

The Ridgeline

Newsletter of the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center

Issue 20 • Spring 2013



Fox Rescue and Release | Animals on the Mend | Summer Wildlife Discovery Camp

Letter from the Director



Making Plans to Expand

Exciting things are happening at the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center, and I don't mean rescuing a rare long-eared owl, or watching a rehabilitated bald eagle fly again. It's exciting around the Center because we are making plans to expand.

During the nine years since we opened our doors, the public has embraced our mission, and thousands of people and animals have benefited from the assistance offered by the BRWC. The region served by the BRWC includes some of the most rapidly developing areas in the nation. This development has caused the destruction of huge amounts of wildlife habitat. As a result, more and more accidents involving wildlife are occurring, and more people are becoming concerned about preserving wildlife. These circumstances have created a great need for the help of the BRWC.

Proof of this need is reflected in the number of calls and animals coming into the Center. Telephone calls asking for help from the Center have increased from one or two a day to more than 5,000 a year. The number of injured, orphaned, and sick animals receiving care has increased from 370 in 2005 to 1,793 in 2012. Requests for our popular wildlife education programs continue to increase each year. In 2012, the BRWC gave environmental education programs to 3,200 children and adults, and reached many, many more when we were featured on Fox 5 Morning News on Earth Day, and during appearances on TV 9 and TV 3 News. Press releases from the Center carried by other TV and internet news organizations have informed the public about lead poisoning in eagles, White Nose Syndrome in bats, Chronic Wasting Disease in deer, and other wildlife concerns.

The four room cottage leased to us by the Burwell-van Lennep Foundation is now much too small to meet these needs. This 800 sq. ft. cottage does not have enough space for our staff, or for the animals brought to the Center for care. In addition, this facility is too small to invite the public to visit, and lacks an indoor location for education programs. It is also difficult to isolate animals with contagious diseases, and to find the space to house predators and prey species in separate rooms. Even though each animal is in its own cage, predators and their prey can sense each other, which can be stressful to the prey animal. If we have songbirds in one room, and fox orphans in another, hawks in another, and a sick raccoon in the bathroom, where do we put the injured great horned owl (who preys on everyone)?

The Burwell-van Lennep Foundation has generously given us a 50 year rent-free lease of 18 acres next to the education pavilion where we plan to build this larger facility.

We are so grateful to all of our supporters who make it possible for us to provide these valuable services to wildlife and the public.

Thank you!

Above: Dr. Burwell with the BRWC's Red-tailed hawk, Briar Rose.

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The Blue Ridge Wildlife Center is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization established to provide assistance to native injured and orphaned wildlife and other helpful information to the public in northern Virginia, the Shenandoah Valley, and beyond. The Center provides quality rehabilitative care for wildlife and operates the

Wildlife Hotline at
540-837-9000.

The Center also presents environmental education programs for people of all ages. Schools and organizations are invited to call for scheduling and fees.

The Center relies on private donations exclusively. It receives no funding from federal, state, or local governments. Contributions are tax-deductible.

Follow our wildlife stories on Facebook!



*Designed by Dara Bailey.
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Fox Rescued from Illegal Leghold Trap



Wildlife Rehabilitator Jennifer Burghoffer releases the healthy fox back to her habitat after spending a month of care at the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center.



On a Saturday morning in February, we received a call about a red fox with its foot caught in a leghold trap. This landowner does not allow trapping on his land, but had come across this fox caught in a poacher's trap on his land. The BRWC staff responded to the call and while the BRWC was rescuing the fox from the trap, the poacher appeared to check on his trap. He was reported to the authorities, and the fox was freed and brought back to the BRWC for treatment of her injured foot. After a month of care, she was taken back home and released. She wasted no time racing back to the wild once the door of her kennel was opened. Leghold traps are still legal in Virginia for trapping fox, bobcat, coyote, raccoon, opossum, skunk, otter, beaver, and muskrat. Leghold traps do just that, grab an animal by the leg and hold it until the trapper arrives to kill it. This

is a most painful and inhumane form of hunting, and it is also indiscriminate in the species it traps. We have rescued hawks, eagles, dogs, and cats from leghold traps, most of whom had permanent disfiguring and sometimes fatal

injuries from the traps. States that have already banned leghold traps include Washington, California, Massachusetts, Arizona, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Florida. We hope Virginia, Maryland and West Virginia will be next.

