

The Ridgeline

NEWSLETTER OF THE BLUE RIDGE WILDLIFE CENTER

ISSUE 51



**Respect our
Native Snakes**

This Eastern Copperhead is one of three venomous snakes treated at the Center so far this year—all native wildlife play an important role!

Snakes Make a Healthy Environment for All of Us



In my past year at Blue Ridge Wildlife Center, I have learned one thing for certain: There are a lot of misconceptions about wildlife. I'll admit I came into this role with many of my own, and my time here has changed me.

For one, I grew up with an unwarranted fear of snakes. Personally, I blame the *Indiana Jones* movies for making me believe that at some point in my life there was a high chance that I would fall into a pit containing thousands of snakes. Luckily, that has yet to happen.

My fear, like most people, was not proportional to the threat that snakes actually pose to humans. In fact, snakes are so critical for managing rodent populations that without them we would be overrun by mice and rats and the diseases they carry. Now when I see a rat snake in my neighborhood, I am grateful.

Many times, a person with a fear of snakes will simply give it space, but far too often these snakes end up being killed or relocated. The more people who appreciate the role snakes and other underappreciated species have in our ecosystem, the healthier our environment will be.

This issue of *The Ridgeline* may address some of the misconceptions you, or someone you know, have about wildlife. Want to learn more? Sign up for our emails and follow us on social media to see stories about our patients, ambassadors, and upcoming events!

With gratitude,

Annie Bradfield
Annie Bradfield



The Ridgeline

Published by

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Blue Ridge Wildlife Center is a 501(c)3 organization caring for native wildlife by integrating veterinary medicine, rehabilitation, education, and research.

BRWC is located in Boyce, Virginia on the Burwell van-Lennep Foundation's property on Island Farm Lane.

The Center relies on private donations exclusively. Contributions are tax-deductible.

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Newsletter designed by Dara Bailey Design

The Importance of Snakes

In Virginia, there are only three venomous snake species. One of those species is the Eastern Copperhead, pictured below being cut free from treacherous garden netting in which it had become entangled. The other two are Timber Rattlesnakes and Northern Cottonmouths, the latter only being found in the southeastern corner of our state.

Garden netting is the number one reason snakes come into our care. As they slither through the openings in the mesh, they become entangled and suffer from constriction injuries. The harder they try to

wriggle free, the tighter the mesh twists causing painful lacerations or the death of skin tissue. It doesn't take long for those lacerations to become dirty and infected, making this a deadly problem if not remedied quickly. If they are "lucky" enough not to suffer lacerations, they will dehydrate or starve to death.

Thankfully, this Copperhead had not been tangled long and had no serious wounds. Once the netting was removed, this patient was promptly sent back to its found location for release.

Many people are concerned about be-

ing able to identify venomous vs. nonvenomous species of snakes. Copperheads in particular have very significant identifying features, like their dark hourglass-shaped or "Hershey's Kiss" shaped bands, their copper-colored heads, and the bright yellow tail tips they have as babies. Timber Rattlesnakes come with significant color variation but are generally able to be easily identified by the rattle on their tail and the

All snakes, including venomous ones, play important roles in their ecosystem, and should be regarded with respect.



Dark hourglass-shaped bands are identifying features of this species.

zig-zag shaped blotches and cross bands over their backs. These come together toward the tail creating chevrons as seen in the photo.

Identification can be fun, however, the best way to avoid being bitten by any wild animal is to give them space! Do not attempt to handle or harass snakes. Teach your children to respect snakes. Walking away is typically the best way to avoid negative interactions. We are not claiming that venomous snakes cannot cause damage—they certainly can! But actively attempting to remove or harass them is the best way to get yourself hurt.

