very rewarding experience, but it is also a serious commitment. Wildlife require regular feedings and cleaning. It is also our job as rehabilitators to “keep the wild in wildlife” so handling and human interaction must be kept to a minimum during feeding and cleaning only (e.g. no visits by family or friends), with handling limited to one or two members of the household. Handling is prohibited once animals are weaned. Although this may seem harsh, we cannot ethically or legally release tamed wildlife who have lost their natural fear of predators (including humans), as they become nuisance animals, can harm people or pets, or meet an untimely end.

Minimum requirements for fostering are:

- minimum 19 years of age
- an up-to-date tetanus vaccine
- if working with raccoons or skunks, an up-to-date rabies vaccine\*\*
- a separate room in the house that is not used by pets or members of the household (for wildlife on formula feedings)
- agreement to follow the Ministry of Natural Resources licence conditions
- agreement to allow the Ministry of Natural Resources to inspect the wildlife room in your house if requested to do so

Minimum requirements for releasing are:

- for squirrels, an appropriate tree in your backyard (deciduous for grey squirrels, conifer for red squirrels), without an existing squirrel nest, to install a nesting box
- native animals of that species in the area
- appropriate habitat, not close to busy roads

#### \*\* Rabies Vaccine Information

If you would like to handle raccoons, skunks or foxes (rabies-vector species), you need to provide proof of rabies pre-exposure vaccination. The rabies pre-exposure vaccine is a series of three injections given in your arm over the course of one month. You can obtain a prescription and get your injections from your family doctor, and order the vaccine from any pharmacy. Most health plans cover such vaccinations. If not, the cost is about \$800. To check if your health plan covers the vaccine, you will need the following Drug Identification Numbers: RabAvert (DIN 02267667) or Imovax (DIN 01908286). If you have had the rabies vaccine in the past, you need to provide proof of your titre levels (blood test for levels of antibodies) every two years.