Great Horned Owls Sickened



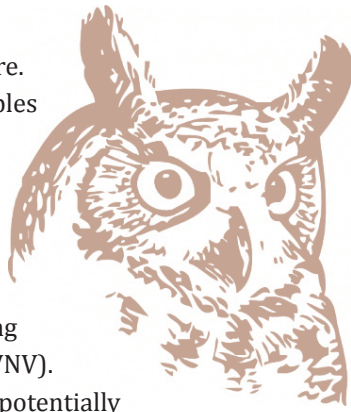
Great horned owl recovering in our flight cage from neurological disease.

During the summer of 2012, the BRWC admitted five great horned owls with symptoms of a neurological disease. Three of these owls were seizing when they were rescued and these three were found in or near apple orchards.

It was unusual to have this many great horned owls come into our Center with these symptoms, and we were anxious to find the cause. In one of these instances, the orchard was being sprayed the day the owl was found, so we were suspicious the cause may have

been a chemical exposure.

Blood and tissue samples were tested for toxins but did not show any significant chemical exposure. Instead, further testing revealed these owls were suffering from West Nile Virus (WNV).



WNV infection causes a potentially fatal encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) in a variety of species, including humans. Blue jays, crows, great horned owls, and red tailed hawks are among the most susceptible bird species. The infection is spread by mosquitoes, and it is suspected that wild birds, especially robins and house sparrows, are the reservoir in the wild. We were not suspecting these owls had WNV because during WNV outbreaks we typically have sick crows, jays, hawks, and other owls species coming in with the same symptoms. This time it was only great horned owls.

At first, finding these owls in or near orchards seemed to be just a coincidence, but it turns out it probably was not. A study by Washington State researchers completed in 2012 showed

that the incidence of WNV is higher around orchards and vineyards (see *Researchers See More West Nile Virus in Orchards*). The reason appears to be a higher incidence of mosquitoes around orchards and vineyards, which spread the disease, and rob-

ins and house sparrows who are the reservoirs of the disease. The article does not address why there are more mosquitos, sparrows, and robins near orchards and vineyards. More work needs to be done to determine how to safely lower the mosquito populations in those areas.

Of these five owls, only two survived the infection. One recovered completely and was able to be released back where he was found in Warren County. The other is handicapped and cannot fly, so she will continue to be cared for by the BRWC and will participate as an animal ambassador in our educational programs about wildlife.

Another Poisoned Bald Eagle on the Mend



This eagle is busy getting her strength back using the BRWC flight cage and will soon be released back to the James River where she was found.

A seriously injured bald eagle was admitted to the BRWC on the day after Christmas. She was rescued from a road east of Richmond, Virginia, and transported to the BRWC because she needed specialized veterinary care.

Examination and testing on arrival at the BRWC revealed this eagle was suffering from lead poisoning and had a fractured left wing. For two months, she has been undergoing treatment with chelating agents to remove the lead from her blood, nervous system, and bone, and her fractured wing has been healing. After three months of care, she is finally well enough to begin flying again in our flight cage.

Many of the birds admitted to the BRWC suffering from lead poisoning have additional injuries, and we believe this is not a coincidence. Even low levels of lead in the blood can cause neurological damage and incoordination which can predispose these animals to injury.

Eagles develop lead poisoning after consuming lead fishing weights and

Squirrel's Start Early

There are four different species of native squirrels in this area, gray, fox, red, and flying squirrels, and all of them like to nest in trees and begin having their young in late winter. This year the BRWC received two litters of orphan baby squirrels in February. One of these litters was in a leaf nest in a cut down tree, and the other was in a hole in an old telephone pole that was replaced. Before cutting down a tree, please check to see if there are holes that might contain a nest. Also look for large leaf nests in the crown of the tree. If a nest is there, try to delay cutting the tree until the inhabitants have left. If you need to cut a tree that has



wildlife residents in it, please call the BRWC for advice before doing so. Sometimes when a tree that contains a nest has been taken down, the mother squirrel will move her babies to another tree if given a chance to do so. If the situation allows it, leave the babies and nest either in the downed tree or in a box close by and leave the area for a few hours. This will give the mother squirrel enough time to secretly return and claim her babies. If she doesn't return within three hours, call the BRWC for more advice.