All snakes, including venomous ones, play important roles in their ecosystem, and should be regarded with respect. These animals are important in pest control as they eat rodents (and the ticks on rodents) that spread disease. Timber Rattlesnakes specifically have been shown to reduce the prevalence of Lyme disease. Copperhead venom has been used in drugs to treat breast cancer. Due to their



Timber Rattlesnakes are generally easily identified by the rattle on their tail and the zig-zag shaped blotches and cross bands over their backs.

importance in the ecosystem, snakes are protected in Virginia (and many other states). Killing or relocating them off one's property is not legal. These are important animals that protect human health and

deserve our support!

Check out the Virginia Herpetological Society's website or social media page for more information on our state's snakes and other reptiles and amphibians. ■

Pollinator Garden Success!



They say if you build it, they will come—and our new memorial **Native Pollinator Garden** has proven just that! After just a month of planting and landscaping, we observed Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, Hummingbird Moths, Monarchs, and Swallowtails (as adults AND as caterpillars), and a variety of bees and other pollinating insects! Remember, native plants support not just pollinators, but many other wildlife species. Consult with your local nurseries to determine which plants are native to your area and would be appropriate for your specific situation, or check out www.nwf.org/Native-PlantFinder/ to plug in your location and find out what native plants in your area feed which animals!



This Pollinator Garden was created in memory of Angela Gale Russell Christman and funded by her family members, Carolyn Russell and Dr. Andrea Russell.

Finder Dos and Don'ts

Caring members of the public are essential to wildlife rehabilitation. They find the wild animals that need assistance and make sure they get care. We fondly refer to these Good Samaritans as “Finders”.

Unfortunately, every year, we see more and more cases where people take it upon themselves to try and raise or rehab an animal. These cases can be something as seemingly innocuous as a person finding a baby bunny and trying to raise it for a week before bringing it to us. In other cases, it may be an owl with multiple broken bones and a person trying to “rehab” it for days without pain control before they realize the bird isn’t getting better. This year we have also had finders attempt to perform surgery on awake animals with no pain control, and human medical professionals giving medications and practicing veterinary medicine without a license.

Though we appreciate the finders’ intentions, all of these avoidable situations resulted in animals suffering and/or dying. If you come across a wild animal that may need help, follow these simple Finder Dos and Don'ts to give the patient the best chance of survival.

Don't: Chase or pick up the animal. If you find an animal that is orphaned or injured, it is already stressed and/or in pain. You, no matter how well-intentioned, are a predator to them and your presence alone is causing them more stress. If you find an orphaned baby animal and take it into your home, you may be unnecessarily depriving a baby of being reunited and raised by its own family. In cases where an animal is stuck or tangled, attempting to free them often causes more harm than good. Many wild animals also carry diseases that are harmful to humans and in many cases having bare handed contact or specific exposures to a mammal can result in the state requiring the animal

be euthanized to test for rabies, even if they are not showing signs of the fatal disease.

Do: CALL a professional: Blue Ridge Wildlife Center at 540-837-9000, a licensed wildlife rehabilitator, or your local animal control. Keep your distance, note the exact found location, and take photos or video from a safe distance. Depending on the situation and the species, it can be safer for you and the animal to have a professional contain it. If you are instructed by a professional to contain the animal, always follow their instructions and use gloves and/or towels to keep both you and the animal safe. Once the animal is contained bring it directly to the rehabber. If you have to wait to get it into care, keep it somewhere warm, dark, and quiet away from people and pets, and leave it alone. If contained animals do pass away prior to arrival, it is almost

*The internet can be a great resource for many things, but it is **NOT** a place to learn how to raise baby wildlife or how to practice veterinary medicine.*

always due to the severity of their injuries or the stress from being handled/talked to/cuddled by well-intentioned finders.

Don't: Offer food or water. Even though it feels like the most natural thing to do, it is very dangerous. Without professional understanding of these animals, feeding can often result in a worse prognosis. Patients that have been hit by cars, crashed into windows, have been caught by cats, or lacerated by lawnmowers are not interested in eating. Finders often underestimate the level of pain and stress that these animals are experiencing. Even healthy orphans should not be fed by finders as feeding often results in aspiration or gastrointestinal issues which can make them critically ill patients later. Healthy orphans typically have no problem surviving 24 hours without food or water.



