

Captive Wildlife Welfare Rights: THE SIX ESSENTIALS

All native and migratory wildlife legally kept in long-term captivity deserve their Physical, Mental, and Behavioural Welfare, and ethically stewarded Quality of Life, to be ensured at all times by the humans responsible for animal care.

This document was drafted with references to The Five Freedoms and in consideration of the establishment of The Raptor Sanctuary at Belize Bird Rescue specifically for Belize wildlife, with respect for local conservation legislation and protocols. The Six Essential Rights is a model intended to be an adaptable resource for other institutions, in all situations where Captive Wildlife Welfare is a consideration, be it long-term rehabilitation, permanent sanctuary, or legally-permitted home care.

1. THE ESSENTIAL RIGHT to nutritional, species-appropriate **FOOD** and **WATER** at all times. Diets should be maintained in a way that benefits the animal's needs, not human convenience. Food should be fresh or freshly kept, properly frozen and defrosted, regularly replenished, free of pathogens, and never rotting. Water should be accessible at all times from clean sources for both drinking and grooming needs. *[Reference: "Freedom from hunger and thirst"]*

2. THE ESSENTIAL RIGHT to secure and hygienically maintained **SHELTER** offering *naturally immersive ENRICHMENT* which allows for Comfort, Choice, and Control. *Naturally immersive* means an ability to access sun or shade when desired, rain or simulated misting when desired, bathing water, different types of turf substrate or perches, temperature management options, foraging options, natural foliage, air flow, and more than enough space to move around, dig, fly, or other means of species-specific enrichment. This includes spacious clean enclosures, an ability to hide, separation from predators, protection from inappropriate noise levels or audible stressors, options for species-specific "relaxation" and "play" that supports long-term or permanent care needs as sanctuary residents, versus short-term rehabilitative care aiming for prompt release. Environments and enclosures should be monitored and attended to with regular and consistent cleaning and repair. *[Reference: "Freedom from discomfort"]*

THE THREE C's

Comfort = proper stewardship by the humans responsible for quality of care and animal *comfort*

Choice = providing animals access to a range of options creating *choice* within enclosure at all times

Control = ability to engage environment enrichment, and predictably *control* stimuli with animal agency

3. THE ESSENTIAL RIGHT to as-needed **MEDICAL ATTENTION** and long term healthful care needs for ongoing welfare, including access to medications, supplements, surgeries, and rehabilitation. If an animal is displaying obvious signs of distress, they should receive necessary diagnostics and treatment. If any animal is not showing obvious signs of distress but is demonstrating questionable quality of life, this should be promptly investigated to alleviate any physical or mental pain they may be in, but not displaying in ways easily gauged. *This includes a right to euthanasia, when it is the right decision for the animal, regardless of human, organizational or political motivations.* Chronic pain is often an underassessed issue in long-term captivity that should be regularly reviewed through established ongoing monitoring protocols as a potential source of behavioural distress; while permanent disability and some medically manageable chronic conditions are still potentially appropriate sanctuary cases, no animal should ever be in a permanent state of mental or physical distress, pain, or discomfort.

[Reference: "Freedom from pain, injury and disease"]

4. THE ESSENTIAL RIGHT to be living in a state of sanctuary that supports all environmental and species-specific desires to sentiently engage in and **EXHIBIT NATURAL BEHAVIOURS**. This includes appropriate placement in adequately sized enclosures either in solitude or in company/packs/flocks with other animals, as per their species-driven and individual needs as assessed during rehabilitative and/or sanctuary care, including a minimum of yearly reassessment of physical and behavioural quality of life. Enrichment that illicitly natural instincts including foraging and bathing options should be consistently made available. Hormonal influences on behavioural needs should always be taken into consideration rather than dismissed as insignificant (such as migration, breeding seasons, and age cycles). No wild species permanent sanctuary animal should be tethered, hooded, declawed, forcibly bred, clipped, defeathered, or any other practices that detrimentally impact or limit natural behaviours, other than temporary restraint measures for medical procedures.

[Reference: "Freedom to express natural behaviour"]

5. THE ESSENTIAL RIGHT to a state of welfare not only being defined by physical well-being, but holistic **MENTAL WELLBEING** free from psychological or behaviour distress (signs of which include displays of auto-mutilation, lethargy, hypervigilance, chronic stress, or boredom). All wild species deserve the right to develop and/or rehabilitate their mental welfare, just as much as physical welfare, which includes dehabitation from enforced human socialization or imprinting behaviours, and allowed the opportunity for long-trajectory recovery (through proper environment, enrichment, physical space, and time with minimal human interference). Human contact as means of compassionate stress management is only applicable when wildlife has been non-reversibly imprinted through previous inappropriate human interaction, and which do not display conspecific socialization traits. Additionally: enclosures should be consciously arranged with appropriate spacing, distancing from stressful sounds, and/or visual barriers between naturally predating species, wherein proximity could result in conflict or distress. Mental health welfare should be assessed as frequently as physical health, and alternative approaches to care should be considered as needed. *[Reference "Freedom from fear and distress"]*

6. THE ESSENTIAL RIGHT to be treated with **DIGNITY** as a *wild animal*. Permanent sanctuary wildlife animals are not pets and must never be anthropomorphized, nor forcibly trained; animal welfare conscious conservation should always prioritize dignity as an essential moral prerogative. No permanent sanctuary animal should be subject to *any unnecessary handling or coercive training* by their caretakers, and should never be on display, nor handled, directly interacted with, nor disturbed from sanctuary experience by the general public. Sanctuary animals not seeking human attention should be afforded respectful stress-free spaciousness and agency, though minimal provisions for building comfort with long-term caretakers especially for ease in exams or required grooming procedures, as well as management of imprinted or human-bonded wildlife, is understandable when approached judiciously. Professional access of sanctuary facilities should only be permitted for other rehabilitators, veterinary experts, or associated wildlife personnel, and never offered as a "tour" or "tourist attraction" for human-benefit only. This includes all forms of exploitative entertainment, interactive "animal ambassador" encounters, and "live shows" whether ticketed or donation based, whether advertised as consumerist

activity or environmental education, or which require tactics of coercive training of wildlife in order to elicit specific income generating scenarios through advantageous use of any animal. [*"Let wild be wild!"*]

Providing sanctuary to wildlife through conscious stewardship practices and ethical conservation efforts is an opportunity and a gift, one which should not be taken for granted nor used towards human interests, personal, financial, or political gain. Animals kept in captivity should be afforded a life of Comfort, Choice, Control, and DIGNITY free from unnecessary human disturbances and with regular assessments for overall welfare state.

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THE SIX ESSENTIAL RIGHTS of BELIZE CAPTIVE WILDLIFE

summarized from the *Captive Wildlife Welfare Rights*

All Belize wildlife legally kept in long term captivity, whether a non-releasable sanctuary species, or a Belize-native parrot species permitted for home care by the Forest Department, deserve their Physical, Mental, and Behavioural Welfare, and ethically stewarded Quality of Life, to be ensured at all times.

Welfare Rights can be summarized by these SIX ESSENTIALS:

All wildlife kept in captivity have the ESSENTIAL RIGHT to...

1. Food & Water

2. Shelter & Enrichment

*Remember the Three C's for Animal Agency:
Comfort, Choice, & Control*

3. Medical Attention & Consistent Care

4. Freedom to Exhibit Natural Behaviours

5. Holistic Mental Health

6. To Be Treated with Dignity, Always and in All Ways

"Let wild be wild!"