



UNIVERSITY OF  
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EXTENSION

Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

## Wildlife Relocation<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

Evidence of Florida's rapid growth is everywhere. New buildings, new roads, and more people are all appearing, often at the expense of our rich biological heritage. As we lose native plant communities to development, we are also losing wildlife habitat. As the human population increases, we are also experiencing an increase in the number of interactions with wildlife in and near developed areas.

These interactions range from minor nuisances such as overturned garbage cans, to threats to the health and safety of both humans and wildlife. The typical solution to these problems has been to relocate the animals. After the animals are relocated, there is an illusion that problems have been solved because the animals have been "saved" from the bulldozer's path or removed from sight of the offended public. In reality, relocating animals often causes more problems than solving them, and ultimately, wildlife relocation is not a solution to the problems of wildlife habitat loss.

### Problems With Relocating Wildlife

The relocation of wildlife for any reason is usually detrimental for the following reasons. First, animals may be stressed during relocation efforts,

primarily from capture, handling, and transport. Second, many wildlife species carry a variety of diseases and parasites. This situation can be particularly prevalent in urban areas where wildlife may be stressed from overcrowding and also in frequent contact with domestic animals that can be carriers of diseases for which wild animals have little resistance. The relocation of urban wildlife to more natural areas can result in the spread of diseases to areas which were previously free of diseases. Third, placing relocated animals into an environment that is already at carrying capacity (saturated with resident animals) causes increased competition among animals. For example, food may be limiting the population size of some animals and the addition of new animals into an already limited environment may bring about an increased threat of starvation to indigenous populations. Finally the introduction of new animals into areas with territorial residents that already defend areas where they live, feed, or breed, can disrupt the social structure and can lead to increased fighting, death, or injury to resident or relocated animals.

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## Occasions When Wildlife Relocation May Be Advantageous

There are situations when relocating wildlife can be an appropriate measure, or an action of last resort. For example, areas with depleted population of native species, like the Florida panther, may be suitable relocation sites. Today, the loss of natural areas to development (especially wetlands) is frequently mitigated by the creating or enhancement of other habitats. These mitigation habitats also may be suitable for the relocation of certain species. However, the relocation of wildlife should be carefully planned and not done haphazardly. An ecologically sound relocation policy should include the following actions:

1. A detailed assessment of the suitability of a proposed relocation site. This assessment should include a description of habitat condition and an assessment of resident populations, such as density estimates.
2. A detailed description of methods, animals, and expertise involved in the relocation effort.
3. A post-relocation monitoring program to assess the success of the relocation.

## Legal Aspects

All species of wildlife are protected from wanton destruction in Florida, and most require a permit for relocation. Migratory birds and waterfowl are protected by federal and state laws, such as the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Florida Wildlife Code Title 39. Non-migratory birds are protected by state laws. Endangered species, as well as other protected species, are protected from "taking", which includes taking, attempting to take, pursuing, hunting, molesting, capturing, or killing any wildlife or freshwater fish, their nests or eggs, by any means, without a special permit. Contact your local GFC office prior to any relocation efforts.

For more information on wildlife relocation or helping to alleviate the problem of habitat loss by creating a backyard habitat, you can contact:

Wildlife Department-Broward County

3245 College Avenue

Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314