This image shows two cottontails of the same age, one fed by its mother as recently as the morning it was brought in due to a pet attack, the other fed by the finder for multiple days. We routinely see these malnourished babies fed by well-intentioned finders and many are also suffering from aspiration pneumonia or other health problems caused by inappropriate care.

Supporter Highlight: Terry Bradfield

What's your favorite Virginia wildlife species?

I am enamored with the black bear. They are shy, elusive, and rare enough that it is still exciting to encounter them, particularly in their natural habitat. As a hiker and backpacker, it's a thrill to see one on the trail. I especially enjoy the challenge of hanging my food bag in ways to keep it out of the reach of those hungry and ingenious eating machines. So far, I've been successful.

What got you interested in helping out here at the BRWC?

My daughter showed up there first, and I just followed her. When I heard that one of the volunteer opportunities was building and maintaining enclosures, I was excited to lend a hand. I like using my hands when doing projects, so this was a natural fit. Working with other volunteers on the projects at the Center provides some direct adult contact, too, which, for an old, retired guy like me, is a welcomed thing.

What are some of your hobbies?

I enjoy outdoor activities. I walk, hike, and backpack frequently. I also like working with my hands, and, thanks

to my dad who passed along his carpentry skills, building and wood-working are activities I really enjoy. I also like traveling with my wife, Maile, and we do a considerable bit of RVing. Tinkering with our travel trailer occupies a bit of time when Maile chases me out of the house.

What is your favorite part about volunteering?

I get to work outside and, most of the time, in the woods. That's the best part of volunteering. I have so much fun just being outside that I don't even think about the things I'm doing as being work or as a volunteer activity. I just can't believe I get to do something I really like to do in a setting I thoroughly enjoy. It's an extra bonus whenever a project is completed and I can stand back for a few moments and marvel that I played a part in its getting done. I like that feeling of satisfaction that I've help create something tangible. After a minute or two, though, I'm usually looking for something else to tear down or build. I can't decide which is better: admiring what we just finished or figuring out a new project to start.



Terry (far right) and two additional volunteers building one of our new waterfowl enclosures.

Do: Get the animal into care right away. If you are unable to transport immediately, ask friends or family if they are able to transport. In some cases, the rehabilitator may have volunteer transporters available. Waiting 24 hours can be the difference between life and death.

Don't: Google how to care for a wild animal. The internet can be a great resource for many things, but it is not a place to learn how to raise baby wildlife or how to practice veterinary medicine. If you google "how to care for a baby rabbit," you'll be inundated with a variety of websites, many of which are just personal blogs from random experiences non-rehabilitators have had, and may even be geared towards domestic rabbits, which are VERY different from wild cottontails. Many people want the experience of raising a wild animal or want their kids to share in this experience with them, but it is a far better experience for your children to teach them about doing what is best for the animal by calling a professional. Most wild animals found by people need medical attention from veterinary professionals. They have very specific nutritional, physical, and social needs and addressing those requires significant knowledge of that species' natural history. Many animals need to be raised with conspecifics (others of the same species). Wildlife rehabilitators work together and sometimes transfer patients to ensure that single babies are not raised alone.

Do: Consider making a donation to help cover the cost of care for the wild animal you brought in. There is no state nor Federal funding for wildlife rehabilitation and each patient costs non-profit centers or volunteer rehabilitators hundreds to thousands of dollars to treat/raise. Any amount you can donate is a huge help to the patient you brought and other wildlife.

You are now armed with the knowledge to give an injured animal the best chance of survival. Our patient's journey begins with you!

It is illegal to raise or rehab a wild animal without the appropriate license and permits. If you are located in Virginia, use this website to find a licensed wildlife rehabilitator near you: <https://dwr.virginia.gov/wildlife/injured/rehabilitators/>.

