

Running a Sanctuary

1. Why do you want to run a sanctuary?

If the answer is not “for the animals” don’t do it – it won’t last! Others will have to pick up the pieces.

2. What species?

- I suggest minimizing the number of species and specializing rather than taking in many different ones. It’s more efficient and less complicated to concentrate on meeting the needs of a limited number of species.
- Choose animals that are close to your heart and that you have the most knowledge about. Is there a need for more sanctuary care for that animal? Are you ready to devote a lifetime to helping and caring for these animals?
- Develop your knowledge and expertise about the animal. Learn from other people with expertise and relevant published sources. You need a good understanding of the animals’ needs – environmental, dietary, social, and psychological – in order to provide adequate care. You also need to understand and interpret their behaviors, vocalizations and body language to know if you are meeting their needs.
- Be aware of the animals’ vulnerabilities and potential dangers to their well being. For example:
 - Diseases transmitted between species can be deadly! Some examples from our experience with New World primates...
 - Squirrel monkeys carry a virus that is fatal to marmosets.
 - Toxoplasmosis, which is often present in the feces of domestic cats, can kill a squirrel monkey.
 - Housing incompatible species, such as predator and prey animals, in close proximity creates a stressful environment for both species.

3. What is your purpose? Your values and philosophies?

- Write a Mission Statement. This should be one paragraph that succinctly states your organization’s reason for existing and how you address that purpose, and it should reflect your sanctuary’s central values. A good mission statement takes a lot of thought!
- Define the philosophies that determine how your sanctuary operates. Again, this will take a lot of thought.

You will find that different sanctuaries, as well as individual animal advocates,

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have varying ideas about how to best serve the interests of the animals. Talk to others, consider different points of view, listen to your heart and decide what you believe is the best way to serve the animals in your care.

Here are some examples of areas you should consider where philosophies differ:

- **Euthanasia?** Would you consider euthanizing an animal, and if so when? Do you believe suffering or terminally ill animals should be euthanized, or would you provide hospice care? Would you euthanize elderly or ill animals if necessary to free resources to help younger, healthier animals in desperate need?
- **Provide what the animal is used to – or strictly natural?** When taking in non-pet species who were raised as ‘pets’ in a human household, would you provide them with the unnatural “comforts” they are accustomed to (such as blankets, toys, TV, human food/treats), or put them directly into a non-humanized environment appropriate to their species, or transition from one to the other over time? How will you make the decision or draw the line?
- **What kind of groups?** How will animals be arranged in social groupings, and how should new animals be introduced? Will you take in fewer animals, keep smaller groups, or will you form larger groups, take in more animals? Should you socialize new animals into groups slowly and with supervision, or all at once? Will you break up fights or change groupings to seek the greatest compatibility, or let the animals work it out for themselves?
- **Human intervention and contact – or back to the wild?** Will you provide individual care to the animals, or simply provide a protected environment and let them live “wild and natural.” Should you interact with the animals, call them by name, give them human attention – or restrict human contact so the animals live in the way that is natural to their species? Will you provide veterinary care for major injury or illness? Minor injury or illness?
- **How should the animals be housed?** Will you strive to provide the most comfortable, most enriching habitats possible? What concessions will you make for ease of cleaning, repair, efficiency, in order to house more animals?

For your own sanctuary, you must make the decisions and follow the philosophies that you believe in. But remember, even though other sanctuaries and animal advocates may have very different philosophies, we are all here for the animals and must all be proactive in working together to help the animals.

4. Where should you build your sanctuary?

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Location, location, location! It doesn't just apply to real estate.

Here are some considerations for choosing a location for your sanctuary:

- Where do the animals that you will care for come from?
- Choose a location that will enhance the animals' lives and not be difficult for them, e.g. rainforest animals thrive in hot humid climates. Don't start a primate sanctuary in Fargo, North Dakota!
- Buy as much land as possible in an area that allows for sanctuaries (e.g, zoned for agriculture) and as far away from civilization as you can get without jeopardizing vet care or other services needed for the animals or emergencies.
- Find out if your species are legal in your area. For example, California and Kentucky have primate bans. And even if the species is legal in your state, they may be illegal or regulated at the county or city level. Know the regulations in your location.
- What, if any, permits do you need in your locations? For example, Fish and Wildlife (state); special use permit (county or city zoning or building agency) USDA (Federal). If you are non-profit, you may need to be registered with the state as well as federal government – and you will also want to get an exemption from paying state sales tax. Note: in the US, a USDA license is required if you are exposing the public to exotic animals. “The Public” is considered everyone that isn't a paid employee—so if you have volunteers, you must have a USDA exhibitor's license.

