

Teacher Page

How to Run the Activity:

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. Cut & Sort the Clues

- Cut apart all the printed hints.
- Give students a copy of the patient page & culprit page
- Keep the different hint sets separated into piles (Hint #1, Hint #2).
- Place each set into labeled envelopes or containers for easy distribution.

2. Distribute Hint #1

- Fold up the Hint #1 slips and place them in a container or envelope.
- Each student (or group) draws one hint at random — no peeking!
- This is their mystery patient, their task is to figure out what species they have.

3. Let the Guessing Begin!

- Give students 5 minutes to read and think about their clue.
- **If needed** allow students to ask yes or no questions to the teacher to get more clues. (e.g., “Is my animal small?” “Does it have feathers?”)
- Encourage them to think like wildlife detectives!

4. Make a First Guess

- After 5 minutes, students write or share their guess about what animal they have.

5. Add a Challenge (Optional)

- **Don't immediately tell students if their guesses are correct.**
- Only confirm once all students have correctly identified their animals.
- Avoid pointing out which specific answers are right or wrong. Instead, give a general hint like: “Something's not quite right...” or “Two of the guesses still need a little more thinking.”
- Encourage students to compare clues, talk to each other, and work together to figure it out.

Teacher Page

6. Continue the Mystery!

- Once students have made their first guesses, it's time to deepen the investigation with Hint #2 (Treatment Clues).
- Distribute Hint #2 cards, you may decide:
- Let them know that not all clues match their patient — now they must collaborate and compare clues.
- Encourage students to share what they know and work together to figure out which treatment clue matches which patient.

7. Guess the Culprit!

Now that students have all the clues, it's time to identify the cause of each patient's injury or illness—the culprit!

Don't reveal who is right or wrong right away. (Optional)

- Encourage students to keep discussing and comparing clues.
- Only confirm the answers once everyone has correctly matched all the patients with their culprits.

8. Release or Recovery?

* Optional discussion: After students have identified their patients and guessed the culprit, have them brainstorm and decide whether each patient was released back into the wild or needed more care.

- Encourage students to think about the severity of the injuries or illness.

Ask:

- Could this animal survive and thrive on its own now?
- What factors might affect the decision to release or keep caring for them?
- How do wildlife rehabilitators decide when an animal is ready to go home?

Answers/Release Scenarios

Read-Aloud Release Scenarios:

1. The Deer Mouse was very lucky! Their injuries healed quickly without any infection. House cats can be very dangerous to birds and small animals because their mouths carry bacteria and germs. Sadly, many animals caught by cats don't survive, so this little mouse's recovery is extra special.
2. This Gopher Snake was able to return safely to its home! WildCare sees tangled snakes like this every year. It's much better to use animal-friendly netting to help keep wildlife safe and free from harm.
3. The Gray Fox was released!
4. When the Red-Tailed Hawk was ready to be released, it started following and bothering people. This means it was imprinted—it sees humans more like its own family instead of other hawks. Because of this, the hawk couldn't be released back into the wild. Now, it lives at a hospital similar to WildCare, where it gets care and a safe home. Young raptors like hawks, eagles, and owls can easily become imprinted. To help them survive in the wild, animal experts have to care for them very carefully from a young age.
5. The California Towhee was released! Glue traps are cruel and catch many different kinds of animals. Before this towhee went home, WildCare talked to the finder to ensure all glue traps had been removed.
6. The Anna's Hummingbird was released! These fake spider webs are really bad news for nature and wildlife. Birds and insects can get easily tangled in the plastic strands, which can hurt them. Help spread the word about how dangerous this kind of decor can be!
7. The Bobcat was released! Scientists have found that 80–90% of big predators like bobcats, mountain lions, and coyotes have been exposed to rat poison. If you love these amazing animals, help keep them safe by telling others how dangerous rodenticides can be!

Answers: for Hint #1

1. Deer Mouse
2. Gopher Snake
3. Gray Fox
4. Red Tailed Hawk
5. California Towhee
6. Anna's Hummingbird
7. Bobcat

Answers: for Hint #2 + Culprits

1. Anna's Hummingbird-Fake spider webs
2. Bobcat-Rat Poison
3. Gopher Snake-Garden netting
4. Red Tailed Hawk-Human imprinting
5. Gray Fox-Soccer Net
6. California Towhee-Glue Trap
7. Deer Mouse-Caught by cat



Patients



Bobcat



California Towhee



Gopher Snake



Red-Tailed Hawk



Deer Mouse



Grey Fox



Anna's Hummingbird



Get ready to solve some wild mysteries!

You won't be investigating the usual crimes from books or TV—instead, you'll step into the shoes of a wildlife detective to uncover what happened to real animal patients treated at WildCare.

Each "crime scene" is based on an actual case.

