Your shelter will receive adorable orphaned animals that will tempt you to try rearing them. But these little animals may be internally injured even though they appear sound. They are suffering the shock and stress of being handled by many people in a noisy, unfamiliar situation.

The young mammals should get their mother's milk which is much thinner than cow's milk; and although substitute milks can be purchased for them, even these are not the "real McCoy." Milks too heavy with butterfat can give them dysentery, which can be fatal if prolonged.

And these orphans will not have an opportunity to learn about survival in the wild. They can seldom be reintroduced to their own kind.

The wild animal pet who suddenly bit its owner, or has simply outgrown its cuteness, usually cannot be reintroduced to the wild. Your shelter should set a firm policy against wild animal adoption.

If an animal brought in from the wild has a broken limb or other medical problem that can be treated quickly and the animal released, then the shelter may want to take the time to do this. If the animal is endangered or regulated for some other reason, the fish and game authorities will be available to assist with its disposition. And if you are impounding a wild animal, the guidelines below will help you maintain it.

But unless the animal is received under special circumstances or you are required to keep it for some legal reason, a painless death must be recognized as a humane disposition for it. The chances for smooth and successful recovery from illness, adoption or survival in the wild are slim. The shelter worker must prevent suffering and maintain the quality of life for animals -- not maintain animal life at any cost.

On those occasions when your shelter must deal with a wild animal, keep the philosophy above in mind. Your first step should be to check with the district game warden.

Shelters can encounter as many as 30 species of local mammals and reptiles and 50 species of local birds, plus an occasional "pet" lion or other exotic animal. The game warden can help you identify the animal and tell you if it is endangered or comes under a state or federal regulation.

The exotic, non-native wild animals, such as lions or other big cats, should be turned over to the nearest specialist immediately. Call the zoo or ask the game warden for a reference. In most cases, euthanasia will be specified by the expert. If you must maintain the animal, the specialists can offer some information on care.

From the time the wild animal comes into your shelter, until the time it is disposed of, it should be given warmth, quiet and rest. Treat it like a "patient."

Don't allow it to become a plaything or object of curiosity for visitors or shelter staff; or the shelter "scout" animal. Keep it in an area 70-80 degrees Fahrenheit and draft-free, and give it time to rest before offering food.

In the last issue of SHELTER SENSE, it was reported that the U.S. Department of Agriculture had postponed a plan to hire part-time employees to assist with enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act. (The Act regulates animal dealers, laboratories, zoos, circuses, airlines transporting animals and other commercial operations.)

The hiring plan has now been approved, and USDA is seeking humanely motivated employees with some practical experience in dealing with animal problems. For complete information, contact Dr. Dale Schwidaman, Senior Staff Veterinarian, Animal Care Staff, APHIS-VS, Federal Building, Hyattsville, MD 20782.