

### **Regarding the Use of Prosthetics in Wildlife Patients**

The goal of wildlife rehabilitation is to release healthy wild animals back into their natural environment where they can forage, reproduce, and behave like normal wild animals of their species. When an animal is admitted into rehabilitation with a catastrophic injury resulting in the loss of a body part, a full evaluation regarding whether the animal can be released back into the wild must be made. If the animal cannot be released, euthanasia should be considered.

The NWRA Veterinary Committee advises against the use of prosthetics in free-ranging wildlife and agrees with the NWRA and IWRC per below.

From Standards for Wildlife Rehabilitation (NWRA & IWRC, 2021)<sup>1</sup>:

“Especially with the advent of 3D printing, the idea of creating prosthetics for captive wildlife is initially attractive. Attempts at leg prosthetics for birds have all resulted in pressure sores, constant need for readjustment as the bone remodels, failure of the prosthetic device, and/or injury to the contralateral limb<sup>2,3,4</sup>. Beak prosthetics for birds have met with similar results—in all cases, use by the bird and growth of the natural beak caused the prosthesis to dislodge, causing discomfort to the bird and requiring frequent replacements<sup>5,6,7,8</sup>. In addition, prosthetic beaks were not able to function like natural beaks (they cannot generate the force required for natural food prehension), so dietary modifications were needed<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, as with humans, most animals appeared to be more comfortable without the prosthetic<sup>7</sup>. For these reasons, the use of prosthetics in captive wildlife is discouraged, and the use for animals being returned to the wild is inappropriate.”

Further, predators that prey on animals with prosthetics may ingest these objects resulting in a foreign body which could lead to the death of the predator. Whether the animal is preyed upon or not, upon the animal’s death a prosthetic implant could result in litter in the environment.

### **References**

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#### **Additional Reading**

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