

The Ridgeline

Newsletter of the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center

Issue 29 • Spring 2016



Barred Owl Family Reunion

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Farewell

Dear Wildlife Friends,

It is hard to believe that I have been at the Center for only fourteen months. While the past months have been filled with challenges, it has also been a very positive time. It seems we have crammed several years of work into only these few months given the many organizational tasks we have undertaken. I am proud of the accomplishments the board and I have worked so hard to achieve. This is the reason it is especially hard to announce that I will be leaving the Center at the end of July. My three hour per day commute is taking its toll and I've decided to go back to my consulting business for environmental non-profits.

Much continues to go on at the Center and like every year at this time, we are in the middle of Baby Season. The spring started out with a bit of a drought, then we had a month of rain, neither of which deterred the creation of wildlife babies. So far this year we have taken in over 1,000 patients—on par with where we were last year. In fact, on one special day, 36 little ones arrived at the Center for our care.

Not all babies that arrive at the Center stay here to be raised. When possible, we always attempt to reunite babies with their natural parents as this gives them the best chance of survival. One Saturday we received a call from law enforcement about a baby Barred Owls that had fallen from its nest. In partnership with law enforcement and fire officials, and with a very long ladder, we were able to re-nest these little ones. (See our cover story on the next page)

The numbers of babies coming in, and requests for our assistance, demonstrated the need for your help at our annual Baby Shower which was held on June 12 at Long Branch Plantation in Millwood, Virginia. It was a record breaking year. Not only did we raise more than \$10,000 in cash donations—a 30 percent increase over last year—but you also brought us puppy chow, Clorox, paper towels, Dawn dish soap, and many other supplies we need for our babies' care and met the rest of our Wildlife Ambassadors. Thank you!

We are also providing services to human little ones during our annual Summer Camp being held during late June through July. There will be three different week-long sessions divided by age group. Don't forget to register your children or grandchildren so they can interact with our Wildlife Ambassadors, and improve their knowledge of science.

Over the past few months, we also reconnected with old friends and met some new ones. Former Executive Director, Jennifer Lee has rejoined the Center to help plan our "Where the Wild Things Are" September 17 gala celebration (Save the Date!), and former Board member, Michael Morency has rejoined the Center's board of directors. Speaking of the Center Board of Directors, the annual meeting was held in April and two new Board members were elected to the board. (See the story on page 7)

This Spring marks a monumental achievement in the history of the Center. Our new Center has been licensed as a full-service veterinary clinic by the Virginia Board of Veterinary Medicine. For the first time in the Center's history, we are a licensed wildlife hospital, making us a unique facility in Northern Virginia. Check out the story on page 6 detailing some of the animals that have received treatment at our new facility. We are now fully occupying the new Center and ushering in wildlife patients through the new blue door located at 106 Island Farm Lane (on the right as you enter the property). If you have any questions about the Center, our programs, or wildlife, please contact the Center anytime. While this is farewell, I will continue to follow with great interest the progress of the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center as they work to ensure the future of our native wildlife.

Sincerely,
David Bancroft
Executive Director



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Published by Blue Ridge Wildlife Center
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The Blue Ridge Wildlife Center is a 501 (c) 3 charitable 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.

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Designed by Dara Bailey
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Printed by Winchester Printers.

Cover Story:

A True Family Reunion

On April 26th, the Center received a call from just outside Millwood: a young Barred Owl chick had been found on the ground near Powhatan School, in the road and all alone. Concerned for its safety, and unable to replace the owlet, the caller brought it to the Center for a check-up. A little dehydrated, but otherwise in good condition, the staff took the owlet in, and decided to see if they would be able to get the owlet back into its nest. Unfortunately, the tree branches were too high for even our tallest ladder, and we decided to raise it with three others already in our care.

Four days later, staff received a second call about an owlet on the ground in the same area, with adult owls swooping down and calling from nearby trees. Staff rushed out to check on the new owlet, already knowing that they could not replace it, and wanting to take it into care before it could be injured on the road, as the caller was not able to stay with the bird. Upon arriving at Powhatan, staff members found a Clarke County Sheriff's Office Deputy already there, blocking the road and keeping an eye on the baby. We discussed the situation, explaining how we already had a sibling in care, and how we were concerned that although owl chicks can sometimes climb back into nesting trees, the branches might be too high for the little one, and that despite its parents being present, we would have to take it too.

