



Canadian Council on Animal Care  
Conseil canadien de protection des animaux



# CCAC guidelines: Outcomes for animals at the end of scientific activities

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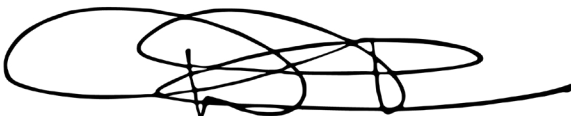
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# Outcomes for animals at the end of scientific activities

## PREFACE

The Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC) is the national peer-review organization responsible for setting, maintaining, and overseeing the implementation of standards for ethical animal care and use in science throughout Canada. CCAC standards are based on professional expertise and current interpretation of scientific evidence.

The *CCAC guidelines: Outcomes for animals at the end of scientific activities* is part of a series of general guidelines documents for the ethics and care of all animals used in scientific activities, including wild animals brought into scientific facilities. General guidelines streamline information for protocol authors, animal care committees, facility managers, veterinarians, technicians, and animal care personnel to help facilitate improvement in both the care given to animals and the manner in which scientific activities are carried out. More specific guidance on the application of this guidelines document for particular species or groups of animals can be found in the CCAC's animal-specific guidelines documents.

This guidelines document describes current standards and processes for determining the best outcomes for animals after a scientific activity is completed.

This guidelines document details the standards that are expected to be met by holders of the CCAC Certificate of GAP – Good Animal Practice®. For scientific activities conducted within Canada or outside of Canada, protocol authors based at CCAC-certified institutions are subject to these standards. Protocol authors are also subject to any relevant legislation and regulations in the jurisdiction where the scientific activity is conducted.

# SUMMARY OF THE GUIDELINES LISTED IN THIS DOCUMENT

The following list of guideline statements serves as an executive summary covering the most important aspects of the current standards and processes for determining the best outcomes for animals after a scientific activity is completed. These guideline statements are included throughout this document alongside details and references that provide support and context for their implementation. Throughout this document, the term 'should' is used to indicate an obligation, for which any exceptions must be justified to, and approved by, an animal care committee. The term 'must' is used for mandatory requirements.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Guideline 1

Decisions regarding the outcome for an animal at the completion of a scientific activity must include an assessment of the animal's welfare and be based on the principles of respect for animals and not causing harm.

*Section 1 Introduction, p.3*

## 2. OPTIONS FOR ANIMALS AT THE COMPLETION OF A SCIENTIFIC ACTIVITY

### Guideline 2

Prior to terminating an animal's life, all other possible outcomes must first be ruled out, with the primary consideration being what is best for the animal.

*Section 2 Options for Animals at the Completion of a Scientific Activity, p.4*

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Throughout this document, the term ‘should’ is used to indicate an obligation, for which any exceptions must be justified to, and approved by, an animal care committee. The term ‘must’ is used for mandatory requirements.

This guidelines document is intended to assist in determining the best outcomes for animals following the completion of a scientific activity.

This document does not apply to:

- animals that are humanely killed as a necessary component of the scientific objectives of a protocol that has been reviewed and approved by the animal care committee – as noted in the [CCAC Ethics Principles for Animal Use in Science](#) (CCAC, 2026), “Scientific activities requiring the animal to be humanely killed at the end of the activity require strong justification, including the selection of a method that is least likely to result in negative welfare states.”
- scientific activities in which wild animals are captured, undergo short procedures, and are immediately released at the same location – for guidance on assuring the best outcomes for those animals, see the [CCAC guidelines: Wildlife](#) (CCAC, 2023) and the [CCAC guidelines on: the care and use of fish in research, teaching and testing](#) (CCAC, 2005)
- the death of an animal due to a spontaneous condition unrelated to the scientific activity

## Guideline 1

Decisions regarding the outcome for an animal at the completion of a scientific activity must include an assessment of the animal’s welfare and be based on the principles of respect for animals and not causing harm.

