But if you have the choice and you are tempted to try to keep any wild animal, ask yourself these questions: What is this animal's future? Can you maintain it comfortably? Where does it come from and can it go back successfully? What will be its quality of life?

There is no adequate record of the numbers of animals that have been adapted to the wild after being in captivity. It is cruel for your shelter to guess that somehow the little raccoon or skunk or bird in your hands now will be able to find food and shelter and defend itself in its natural setting after it has become accustomed to your care.

Also, does your shelter staff have hours to spare on a painstaking reintroduction program? It is not fair to ask shelter workers to invest a great deal of time and emotion in a project with a doubtful result.

The slim chance for successful reintroduction to the wild is further eroded by the stress on the animal of being cared for in an artificial way. Animals have specific requirements for proper diet and physical comfort without stress. Shelters set up for the care of dogs and cats may not be able to meet these requirements.

For example, browsing animals have a specific feeding pattern of walking and eating. A shelter would most likely have to keep browsers in a pen and feed them once a day, which is not the schedule their digestive systems are designed for.

Snakes and reptiles have special requirements for comfort and security. They have a narrow range of acceptable temperatures, and they can escape from nearly any container devised by shelter staff. Providing appropriate foods and maintaining body temperatures so the animal will eat is a problem for any facility not specializing in snake care.

Investigative photography

by Frantz Dantzler

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Photo showing size reference and identification (this photo was used in a precedent-setting case for Virginia's "kaster chick" law).

(Newcomers to photography are often disappointed with the results of their picture-taking efforts because they forget that the camera does not "see" things as they do.

Consider for a moment the vast difference between the function of your eyes and that of the camera. Your eyes always select and center on objects that attract you, and this is done so quickly and automatically that you rarely give it any thought. Other objects in your field of view are out of focus and do not distract from the object you are concentrating on at that moment.

The camera, however, sees everything and does not "select" objects automatically. This makes it necessary to get closer to your subject than you normally would to eliminate those subjects that distract from the central point of interest.

With a little practice, you can learn to "see" with the camera's viewfinder, taking notice of everything it takes in. Soon, you will be able to isolate subjects with the camera, just as you do with your eyes. To exclude scenery and other distractions in the photo, blur the background by making the camera lens opening larger (a setting of 5.6 or larger).

Just remember: what you see is not always what the camera sees.

When photographing for evidence, it is a good idea to include a highly legible written document in the picture showing the date and time of the photo, the case identification number, the name of the investigator and any other pertinent information. The identification is especially important when the animal involved may be impounded or otherwise removed from the scene.

Sometimes it is helpful also to include yourself or an associate in the photo to verify that you were indeed present and saw the conditions the animals were subjected to at the time. You should also consider the need for size references.
in close-ups -- a yardstick or a person's hand can help show, for example, the size of a wound on an animal.

Be sure that you do not distort the scene, however. Don't try to recreate cruelty scenes, either, and make sure your negatives are protected from tampering. Make sure that your film is never cut.

If you use black and white film, always request a "proof sheet" or "contact sheet" from the processor. A proof sheet is inexpensive and will enable you to see all your photos printed on one sheet of paper so you can determine those suitable for printing.

Before making the decision, however, review the photos with the prosecuting attorney. This gives the attorney an opportunity to see which aspects of the case are strong as far as photographs are concerned and also helps point out the weaker aspects that did not photograph as well. You then pay to print only the photos you use.

Remember that the more photographs you take on the scene, the better your selection will be when it's time to prepare for court.

When you have a choice, always have 8" x 10" prints made for courtroom use. Any additional cost for the larger prints is negligible when you consider the overall investment you make in your investigation.

The larger prints will set you apart from amateurish, less efficient investigators in the minds of a jury or judge. They help increase your credibility in a setting where the burden of proving cruelty is on you!

Finally, if you are presenting several photos, take the time to prepare a sketch showing the overall view of the property and the areas the photos cover. Show the location and direction of the camera at the time the photos were taken. When you testify, explain the setting and how you took the photos, and give specific details.

With a little practice and patience, you can take good investigative photographs that will help the jury and judge toward full understanding of what happened. This, in turn, will secure more cruelty convictions and help the cause of animal protection.

"Contact sheet" or "proof sheet."