Your mission:

- Examine the evidence in order to guess who your patient is!
- Match your animal with the treatment they received at WildCare.
- Guess who your culprit is!
- Guess whether or not your animal was released!

Are you ready to crack the case and help protect wildlife? Let's investigate!



Hints #1

Who is your patient?

1. I am a nocturnal, awake at night. I like to eat a variety of seeds, fungi (mushrooms), fruits, and insects! I am very easy to please, I live in almost every habitat and don't even mind living with humans.

2. I have bold markings on my body. These patterns are a strategy I have to confuse animals and convince them that I am someone else. My performance is pretty clever because this "someone" that I pretend to be is venomous, while I am not!

3. I am awake during the night, dawn, and dusk. During these times I like to hunt, but I also eat a wide variety of things like berries, nuts, and whatever else I can find. I am shy and don't typically stay where humans are. In my family (family in the scientific sense), I am one of the few with semi-retractable claws (claws that can go in and out), and am able to climb trees. Coyotes are my cousins!

4. I am one of the largest of my kind. My beautiful, piercing cry—often used in Hollywood westerns to replace the sound of an eagle—rarely earns me the credit I deserve. I prefer to perch in tall, high places where I can survey everything below. My eyesight is incredible! When the moment is right, I strike with my powerful feet to capture my prey.

5. People see me often, but don't think much of me. I don't have bright colors on my feathers like others of my kind, but the sounds I make are bright and cheerful. Typically you will see me foraging for food on the ground, one of my favorite foods is poison oak berries!

6. You've probably seen me before—most people think I'm cute and friendly because I'm small. But don't be fooled! I'm actually very territorial and get into plenty of arguments with my neighbors. I have to defend my space—survival takes serious effort! Because I fly so fast, I use a lot of energy. I need to eat every 10–15 minutes. If I go even an hour without food, it could be the end of me.

7. Most people adore me, though some fear me—thinking I might be dangerous. But the truth is, I'd rather avoid humans altogether! I'm an expert climber, a powerful leaper, and a fast runner. I'm also incredibly stealthy and patient, waiting for just the right moment to pounce on my prey.

WANTED



Rat Poison



Plastic Halloween Spider Webs



Glue Trap



Human



Plastic Garden Netting



Torn Soccer Net



House Cat

Hints #2

This was their treatment at WildCare!

1. When this patient arrived in late October, staff had to act fast! They were exhausted and dangerously hungry. We fed them sugar water with tiny eyedropper and placed them on a heating pad to warm up. Once their belly was full, we took a closer look at their feet. Something had been tightly wrapped around their toes, causing small cuts and wounds. They were given an x-ray and luckily no bones were broken! Their feet were gently cleaned and they were given medicine to prevent their injuries from getting worse.
2. This patient was found resting in someone's backyard — which is unusual, since this wild animal normally avoids people. They seemed weak and didn't try to run away, so they were brought to WildCare for help. When they arrived, they had a severe skin infection caused by small animals called mites. Usually, a healthy mammal can fight off these mites, but something was wrong! They ate something that made them sick. We gave them medicine for the mites, fresh meat to eat, water to drink, and a quiet, safe place to rest and recover.
3. This patient was found tightly wrapped in something, and had what we call constriction injuries — injuries that happen when something wraps too tightly around an animal's body. To help, staff used special scissors to free them. After, they were placed in a warm bath to help them rehydrate. Once their bath was finished, they were moved into a clear container where medical staff waited for the patient's next shed, which would show them how bad their injuries were.
4. This animal was brought to WildCare as a teenager, after it had been cared for by large mammals that weren't their original parents. When this animal arrived at WildCare it was very sick and wouldn't eat. It turns out that they weren't given the right diet or vitamins! It took them a couple weeks before they were strong and healthy again.
5. This animal was brought to WildCare all tangled in something that was large, thick, and tough! They were very dehydrated and needed fluids. After being rehydrated they were given pain medications to help them with their constriction injuries. Over the next two weeks they were given "smoothies" - liquid foods - by hand and also offered a variety of foods like berries, sweet potatoes, squash, rats, mice, and eggs (an omnivorous buffet). Eventually they started eating on their own!
6. This patient needed a special bath in mineral oil as soon as they arrived, something was stuck to their feathers! After their first bath, they were placed in a quiet, safe space to rest and recover. Once they were calm and comfortable, they were offered food and water. Later, they received a second bath — this time with warm water and gentle dish soap — to help get them clean and feel better.
7. This tiny patient was found in someone's backyard full of scratches and puncture wounds (small, but deep holes in the skin) that needed immediate care! The injuries were full of bacteria and could have become very dangerous if left untreated. They were given medicine to help them fight off any infections, their wounds were gently cleaned. After treatment, they were placed in a quiet place to rest and recover.