The Deputy Sheriff then had an idea: a friend of his was a fireman with the Blue Ridge Mountain Volunteer Fire Company 8, and despite it being Apple Blossom weekend, he was sure that he



*Photos by Jessica Anderson.
Cover photo by Ryan Rose.*



could convince his friend to borrow the Company's tallest ladder and help the baby out. Excited to re-nest the owlet, staff returned to the Center to bring the first chick back to the tree. In the short time that we were gone, the owlet on the ground had begun to climb the tree, and was almost halfway up. Its adventure had also drawn a small crowd, all rooting for its success, including the finders of the original chick.

When the fire truck arrived, the chick was almost to the first fork in the tree, but had stopped for a little while, and seemed tired. The Deputy and the fireman set the ladder up against the tree, and the fireman proceeded to climb one-handed with the first owlet tucked against his chest. The highest point he could climb put him within arm's reach of the owlet in the tree and the fork. He placed the owlet he was holding on the tree and, once it had a grip, nudged it to

the fork, then moved to help the other owlet, who decided to climb on its own out of reach, but to a much more stable spot. Both owl parents were present for the whole affair, watching and calling, coming closer and keeping an eye on all of us. The deputy, the finders, and several of the others watching promised to keep a good eye on the area for the next few days to make sure both chicks stayed in the tree.

It is a myth that touching a wild baby animal will cause the parents to abandon it, as all wild animals put a lot of time and effort into their young, and are not so easily persuaded to give them up. If you find a baby wild animal you feel is in need, please call the Center for advice: it may be possible to reunite the baby with its parents, which is always the baby's best chance. ■

Timber! *The North American Beaver Play an Important Role in the Ecosystem*



Over the years, staff at the Center has received dozens of calls about a very unusual species: the North American Beaver. The second largest rodent species in the world, the beaver's diet consists entirely of plant material, mostly the bark and living tissue (cambium) layer of trees, buds, and water-plant tubers. Beavers are very family oriented. Up to three generations will live in the lodge at one time—the breeding pair, their current litter, and last year's litter. When they are three-years-old they will leave the lodge to form their own breeding pairs, either in a new lodge on the same dam, or in a new locations entirely, based on the amount of food in the area.

Beavers are generally unpopular in most areas. Extremely fast and mobile in the water, beavers will build their dam across moving water in creeks, streams, or rivers, causing the water flow to decrease, and widening the area covered by water. This allows the animals to swim to new food sources, rather than walk, and gains them easy access to an escape route if predators approach. The entrance to the lodge is usually under-

The North American Beaver Play an Important Role in the Ecosystem



Above: Canada's Wood Buffalo National Park is home to the largest beaver dam in the world.

water for the same reason—easy access for the beaver, but impossible for most of the beaver's predators. Unfortunately for the beaver, this flooding can cause damage to fields, pastures, and yards in more developed areas, in turn causing a negative interaction with humans.

The largest beaver dam in the world is located in the Wood Buffalo National Park in Canada. It supports two lodges and several generations; at almost half a mile long, the flooded area can be seen from space. The dam and the lodge are built from the trees that make up the

beaver's diet, as well as trees they may not eat. A single beaver will take down a tree or branch, strip and eat the bark and cambium layers, and tote the hardwood center back to the lodge or dam, where it will be added to the structure and secured with mud. All members of the family take part in building or repairing the lodge, even the young, teaching the next generation necessary life skills.

