

**National Wildlife Rehabilitation Conference
Darwin, NT 28th August – 1st September 2006**

Conservation, Conflict & Rehabilitation - Perspectives from India

**Dr Anand Ramanathan BVSc, MSc.
Emergency Relief Manager,
Animals In Crisis & Distress,
International Fund for Animal Welfare,**

**1350, Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 1220,
Washington, DC 20036.**

Mobile: +1-508-364-6802

Tel: +1-202-296-3860 Ext - 12 ~ Fax: +1-202-296-3802

Email: ranand@ifaw.org ~ Website: www.ifaw.org

Abstract

Wildlife rehabilitation is gaining importance as a conservation and animal welfare prerogative, around the world, India being a case in point. This discipline is fast becoming a part of the new paradigm in wildlife conservation. Its value as an additional tool to maintain population viability and genetic diversity is gaining ground. Since the new millennium, IFAW and its partner organization in India - Wildlife Trust of India have helped increase the profile of this field by setting up specialist rehabilitation centers, mobile wildlife rescue units and a rehabilitation network across India. Endangered and threatened species of wildlife are being rehabilitated with the participation of government agencies and the support of the conservation community in India. New legislation incorporating wildlife rehabilitation has helped legitimize the operation of such facilities while also enabling wildlife agencies to police the development and management of such facilities.

As in many developing countries, wildlife rehabilitation in India is also accompanied by the same controversial issues which are still being experienced and deliberated in the developed world. But some broad differences exist in the practice of the discipline and how it is perceived in the Indian political and cultural context. Whilst rehab programs receiving animals because they are sick, injured, or orphaned is becoming more common in urban areas, rehab centers in sylvatic areas frequently care for animals also rescued because of human-animal conflict, displaced due to natural disasters, and or confiscated pets from illegal confinement. Often, reasons for rehabilitation can also be influenced by political priorities especially when human-animal conflict escalates. This places increased demands on rehab programs in addition to aspects like cultural attitudes towards certain species and sometimes misplaced animal welfare concerns.

Whilst we are trying to measure success by monitoring the survival of rehabilitated animals, a welcome change in peoples' attitudes has helped support field rehab programs. The future of these programs clearly lies in building increased capacity and establishing

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standards and protocols for rehabilitation of endangered Indian species, and consequently demonstrating conservation success.

This presentation attempts to offer a perspective on wildlife rehabilitation in India, chronicle the developments in recent years, talk about the various issues confronted in the field and discuss the future needs for making rehabilitation a conservation discipline in India.