lures left inside fish (the ones that got away), or from feeding on deer carcasses which have fragments of lead bullets in them. Except for rare circumstances, they do not develop lead poisoning from being shot. For the past few years, the BRWC has been testing all the sick and injured hawks and eagles that come into the Center, and this testing has shown that this type of lead poisoning is more common than previously thought. We want to remind everyone who hunts

and fishes never to use equipment containing lead. Lead sinkers and lures, and lead ammunition are toxic to animals (such as eagles) that accidentally consume the remnants of this lead in their prey.

This eagle had a USGS band on her leg through which we were able to track that she is almost five-years-old and a female. Once she is strong again and flying normally, she will be returned to the James River where she was found.

Opossums Travel with Their Families



This injured mother opossum had a pouch full of babies when she was hit by a car, but she recovered, and mother and babies could be released together.

Opossums are unique mammals in this area because they are the only marsupial. Female opossums have two litters a year, but they don't raise these babies in a den; instead, they nurse them in a pouch and carry them everywhere with them. Opossums are nomadic and do not have a fixed territory. They are scavengers, have a very good sense of smell, and will travel to wherever there is food. They are omnivorous and will eat almost everything, but they particularly enjoy pet food and are quick to find dog or cat food bowls kept outside. Mother opossums have their first litter of the season in March or April after a very short gestation of only 13 days. Their tiny underdeveloped babies will stay in their pouch for more than two months until their eyes open. Then

they will venture out of the pouch and sometimes ride on their mother's back. Baby opossums are dependent on their mothers until they are five months old. If something happens to their mother during that time, the babies will often be there with her even if she has died. Sometimes when a mother is chased by a dog her babies will fall off and be left behind. Every year we raise many orphan opossums whose mothers were killed on the road or attacked by dogs. If you find a small opossum under eight inches in length (not including the tail), alone without its mother, it is probably an orphan and will need some help to survive. Call the BRWC for help.

Kestrel Rescue in Maryland



This little American Kestrel was found on the ground, unable to fly, near the Potomac River in Maryland. He was rescued by a good Samaritan from West Virginia and then driven

to the BRWC for care. He had a fractured wing which has healed, and since then has been exercising in one of our

Do Raccoons, Foxes, and Opossums Seen Out During the Day Have Rabies?

Most of Virginia's mammals are nocturnal, meaning they are active at night, but this time of year



it is not unusual to see some of these mammals out during the day. Does this mean they are sick or possibly rabid? Not necessarily. This time of year mother foxes, opossums, and raccoons are raising their young and need to consume a lot more calories than they do during the rest of the year. To do this, they must spend a lot more time scavenging for food. For this reason, it is not unusual to see these mammals out during the day. One way to distinguish whether a wild mammal is sick, or just out looking for food, is to notice if they have a normal fear of humans. If the animal runs away when it sees you, then it is probably healthy. If it doesn't, then it may be sick and you should call the BRWC for more information about what to do next. We are not suggesting you go chasing after any wild mammal you see out during the day, but if one is in your yard and not afraid of you or your pets, please call our Center for advice.

BRWC Hotline: 540.837.9000

large outdoor cages in preparation for release. Soon he will be on his way back to Maryland. We are so thankful to all the good people who go out of their way to help transport these animals to our wildlife hospital to get the care they need. There are not many wildlife hospitals in this area, so having committed animal transports is very important to the survival of these animals. If you are interested in becoming a transporter for the BRWC, please contact us at 540-837-9000.