Rehab + Corner

Summer Baby Releases!

Spring and Summer are our busiest seasons of the year, and the majority of these patients are sick or injured babies. Some of these babies grow and reach independence relatively quickly, like Eastern Cottontails who, on average, are only in our care for 3-4 weeks. Other babies, like raccoons and foxes, take much longer, on average 4-5 months before they're old enough and mature enough to be released into the wild. Check out some of our favorite release photos from this year's babies!



Eastern Cottontails.



Red Fox.



Virginia Opossums (above).



Wood Ducks (left).



Raccoons.



Baby Snapping Turtles incubated and hatched at the Center after being retrieved from a deceased hit-by-car mother.

Patient Highlights

Bald Eagle



With deer hunting season comes “lead season” at wildlife centers. Though we see lead poisoning cases year-round, severity and case numbers increase dramatically in the late fall/early winter. This **Bald Eagle** was one of the first lead poisoning victims this season and was lucky to be released back home after treatment.



Upon release, this patient immediately found and joined another juvenile Bald Eagle!

Porcupine



The Center received a very special patient in early July—a **North American Porcupine**, found only minutes down the road! While porcupines have been considered officially extirpated (locally extinct) in Virginia since the mid-1800s, there have been studies and verified reports showing that they have been expanding their range and slowly returning to the northwestern areas of Virginia.



This **Canada Goose** came to us with an old, infected neck degloving injury. With weeks of honey bandages and delayed surgical closure, we were able to get this goose healed up and back to its family!



Did you know: BRWC does not receive state or federal funding? We are dependent on donations to care for the thousands of patients we treat each year. Please help us help them by making a donation today!

Red-shouldered Hawk



Imping is a technique we use when a bird's feathers have been broken. By attaching donor feathers from deceased patients of the same species to damaged feathers on the patient, that bird can fly again. The impeded feathers molt and be replaced with new feathers just like the original feathers. Take a look at the before and after photos of this **Red-shouldered Hawk's** wing that had been burned.

American Bullfrog



This **American Bullfrog** suffered severe trauma, including the loss of her left front foot, in a lawnmower accident. After surgical closure of the amputation site and a skin graft over the degloved area on the hind limb, this patient was released back home! ■



Did you know?

Virginia's Department of Wildlife Resources recently made it unlawful to possess any reptile or amphibian of greatest conservation need. That means that it is now not legal to keep any box turtle, snapping turtle, or many other species as a pet. If you currently have one of these animals in your care, be sure to register it with DWR (see their website for details).



dwr.virginia.gov

WildFest 2021

WildFest was held at the Clarke County Ruritan Fairgrounds in September and was attended by over 350 people!

Thank you to our sponsors (Dr. Russell B. McKelway, MD, Birds & Beans, and Bank of Clarke County) for making WildFest a free event for our community!



Save the date for next year:
September 10, 2022

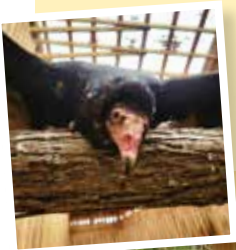


Photos by Cathy Kuehner



New Ambassadors!

In early October, our two newest wildlife ambassadors were welcomed to their permanent home on the Wildlife Walk. We hope you are able to come out soon and meet our Turkey Vulture, Moira Rose and our Black Vulture, Wednesday Addams!



Visit our website to make a FREE Wildlife Walk reservation

Q & A with Jessica Andersen

BRWC's Rehabilitation Program Manager

Q. What originally sparked your interest in the work of wildlife rehabilitation?

A. I didn't know wildlife rehabilitation even existed until the early spring of 2013, during my senior year of college, when I was looking for hands-on animal care internships. I didn't know specifically what I wanted to do with my life, just that I wanted to work with animals, so I just googled "animal care internship" and sent out applications to anything that seemed remotely in my line of interest. I got my first internship with the Marine Mammal Care Center in San Pedro, CA, which rehabilitates marine mammals, primarily seals and sea lions. It was my first experience into rehabilitation, and I loved it—the work, the people, and the mission.