Though difficult to live with in inhabited areas, beavers play an extremely important role in the ecosystem. Flooding caused by their dams creates new wetlands and thus a habitat for thousands of insect, amphibian, reptile and bird species. The selective taking down of trees for food opens up space in the surrounding forest for new species to take hold—ones that may have been suppressed by the beavers' preferred foods. The pond which develops behind the dam begins to collect rich soil as sediment carried downstream is stopped. Plants drowned by the rising water add nutrients to the water as they decompose. When the beavers have eaten all of their preferred trees, and abandon the dam, it will breakdown, releasing the water, and leaving the soil behind. From this beginning, lush meadows will emerge, and a second, completely different ecosystem will evolve. ■



Fur for the Furry

Rehabilitators have been accepting donations of fur coats, stoles, hats, and other articles of clothing for years for a very unique purpose: to comfort the young wild animals in their care. Pieces of fur cut from coats are placed in with our wild baby mammals, giving them something familiar to snuggle with, and make them feel safe, especially when they are alone. Oddly, the species does not seem to matter: raccoons snuggle with fox fur, foxes with fake

rabbit, and skunks with goat hair. Not only does it give comfort to the wildlife, it seems to give peace of mind to the wildlife-lovers. Often they have found themselves the sudden owners of fur articles, and do not know how to dispose of them in a manner that makes them comfortable, while honoring the memory of its original owner. This year we were lucky to partner with Born Free, USA, a non-profit organization dedicated to the advocacy of wildlife, and received several bags of fur items that had been donated during their yearly drive. Right Photo: Born Free USA/Jennifer Place.



Mange Ed 101



Mange, and its potential treatment, has been a popular topic over the last couple of weeks, as foxes begin to den and forage closer to people's houses. We have received many concerned phone calls about mangy foxes with requests for medication to treat them. There are a number of reasons why we do not encourage medicating a wild animal outside of a rehabilitation setting.

Mange is a disease that is caused by mites on an animal's skin which cause itching, hair loss, and open sores and scabs. Mange is spread by a healthy animal coming into contact with a sick individual or its bedding. Many people see an animal with mange and believe that it is possible to treat them in the wild with medication left out in food. Although well intentioned, this can actually cause more harm than good, both for that specific animal and for other wildlife in the area.

Mange may be the original cause for concern, but even if the mange itself is treated, that animal is already suffering from secondary infections of the open wounds caused by the constant scratching. These secondary infections require antibiotics specific for that infection and based on weight. It's impossible to properly treat an animal's infection without catching that animal and allowing a vet to examine and treat it in a rehabilitation setting. Mange medication can be fatal if ingested in the wrong dose, or by some other species.

Leaving food out in order to medicate a wild animal is not recommended. First and foremost, it is illegal to feed any wildlife. The likelihood that the wild animal in need will be the one to get the medicated food is very low. Putting food out in general can also attract other

wildlife to that area, putting them at risk to getting mange as well and worsening the outbreak. The best way to treat mange and the subsequent infections that follow is to humanely trap the animal and get it to a permitted wildlife rehabilitator as soon as possible. This allows the animal to be weighed,

examined, and medicated for any and all issues by a certified wildlife veterinarian and be given supportive care. We always encourage people with questions or concerns, especially regarding possible mange cases, to call the Center to discuss the best course of action for that specific animal. ■

Semi-Aquatic



The Center has had its hands full of research this year as every few months staff is presented with new species that do not come into the Center very often. Recently the focus has been on a particular set of mammals—beavers, muskrats, otters, and mink are all semi-aquatic species that spend the majority of their lives and activities in or around the water.

A muskrat was discovered in a FedEx truck in Fairfax, dehydrated and definitely out of his element. Since the truck had traveled from the Richmond area, there was no way to find his original territory and return him there. After a week of supportive care at the Center, a suitable new home was found for him in Clarke County, with multiple ponds to choose from to make his new den. Muskrats use the mud, reeds, and other tall plants on the pond's edge to build a nest called a push-up, which are in the water but near the shore. Like beavers, their fur has two layers to keep water from reaching their skin, and have a long almost triangular tail used to propel them through the water.

More recently, a nest of otter kits was discovered under a trailer in Alexandria, Virginia when the trailer was moved during construction. Despite attempts to reunite the young with the parents, only one kit was taken, leaving two that needed to come into our care. They were brought to the Center, and staff proceeded to research how to raise

nursing otters, as the last otter brought to the Center had been older, and eating on its own. After extensive reading and consulting with fellow rehabilitators, it was decided that the best course for these two was to be transferred to a specialist rehabilitation center in Virginia

Beach, as they had specific otter caging and many more years experience. Staff at the Center hopes to be able to build such specialized caging in the future to give the best care possible to our most unique patients.

