



Wildlife cannot be kept as pets under most circumstances. Here's what you need to know.

# Can I Keep It?

**Q: Do I need a special permit to keep wildlife as pets?**

**A:** Many Illinois residents encounter young wildlife they'd like to keep as pets. It's an ages-old temptation. The trouble is, nearly all wildlife in Illinois is protected under the Wildlife Code (Section 2.2) and cannot be held in captivity without authorization from the appropriate agencies. Additionally, some wildlife host diseases transmissible to humans, making such "pets" risky companions. (Don't ask your local veterinarian to vaccinate that baby raccoon or squirrel you've decided to keep as a pet, since doing so is against the law.)

Exception: Licensed wildlife rehabilitators are one of the few individuals authorized to keep wildlife in captivity in Illinois. Anyone encountering injured or orphaned wildlife can locate the nearest wildlife rehabilitator on the Web at: <http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/wildlife/>

**No childhood would be complete without catching a toad. It's perfectly legal to do so in your backyard.**



injured.cfm. Remember that, in many cases, "orphaned" wildlife, such as baby owls and deer fawns, aren't lost or abandoned at all—the parent of the wildlife is usually hiding nearby, waiting for you to leave the area so they can continue caring for their young.

But what about other creatures, such as frogs, snakes and lizards? Is it legal to keep a box turtle found in the backyard? As a general rule, reptiles and amphibians—classified as aquatic life—may be kept as pets only if they were collected on private property (with landowner permission). None can be collected on public lands (such as state parks, national forests, etc.), and the possession limit for such aquatic life is 16 per species. No threatened or endangered species may be kept, and the "pets" cannot be offered for sale—nor can their offspring be offered for sale. While it's perfectly legal for a child to collect a frog in the back yard and show it off around the

**Collecting wildlife for pets is a ritual of youth. Yet such collections—specifically on public lands—are often prohibited.**

neighborhood, once that child is old enough to require a sport fishing license (16 years of age and older, unless otherwise exempt), the teenager will need to have a valid Illinois sportfishing license or sportsman's license to legally possess their prizes.

Other examples lead to additional rules. Interested in starting a mounted insect collection? Insects such as butterflies or fireflies cannot be collected on public lands. Protected species (such as the endangered Swamp Metalmark butterfly) cannot be collected anywhere without a scientific collection permit.

As a safe, general rule, do not collect any wildlife unless you've got a license to do so.