No Burrows for Cottontails



Most people think that the wild cottontails in this area nest in burrows. Unfortunately for them, they don't. Instead, they nest in shallow indentations in the ground, usually in tall grass, bushes, or gardens, which they line with their fur and cover with leaves or grass. They keep their nests very clean and scent free so they won't be found, but this doesn't protect them from lawnmowers or gardeners. Cats and dogs will also frequently find the nests in their yards. One trait they have to their advantage is the short time they use these nests. Cottontails raise their families very quickly, with the young going from birth to weaning in three weeks. Their eyes open and they begin eating grass at two

weeks of age and disperse from the nest at three to four weeks. So if you find a cottontail nest in your yard or garden, if you can avoid the area for three to four weeks, they will grow up and leave.

When the young leave the nest they are very small and not very wise and can be easily caught by pets and humans. Many good Samaritans mistakenly seek help for these little ones thinking they still need their mothers. In reality, all these weanlings need is a safe place to hide with accessible food and water. Cottontails are prolific and will have four to five litters a year. If a nest is disturbed and the babies lost, the mother will often move on and have another litter somewhere else after another 30 day gestation. Cottontails are weaned and fully independent at this age.



Thank you to Charlotte Turnmeyer!

Charlotte is an amazing seamstress who has created these new covers for our transport crates.

She has also made us rice bags with fleece covers we can heat for the orphan babies to cuddle with, and crocheted nests for baby birds. Thank you Charlotte! And a thank you to Charlotte's son, Scott, for his beautiful photography of our animals, and for helping us with our website. What a talented family!



? Ever wonder why we keep the cages containing wild animals covered up? Keeping the animal's cages dark, and obstructing their view of people, helps the animals feel hidden and secure, and lowers their stress levels.

Baby Shower Wish Gift List

- Puppy Chow: Dry and Canned
- Kitten Chow: Dry and Canned
- Baby Cereal: Rice or Oat
- Rolled Oats
- Baby Food: Sweet Potato, green bean, pea,
- Bird Seed: Finch Seed and also Mixed Seed
- Chick Starter
- Money to purchase other foods
- Bleach
- Paper Towels
- Toilet Paper
- Sponges
- Rubbermaid Containers: all sizes
- Exam Gloves: sizes Small and Medium
- Dark microfleece throws (small blankets)

Gift Certificates to:

- Winchester Aquarium and Pet (to purchase insects)
- Food Lion
- Martins
- Costco

Links for:

- Reptariums
- Vision Cages
- Soft sided kennels (for small birds)

Baby Shower June 9th!



From 1:00-3:00 p.m. at
Historic Long Branch in Clarke County

Please plan to come to the BRWC's third annual Baby Shower to be held June 9th from 1:00 until 3:00 p.m. at Historic Long Branch in Clarke County. The BRWC expects to receive more than 1,000 orphan baby wild animals this spring and summer, and caring for these babies requires a large amount of supplies and money. Come to our baby shower and bring a gift to help us raise these orphans. At this event we will be giving presentations with native wildlife and explaining how everyone can help prevent accidents that create orphan wildlife. There will also be games and activities for families. Please see our website www.blueridgewildlife.org for more info and directions to Long Branch.

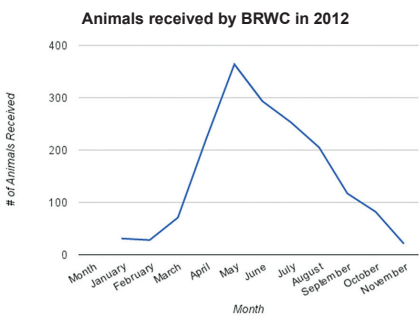
? Did you know that most baby birds leave their nests before they can fly? These fledgling birds will still be cared for by their parents while they are on the ground and learning to fly. You can tell a fledgling from an adult by their short tail and wing feathers. If you see a fledgling bird on the ground, it is best to stay out of the area for a couple of days while the bird learns to fly.



Wildlife Discovery Camp

The BRWC is once again offering a summer camp where children ages 7-12 can spend the day learning about Virginia's native wildlife, exploring wildlife habitat, and even meeting some of the BRWC's wildlife ambassadors, including hawks, owls, skunks, and bats. Join us as we hike and explore the forest, meet wild animals face to face, participate in scavenger hunts, and make bird houses, feeders, and other crafts. This day camp will be held on Tuesdays throughout the Summer from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at the Burwell-van Lennep Island Farms, 930 Tilthammer Mill Road in Boyce. See <http://blueridgewildlife.org/Articles/Camp2013.pdf> for more information and to download a registration form, or call the Center at 540-837-9000.