The principles of respect for animals and not causing harm are described in the [CCAC Ethics Principles for Animal Use in Science](#) (CCAC, 2026).

In every instance of scientific animal use, decisions must be made regarding what will happen to the animals once the scientific activity is complete. Information on the outcome of the animals must be included in the animal use protocol submitted to the animal care committee (CCAC, 2006). Available options will depend on the relevant government regulations and factors such as the species, age, and history of the individual animal. The animal’s outcome must be informed by their current welfare status and a cumulative endpoints assessment (see the [CCAC guidelines: Animal welfare assessment](#) (CCAC, 2021) and the [CCAC guidelines: Identification of scientific endpoints, humane intervention points, and cumulative endpoints](#) (CCAC, 2022)). Cost and convenience must not be the primary factors in decision-making.

## OPTIONS FOR ANIMALS AT THE COMPLETION OF A SCIENTIFIC ACTIVITY

### Guideline 2

Prior to terminating an animal's life, all other possible outcomes must first be ruled out, with the primary consideration being what is best for the animal.

The following sections provide an overview of possible options for animals once their use in a scientific activity is complete. These options should be viewed alongside the relevant CCAC animal-specific guidelines, which provide more detailed guidance.

### 2.1 REHOME

Where permitted by regulatory authorities, institutions should assess the potential for rehoming healthy animals. Rehoming is defined as moving an animal to a non-scientific environment, such as a private residence, an animal sanctuary, or, in the case of farm animals, an agricultural farm. Rehoming animals at the end of scientific activities can improve their quality of life, have positive effects on research and animal care personnel who have been working with the animals, and address public concerns regarding the use of these animals.

Decisions to rehome animals must be undertaken on a case-by-case basis, based on the welfare of each animal (considering the animal's age, health, temperament, lifetime experience, behaviour, and training) and the conditions of the potential rehoming situation. Each animal should be assessed for their suitability for rehoming, and any welfare or behavioural concerns that arise in the assessment should be addressed before the animal is released from the institution, or the party receiving the animal should be informed of these concerns and have the capacity to address them.

The institution releasing the animal for rehoming must evaluate the rehoming situation and assess any potential compromise of the animal's welfare. Each institution that intends to rehome animals must document a process describing the conditions that must be fulfilled and the documentation required before releasing an animal to the care of another party. Institutions should also take steps to prepare animals for rehoming during their use in scientific activities (e.g., desensitize animals to noises they will be exposed to in the new setting, train animals to facilitate their transition). The conditions of transportation must also meet those specified in the relevant CCAC animal-specific guidelines.

The institution must be assured that those who will be caring for the animals have the knowledge and ability to meet, and ideally exceed, the animals' needs as outlined in the CCAC's animal-specific guidelines. There must also be assurance that the animals will receive any necessary care throughout their lifetime. The likelihood of compatibility with other animals that already reside in the proposed rehoming setting must be assessed.

New caretakers should be provided with a health certificate for the animal and information that is pertinent to the animal's welfare (e.g., the animal shows a fear response to needles) so that measures can be taken to accommodate the animal in particular situations if necessary. Contact information for the institution should also be made available for caretakers to share with the veterinarian who will provide care for the animal after leaving the institution.

## 2.2 TRANSFER TO ANOTHER ANIMAL USE PROTOCOL

In line with the Three Rs, the reduction of animals in science may be achieved by assigning animals to additional protocols when appropriate and approved by the animal care committee. Institutions must have a cumulative endpoints policy or standard operating procedure (SOP) for animals that undergo multiple scientific activities. The [\*CCAC guidelines: Identification of scientific endpoints, humane intervention points, and cumulative endpoints\*](#) (CCAC, 2022) provides relevant, detailed information about what the policy should include, how animals should be assessed, how to set limits on individual animal use, etc. Animals should be subjected to only one severe or high-welfare-impact experience in their lifetime (CCAC, 2022).