5. How will you pay for your sanctuary?

If you are independently wealthy or have a rich uncle...great! Your sanctuary can be privately operated. If not, and you are searching for donations, you will need to become a non profit 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. The process of gaining non-profit status from the IRS is complicated; consider hiring an attorney (which can be costly), or do thorough research to understand how to qualify and how to apply.

How do you raise money?

- Start by writing or emailing everyone you know: friends, relatives, co-workers, doctors, dentist – *everyone* – letting them know that you are founding a sanctuary. Include...
 - **Why your sanctuary is needed.** Explain the problem and why a sanctuary is needed for your chosen species. If your species cannot be adopted out or released in the wild, explain *why* they need permanent sanctuary care.
 - **How you will meet the need.** Acquire land, build habitats and enclosures, provide care and enrichment, educate the public, etc.

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- **Ask for money!** This is hard for most people, but don't wait for them to offer – you have to ask!
- **Follow up!** Let them know that you will get back to them in a few days – and do it!
- **Thank people for donations!** Send a thank-you ASAP for every donation – and at the same time ask for more money.
- Remember that your donors are your best friends! Treat them that way; thank them, invite them to visit, send them a holiday card, etc.
- Ask your donors, volunteers and supporters (and everyone you know!) to spread the word to their friends, family, co-workers.
- Have something to give to people (cards, brochures, newsletter, DVD, etc.). Be sure to include contact information, website address, and how to donate.
- Your website is an essential tool: It should be easy to navigate, easy to make a donation (online donations AND information to mail or fax donations); informative and relevant, fun and exciting to look at; and frequently updated (e.g., with newsletters or updates on animals or campaigns).
- Emailing is an inexpensive and effective way to keep in touch with your supporters. Be sure to email interesting and appealing stories and not just pleas for money. But of course, don't forget to ask for donations!
- Mailings are costly and may not produce short-term results. If you are going to do mailings be sure to get a quality, appropriately targeted mailing list – and realize you may need to fund an ongoing mailing campaign for some time before you see a profit.
- Grants are few and far between. Most foundations that award grants have specific areas of interest – e.g., not “animals” but “spay and neuter programs” or “preserving indigenous wildlife environments.” If you want to apply for grants, do your homework to identify appropriate foundations, and adhere to their application procedures and deadlines. If you find a foundation that will support your cause it can be a tremendous asset – but realize you will likely get many more rejections than checks in the mail.

6. How do I run a sanctuary?

- Rule #1: the animals come first! Structure your operations around the animals' needs.
- Learn from those who are already doing it – and the best way is hands-on experience.

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- Intern or volunteer at other sanctuaries – work at as many as possible, and for as long as possible. Not only will you learn a lot, you will build invaluable relationships in the sanctuary community. *And* you'll see for yourself if you are really willing to commit yourself to the sanctuary lifestyle – the time to find this out is *before* you have a sanctuary full of animals depending on only you.
- Network with other sanctuaries and ask for advice and information. Be willing to help other sanctuaries when they are in need – next time it might be your sanctuary in trouble.
- **Write a procedures manual.** This will help *you* define the procedures and processes to care for the animals and run your organization (everything from how to clean a habitat to how to do a load of laundry; from data entry to website maintenance.) And, it will be an invaluable tool for training volunteers and staff. Your procedures manual will be an ongoing work-in-process as you grow, learn from experience and others, and discover better ways to do the job -- but don't let that stop you from putting in writing what you know right now. For examples to help you get started, ask other sanctuaries for their procedures manuals. (You can get Jungle Friends' at <http://www.junglefriends.org/proceduresmanual.pdf>)
- Set specific concrete goals; do what is in front of you, one step at a time. Don't let the "big picture" overwhelm you – do what you need to do and are able to do TODAY, whether it's rescue one animal, build one habitat, or send one fundraising email (to lots of people ☺). And don't forget to ask others to help you!