

A close-up photograph of a tortoise's head, showing its textured, scaly skin and dark eye. The tortoise is looking slightly upwards and to the right.

AAALAC accreditation of wildlife programs

- Why should wildlife programs participate in the AAALAC accreditation program?
- What types of programs are eligible?
- What standards does AAALAC use?
- What is AAALAC's guidance to institutions who may use wildlife in research or teaching?
- Common IACUC and site visit questions answered
- Dispelling common myths and misperceptions



AAALAC International Accreditation of Wildlife Programs

Programs that use **wildlife** in science and education are eligible to participate in AAALAC International accreditation. Studies that involve observation of wild animals, those caught and placed in captivity or captured and released, or wild animals essential to a program's mission, may be included as an accredited program. The institution must have a process to maintain and ensure appropriate management.

What species does AAALAC accredit?

All animals used or intended for use in science and education at accreditation eligible institutions are to be included and evaluated. This includes traditional research animals, farm animals, **wildlife, and aquatic animals**. Nontraditional animals, inclusive of invertebrate species, are also included where they are relevant to an institution's mission and/or are protected by local regulations.

Why should wildlife programs participate in AAALAC accreditation?

- Ensures **accountability** for appropriate and humane care of free-range animals while using them, and regardless of the species, the expectation is that all animals receive appropriate care and that pain and distress are minimized.
- **Recognizes** the importance of ensuring internationally recognized standards of high-quality **animal welfare**.



- **Demonstrates to the public** an institution's commitment to the highest quality animal care and oversight.
- Improves opportunities for inter- and intra-institutional **collaborations** at national and international levels that may result in sponsored research funding and enhanced networking.
- Gives **credibility** to the institution's program among governmental agencies, for example: US federal agencies (the US Fish and Wildlife Service) and sponsors such as: The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.
- Stimulates continuous **program self-assessment**, benchmarking, and improvement.

What types of research/teaching programs might be accreditation eligible?

- **Disease** surveillance
- **Education** in wildlife management
- **Population** dynamics
- **Invasive species** impacts
- **Aquaculture and food** production systems
- **Zoonotic** disease and human interactions
- **Habitat** loss/reintroduction implications
- **Conservation** research, reproduction, artificial fertilization, and embryo transfer

What standards does AAALAC International use to evaluate wildlife research programs?

AAALAC International recognizes that the legal framework for the use of wild-caught animals in science and education can vary with local, state, national, or international regulations. In countries where regulations or guidelines may not exist regarding acquisition and use of wild-caught animals, or where animal activities are conducted in natural environments, AAALAC International recommends that institutions consider appropriate AAALAC International Reference Resources as baseline references.

Select specific Reference Resources

Wildlife Field Studies

- *Guidelines to the use of Wild Birds in Research, Ornithological Council (2023)*
- *2016 Guidelines of the American Society of Mammalogists for the use of Wild Mammals in Research and Education*

Species Specific Resources

- *Guidelines for the Use of Live Amphibians and Reptiles in Field and Laboratory Research*
- *CCAC Guidelines on the Care and Use of Fish in Research, Teaching, and Testing*
- *Guidelines for the Use of Fishes in Research*

In all cases where the utilization of wild-caught animals is part of the accredited program, any applicable local and international regulations serve as the minimum standard, with guidance from the **Primary Standards** and **Reference Resources** utilized by AAALAC International that supplement these standards.

AAALAC also utilizes the Primary Standards, Position Statements, Guidance Statements, and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) when applicable to lend clarifications and enhance understanding of expectations on particular topics. **The Primary Standards are not utilized for animals in their natural habitat but may have applicability for animals in captivity.**

What is AAALAC International's guidance to institutions who use wildlife in research or teaching?

In situations where the need for non-purpose-bred animals is proposed and the justification for such use is not obvious from the study focus (e.g., research involving wild species), AAALAC International expects that the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee or equivalent Oversight Body (IACUC/OB) will require a thorough and robust justification for the use of non-purpose-bred animals for any breeding or research purposes. Additionally, the IACUC/OB must ensure species-appropriate management of these animals.

What are some common IACUC questions to consider when using wildlife?

- How are permits handled for work with wild animals?
- How are animals captured or marked? How are options for capture or marking evaluated?
- How are potential impacts on local populations considered?
- How are potential impacts on non-target species considered?



- Is there a contingency plan for animals injured during capture/handling?
- What is the final disposition of animals captured from the wild?
- Is there a personnel health risk evaluation?
- Has hazard identification and risk assessment been completed?

Who performs the accreditation site visit?

The site visit team is composed of an AAALAC Council on Accreditation (COA) member and as many Ad Hoc Visitors as needed depending upon the institution's size and research program complexity. To ensure a thorough peer-review, the team members are selected based on the program's animal species and research/teaching activities. As such, for wildlife programs, an **expert in the use of wildlife** in research and teaching would be a member of the site visit team.

How much does accreditation cost?

Organizations seeking and maintaining accreditation are asked to pay a one-time application fee and subsequent annual fees. Both fees are based on a sliding scale that generally correlates with the size of an institution's animal facility. However, for animals used in the field, the accreditation fees of wildlife programs are negotiated on a case-by-case basis. (<https://www.aaalac.org/accreditation-standards/faqs/#G2>)

How does AAALAC ensure confidentiality?

The entire accreditation process is confidential. The accreditation evaluation and its results, even if deficiencies are found, are kept between the organization seeking accreditation and AAALAC International. All AAALAC representatives sign a confidentiality and secrecy agreement and agree to safeguard and treat materials as privileged. AAALAC also complies with the European GDPR.

Photos on pages 2-3 used with permission, Julian Avery, Ph.D.— Penn State University.



Dispelling common myths and misperceptions

Myth: AAALAC International is a regulatory agency.

Fact: AAALAC International is a private, nonprofit organization. The accreditation process is a peer review performance-based process at the invitation of an institution.

Myth: AAALAC International establishes policies and regulations.

Fact: AAALAC International evaluates animal care and use programs based on recommendations in their Three Primary Standards, applicable legislation and other approved references.

Myth: In the U.S., AAALAC International evaluates animal care and use programs that only use animals regulated under the Animal Welfare Act.

Fact: AAALAC International accreditation covers all animals* used or to be used in research, teaching or testing at accredited programs.

*Rules of Accreditation: Definition/Animals - This includes traditional laboratory animals, farm animals, **wildlife, and aquatic** animals. Nontraditional animals, inclusive of invertebrate species, are also included where they are relevant to the program's mission and/or protected by implementing legislation.

Myth: AAALAC International is part of the IACUC or comparable Oversight Body.

Fact: The acronyms associated with animal research can be confusing, but it is important to know that **AAALAC is not linked to the IACUC** (Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee) or any other comparable Oversight Body (OB) such as an Ethics Committee or Animal Welfare Body. The IACUC/OB is charged with oversight of the institution's animal care and use program. As part of the accreditation process, AAALAC evaluates the performance of the IACUC/OB during a site visit to ensure that it is performing well.

Myth: AAALAC International requires Wildlife programs adhere to biomedical animal care and standards.

Fact: AAALAC International recognizes that different species may require specialized care. It is the IACUC/OB's responsibility to ensure species-appropriate management.



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