Decisions concerning multiple scientific activities must focus on their cumulative impact on the animal's welfare (i.e., lifetime experience), with due consideration of the intensity and duration of all adverse events they are exposed to (e.g., some long-duration procedures or conditions of restrictive housing may cause greater negative welfare impacts than short-term procedures that are more invasive). Furthermore, each animal's physical and psychological state must be assessed (see the [\*CCAC guidelines: Animal welfare assessment\*](#) (CCAC, 2021)), as some individuals may react differently to a particular environment or event.

Any plans to relocate an animal to another research institution must also assess whether the animal's welfare will be compromised by the transportation process or the conditions at the new facility. Animals should be moved to another facility only if such transfer meets the requirements of the cumulative endpoints policy or SOP and the animals have undergone a recent welfare assessment that has determined they are fit to travel. Such transfers must be in accordance with the relevant regulations and follow the documentation, transportation, and quarantine procedures described in the CCAC animal-specific guidelines. If animals are transferred to an institution that is not CCAC-certified, the institution sending the animals must determine that the receiving institution has the resources to provide the animals with appropriate care, as described in the CCAC's animal-specific guidelines.

The transfer of unhealthy animals between facilities should only take place when approved by a veterinarian for clinical investigation and diagnosis.

## 2.3 MAINTAIN ON A HOLDING PROTOCOL

CCAC policies for animal use apply to animals that have been approved by an animal care committee to be maintained within a facility. Institutions must ensure the care of these animals meets the applicable CCAC animal-specific guidelines. These animals must also be subject to the institution's cumulative endpoints policy or SOP.

## 2.4 RELEASE TO THE WILD OF ANIMALS THAT HAVE BEEN HELD IN FACILITIES

Prior to the release of an animal to the wild, there must be an evaluation of the benefits and risks to the animal, to other animals at the release site, and to the ecological conditions of the release site. In general, animals that have been kept in captive environments other than for a short period of time at the site of capture should not be released into the wild. For more information, see Section 12, “Release of Animals”, in the [CCAC guidelines: Wildlife](#) (CCAC, 2023).

## 2.5 RETURN TO OWNER

For scientific activities using animals owned by a third party, the animals must be returned to the owner at the end of the scientific activity, as per the terms of the pre-established agreement (see the [CCAC guidelines on: procurement of animals used in science](#) (CCAC, 2007)).

## 2.6 HUMANE KILLING

As noted in Section 1, “Introduction”, this guidelines document does not apply to animals that are humanely killed as a necessary component of the scientific objectives of a protocol that has been reviewed and approved by the animal care committee. This section, therefore, focuses on the humane killing of an animal’s life following the completion of a scientific activity.

Humanely killing an animal is considered a harm to that animal ([CCAC Ethics Principles for Animal Use in Science](#) (CCAC, 2026)), and other outcomes should be pursued. However, for some animals experiencing poor welfare, humane killing (i.e., the intentional ending of an animal’s life using methods that demonstrate respect for the animal and minimize negative welfare impacts) may be the best option. Where an animal is to be humanely killed, there must be strong justification presented to, and accepted by, the animal care committee ([CCAC Ethics Principles for Animal Use in Science](#) (CCAC, 2026)), and the [CCAC guidelines on: euthanasia of animals used in science](#) (CCAC, 2010) must be applied. For additional guidance, see the animal-specific guidelines.

Where possible, the use of each animal should be maximized; for example, by harvesting blood and tissues and coordinating their distribution to interested investigators in advance or by freezing samples for future studies and communicating their availability through research networks (Joint Working Group on Refinement, 2009).

## REFERENCES

More information about documents marked “in prep.” can be found in the [Guidelines section of the CCAC website](#).

Canadian Council on Animal Care – CCAC (2005) [CCAC guidelines on: the care and use of fish in research, teaching and testing](#). Ottawa ON: CCAC (accessed on 2026-01-12).

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