We are currently caring for our latest semi-aquatic patient: a young American mink, admitted in April as a newborn along with her sibling after being heard crying continuously by Good Samaritans. Though her sibling did not survive, dedicated staff has been raising this mink for the last five weeks, starting with formula feedings every two hours, even through the night, to her current three feedings a day of fresh meat and fish. Strict carnivores, mink are small mammals in the weasel family that spend their lives along the water, fishing and catching rodents and birds. They will take prey as large as rabbits, and cache uneaten food for later. It will be several months before this little mink is ready for release, and staff will continue to research what she will need for every step of her development. ■



Beaver



Muskrat



American Mink



Utilizing Our New Hospital



Since this past March, our newly constructed building has been permitted for use as a full-service veterinary hospital. Once this permit was issued, all diagnostics and surgical procedures could be done on-site at our convenience. The new facility features designated areas for surgery, radiology, and laboratory diagnostics. The most used of these three areas of the new building is radiology, with our brand new digital radiology system. Having this machine in house has enabled us to help with proper diagnosis of fractures and internal damage. We have taken over 100 x-rays since being permitted.

Multiple surgeries on birds, reptiles, and mammals have been performed in our new surgical suite. This past April, a groundhog was admitted after being hit by a vehicle. This collision caused a herniation, a tear in the abdominal wall through which the intestines protrude. He also suffered from a fracture of the pelvis. The animal was weak and dehydrated by the time he arrived at the Center. Our staff were able to stabilize the groundhog overnight so that he could be brought up to the new building for surgery the following day. The hernia was repaired and the animal healed completely while being given plenty of cage rest in addition to pain medications and antibiotics.

With our surgical suite and new state-of-the-art equipment, we have also been able to repair fractured bird wings on site. A Sharp-shinned Hawk was admitted

with a fracture through both the radius and ulna, the two bones between the wrist and the elbow. A stainless steel surgical pin was placed in the larger of the two bones to aid in the healing and stabilization of both. Unfortunately, this patient did not survive long after surgery due to the severity of his multiple injuries. It is important to remember that when animals have a severe traumatic incident, a fracture is often the only visible problem, but it is rarely the only injury. Many patients that have been hit by a vehicle are also suffering from internal injuries and bleeding which can be minor or life-threatening. Although the Sharp-shinned Hawk did not survive



to be released, performing a surgery of this nature provides opportunities to take what we learn and apply that knowledge to the next patient. Pinning surgeries involve careful preparation, the pinning itself, then trips from the surgical suite to our adjacent radiology room to get x-rays confirming placement while the animal is still under general anesthesia and being carefully monitored. As this was the first surgery of its kind done in our new facility, it helped us determine best placement for items in the room and quickest ways to move equipment so that we could make the procedure as efficient as possible for future patients.

Another patient helped by our amazing new surgical suite was a snapping turtle that was brought in this spring after being hit by a car. As this turtle had soft tissue extruding from his fracture site, his repair required surgery for the exposed tissue prior to a non-surgical repair of the shell fracture. This turtle was treated with fluids, pain medications and antibiotics in addition to surgery and was characteristically active and aggressive upon release.

In addition to the animals we have diagnosed radiographically and helped surgically, the new facility has provided us with a great laboratory space to perform our in-house diagnostics including bloodwork, fecal exams, and necropsies. Having a dedicated space away from patients allows these procedures to be done as safely and efficiently as possible without disturbing other hospitalized patients as they heal.

Thank you to everyone who has helped to make this facility a reality. We are thrilled to have and use all of our new equipment and our new facility to help us in our mission to ensure the future of our native wildlife! ■



The BRWC is dependent on your donations. There is no state or federal funding for wildlife rescue and rehabilitation. The BRWC depends entirely on donations to fulfill its mission. This entire region is thankful to those who have generously made it possible for us to help with so many animal emergencies!