Student Independent Study at the BRWC



Each year the BRWC mentors students from local schools. This year, Sherando High School junior Claire Haskins, a Gifted and Talented Student from the Frederick County Public Schools, completed a study at the BRWC entitled "Reducing Individual Impact on Wildlife".

Claire reviewed the records of all the animals admitted to our Wildlife Center

Camp Schedule

Register for one or all sessions!
\$25 for each session.



June

- June 11:** Groundhogs: Kings of the Underground and Ancient Opossums
- June 18:** On Silent Wings: Owls
- June 25:** Critters of our Ponds and Creeks: Crayfish, Frogs, and Turtles

July

- July 2:** Feathered Friends and Their Nests
- July 9:** Butterflies and Birds: Creating a Backyard Sanctuary
- July 16:** Squirrely Squirrels and Romping Raccoons
- July 23:** Bees and other Not-So-Scary Bugs

August

- August 6:** Rocking Reptiles: Turtles and Snakes
- August 13:** Hawk's Eyes: Amazing Hunters
- August 20:** Bats: our Flying Hero's

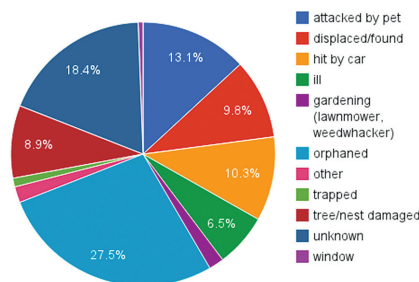


in 2012, and examined the causes of injury and reasons they needed to be rescued. She analyzed the data, and using this information, determined the best ways the public could reduce their impact on wildlife.

She presented her findings at the Frederick County Schools' Showcase in December, and included some very helpful suggestions regarding how

individuals can prevent injuring wildlife. Among her suggestions were to supervise pets when they are outside to prevent them from attacking wildlife, and to avoid littering because it attracts wild animals to the road where they may be struck by vehicles. To decrease the chance of hitting animals on the road, she recommended that drivers always pay attention to the road when driving, obey the speed limits, and use high beams whenever possible. Claire also advised that when finding animals that appear to be orphaned, it is sometimes best to leave the babies where they were found and have all people and pets leave the area for four to six hours before rescuing them to give the parents a chance to reclaim their babies. Thank you, Claire, for this very informative study.

Reasons of Admission to Blue Ridge Wildlife Center





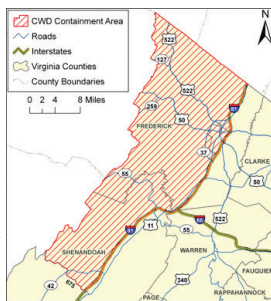
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Update on Chronic Wasting Disease of White Tailed Deer in Virginia

White tailed deer in Frederick County Virginia have been found to be infected with Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). This terrible disease is spread by a prion (a malformed protein) shed in the urine, feces, and saliva of infected deer. Because infected deer can look perfectly healthy, yet be shedding the disease for years before they look sick, Virginia has defined a containment area to the south of I-81 where the infected animals have been found, and is not allowing any deer to be moved out of that area. Also, to prevent the spread of the disease, DGIF has banned the feeding of deer in Frederick, Clarke, Shenandoah, and Warren Counties.



The Blue Ridge Wildlife Center Plans to Expand

Plans are continuing for the expansion of the BRWC. We have received a 50 year rent-free lease from the Burwell-van Lennep Foundation (BvL) for an 18 acre wooded site for our new Wildlife Hospital and Education Center.

The BRWC is extremely grateful to the BvL Foundation for its continued support of our organization and our work.



The illustration by Doug Pifer shows what our future wildlife hospital and education center may look like in the woods of the Burwell-van Lennep Foundation property.

Thank You for Supporting our Bal de Fur



Thank you to everyone who supported our 2013 fundraising Gala held February 9 at Ayrshire Farm in Upperville, Virginia. This event raises 25% of the funds needed to keep the Center running each year and we couldn't do it without your help!