Q. What does your typical day at the Center, as a wildlife rehabilitator, look like?

A. While there's no "typical" day, mine looks something like this: I come in and check in with other staff to plan for the day as best we can. We start off with feeding babies, or other animals that need multiple feeds in the day, starting with those who need the most first. We clean everyone inside, weigh babies and others that we need to, and feed everyone eventually as we make it through the day. We make sure all medications are given to those who need it, perform all treatments like physical therapy, soaks, etc. As we move through the day, we admit new patients and I'll assist vet staff with intakes and getting those animals set up and settled with everything they need. On top of all of this, I'm organizing and supervising volunteers and interns, training them on new tasks, supervising the tasks they're currently trained on, updating them on new protocols or changes made, giving classroom talks, and more. With the help of volunteers, we prep diets for the next day, clean enclosures, and move animals that are ready to be upgraded or released. We clean throughout and at the end of the day, doing dishes,

laundry, cleaning counters, sweeping, and making sure the hospital and surrounding areas are clean and hygienic for our patients. As someone who helps manage our social media as well, I'm constantly monitoring the multiple accounts we have to engage with people and answer questions they may have about the posts we discuss every day, and planning and creating content for later. Nearing the end of the day I work with some of our ambassador animals with their training and husbandry, make sure all necessary paperwork for our rehabilitation patients are filled out, and prepare for the next day!

Q. Is there a particular accomplishment in your work so far that you're most proud of?

A. One accomplishment I'm proud of is our growth as a facility. When I started, we had four staff members total, working out of a small 200-year-old cottage, seeing about 1600 patients a year, with only one or two volunteers a day and maybe 5-6 interns in a summer. Now, we work out of an 8,000+ sqft state-of-the-art hospital, seeing over 3,000+ patients annually, with 7 staff members (soon to be 9), 2-4 volunteers each day, and up to 15 interns in a summer season. We provide a critical service to our community, both locally but also within the national rehabilitation community, as many of our staff (including myself) have spoken at various conferences, and even provide a continuing education event ourselves. Our social media has grown exponentially as well, allowing us to engage with and teach so many more people that results in helping wildlife all over the world, and I'm proud of how we've changed and grown as a group to better the field overall.



Jessica works with one of our Animal Ambassadors, Jefferson, the Bald Eagle.

Q. What advice would you have for a new wildlife rehabilitator, or someone interested in becoming one?

A. For anyone interested in becoming a wildlife rehabilitator, or someone who is new to the field, I'd advise that they get as much experience as possible in as many different places as possible, even if it's just different rehabilitation facilities or with home rehabilitators. Everyone does things a little differently, and the broader experience you have, the more you're going to learn and be able to use all of those different experiences to the benefit of the animals you care for.

Q. What do you hope/vision for the future of wildlife rehabilitation?

A. My hope for wildlife rehabilitation is for it to become a more "serious" field. Rehabilitation used to be your next-door neighbor who all the kids took baby squirrels to. Now, in most states, to become a rehabilitator you have to apprentice for a certain amount of time with another permitted rehabilitator, and you have to take continuing education every year, and in some cases, you may even need to pass a test. I think the more serious this field is taken, and the higher standards we as rehabilitators can hold ourselves to, the better the care for wildlife everywhere, and the more likely that people will recognize that caring for wildlife requires serious skill and training—not just a Google search or a post in a Facebook group. ■

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Giving Tuesday

November 30, 2021

Please help to support the Center on **Giving Tuesday, November 30, 2021!** Donations made on this day via social media, our website, or check mailed to the Center will be **MATCHED TWICE** (by Facebook starting at 8:00 a.m. EST and by our private donor match fund all day) until matching funds are exhausted. With no state nor federal funding for wildlife rehabilitation, wild animals rely on donors like you!

GIVING
TUESDAY