Rehabilitators Collaborate to Benefit Wildlife

With so many different wildlife species in our area, it is impossible for any rehabilitator to be an expert in everything. Luckily, BRWC and other non-profit wildlife rehabilitation organizations are happy to work together and use their expertise to ensure the best possible outcome for our native species.

This year we have already received many young orphans, including two river otters, a species that does not come into the Center in large numbers. Wildlife Response Inc., a Virginia Beach rehabilitation facility with years of experience raising otters, was able to care for these two



(pictured below), who are reportedly doing very well.

Similarly, we were able to give a number of orphaned groundhogs the best chance possible by transferring them to Valley Wildlife Care Inc., a non-profit that has successfully raised many young groundhogs over the years. We also received two mink neonates from this organization after the two had been sent there as suspected beaver orphans.

BRWC has also assisted our friends in rehabilitation by taking in animals from licensed rehabilitators that have run out of time and space or that do not have much experience caring for a specific

species. This year we have taken in foxes from Wildlife Rescue League and we will be available to take in their insect-eating birds such as woodpeckers and chimney swifts as needed. We also work with North Mountain Wildlife Rescue, transferring animals to or from the facility with greatest ability to care for the animal at the time.

The ability and willingness to transfer animals to other rehabilitators, or take animals from other rehabilitators when we can provide the optimal care, allows for all sick, injured, or orphaned wildlife in the region to have the greatest chance at success. We are fortunate to be working in an area where so many rehabilitators are willing to work together for the benefit of our native wildlife. ■

Center's Board Evolves Toward the Future



Over the past few months, the Center's Board of Directors has seen some old friends leave, some former members return and some new members join. Both George Ohrstrom II and (Charles) Greg Ellison have stepped down after providing more than a decade of services to the Center. Thanks to George and Greg for all the hours of hard work they dedicated in advancing the Center's wildlife mission,

Late in 2015, Michael Morency, who was a member of the board in 2014, was elected back on to the Center's board. Mike grew up on a farm in Fauquier County, which engendered a love of animals, wildlife and an understanding of the interdependence of all living things. He has served on the Board of the Piedmont Environmental Council and is on the President's Council of the Southern Environmental Law Center; both organizations are dedicated to promoting

and preserving our natural resources, including open space and wildlife habitat. Mike and his wife, Jeanne, are converting several fields on their farm from predominantly fescue to wildlife habitat consisting of native grasses and other plants to provide sustenance and cover for birds and small animals.

At the Center's annual meeting in April 2016, new members, Tricia Booker and Pat Robinson were elected to the Board. Tricia Booker is an award-winning Virginia-based editor, writer and photographer and is owner of both Cameron Green LLC and Tricia Booker Photography. Tricia is also passionate about animal welfare and conservation and currently volunteers with the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute as a Citizen Scientist with the Virginia Working Landscapes, helping to promote the conservation of native species through the Grassland Biodiversity Surveys.

Pat Robinson, an attorney for 29 years, currently is Of Counsel at the law firm of Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz in New York City and a member of the firm's financial institutions practice group. Pat received her J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center in 1987. Before attending law school, she was a social studies teacher in middle schools in Houston and San Antonio, Texas. Pat is excited to channel her love of animals and environmental protection into working with the BRWC. She and her husband, Neal, own Chapel Springs, a historic property under conservation easement in Clarke County.

The Center will continue expanding its membership over the next several years to add the expertise and diversity to help it achieve its mission. ■



New Website! www.blueridgewildlifectr.org • New Email! info@blueridgewildlifectr.org



Follow us on Facebook and Twitter! We post stories about the animals we rescue and rehabilitate. Learn about Virginia wildlife and some of the things that endanger them on our Facebook page.



Join and follow the event on Facebook!

Where The Wild Things Are ~ BRWC Gala

Where the Wild Things Are Soirée

Join us Saturday, September 17, 2016

for a fun evening of local food and drink, live music,
Clydesdale carriage rides, and beautiful landscapes at
the home of Beatrice and Adalbert von Gontard,
Oxbow Farm, Front Royal, Virginia.

For more information and to learn how you can help support the event,
please contact Jennifer Lee at jennifer@2leeward.com or visit

www.BlueRidgeWildlifeCtr.org

