

The Ridgeline

NEWSLETTER OF THE BLUE RIDGE WILDLIFE CENTER

ISSUE 33

Avian Nesting Habits

Every species has its own requirements



Spring is here and BRWC is prepared!

Dear Friends of Wildlife —

What a difference our new facility makes to the work of the BRWC as it moves through its first spring season caring for our region's injured and orphaned native wildlife!

The heightened activity that now fills our outdoor environment can bring humans and wildlife in closer contact. People are outside longer and wildlife parents are busy, often crossing roads, foraging to feed their young. To be aware of our natural surroundings, to be alert to our wildlife neighbors, to see those that need assistance and those that are simply waiting for their parent to return, to feel comfortable calling for advice when there is a question of what to do are all important ways we humans can make a difference during this busy season.

Here at the BRWC we are experiencing an increase in wildlife babies being admitted—not only just this spring, but also year-over-year. In this issue, you will find interesting articles on how to deal with this flurry of activity—from understanding bird nesting habits to mother-newborn interactions to flowcharts for helping you know when/how to help the young of mammals and songbirds, covering dromaeosaurs and their delightful descendants!

Dr. Riley provides valuable information on a serious zoonotic disease that needs to remain in the forefront of our minds when we consider cuddling with those cute baby raccoons we come across in the wild. And, of course, we present four interesting cases that came in to the BRWC since our last newsletter.

We look forward to seeing you at our 7th annual Baby Shower held at Long Branch Historic House and Farm in Millwood, Virginia on Sunday June 4. It will surely be another wonderful and informative day for the kids and parents to learn about wildlife!

Thank you for all you do to help us help our native wildlife survive and thrive!

*With best regards,
Lisa Goshen*



On the Cover:
Bald Eagle on a nest at U.S. National Arboretum.
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Captured from video by Hillary Davidson.

The Ridgeline

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The Blue Ridge Wildlife Center is a 501 (c) 3 charitable organization established to provide quality rehabilitative care to native injured and orphaned wildlife and other helpful information to the public in northern Virginia, the Shenandoah Valley, and beyond. The Center operates the **Wildlife Hotline at 540-837-9000**

The Center also presents environmental education programs for people of all ages. For more information contact education@blueridgewildlifectr.org.

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COVER STORY

Nesting Habits

By Jennifer Burghoffer

If you were lucky enough to buy or receive one of the Unique Avian Abodes featured in previous newsletters and Facebook posts, you may be wondering which species would move in. The truth is that every species has its own requirements for nests or nest boxes, some of which are elaborate.

The first set of species to nest in our area are raptors, or birds of prey. By December, hawks, eagles, vultures and others have chosen their mates and staked out a nest spot and territory. Hawks and eagles will typically use the same nest every year, replacing and adding sticks until it is the perfect size and shape.

Owls, on the other hand, do not build their own nests, but prefer to steal abandoned hawk or eagle nests, repurpose woodpecker holes, or, for Barred Owls, find suitable rocky outcrops in addition to tree cavities.

An exception is the Barn Owl, which finds ledges or cavities in barns or silos and uses regurgitated pellets to make a nest lining. Vultures are the other extreme and do not build a nest. They will find secluded places, such as abandoned barns and other buildings, to hatch their young.

Within the songbird species, the nesting habits are just as varied. The American Robin, considered a herald of Spring, prefers to build nests on flat surfaces, while the Carolina Wren prefers cavities filled with woven dried grasses. Female Robins build the nest using her wings to shape the twigs brought to



her. To hold the nest together, a layer of mud is added, and the end product is lined with soft grasses. Carolina Wren pairs build the nest together, and it can take up to four weeks. The nest has a domed shape, a side entrance and may even have an entrance platform.

LEFT: Carolina Wren nesting in a cavity in a barn.

Photo by Hillary Davidson.



ABOVE: Bald Eagle on a nest at U.S. National Arboretum.
©2017 American Eagle Foundation, DCEAGLECAM.ORG.



LEFT: Kildeer chicks recover at the Center.

Hummingbirds build nests of dandelion fluff, held together by spider silk and pine resin, glued to a tree or bush branch for stability. The finished product is only the size of a thimble.

The Killdeer, a small brown-and-white bird, is a ground-nester: The male attracts a mate by scratching a shallow depression in the ground. Killdeer will often employ a fake "broken wing" scheme to protect their nest. If a predator approaches too close to the nest, the female will drag her wing while walking

away from the nest, making her seem like easy prey. Once the predator is far enough from the nest, she will drop the charade and fly away.

Wading birds, such as Great Blue Herons and egrets, will nest in trees, often in large groups called roosts or colonies. Some roosts have had more than 500 nests in one tree. The male will bring materials to the female, who will then weave a platform-like nest for the young, sometimes as high as 100 feet off the ground. Waterfowl may also be nesting and often choose bad locations such as roadsides and parking lots.

No matter the kind of nest, or the care put into its construction, sometimes baby birds will fall from the nest for numerous reasons. First, most nests are a finite size; they can only comfortably hold a certain number of young. As the babies grow and take up more space, younger, weaker siblings will be pushed from the nest by stronger siblings. Other times, weather or yard work will cause damage to the nest and the young will

fall. Another scenario is when unwanted young, either due to illness or the limits of the parents, are forced from the nest.

If you have found a young, un-feathered bird on the ground, as long as the nest can be located, a reunion can be attempted, for any species. If you are unable to reach the original nest, don't worry: As long as the second nest is close by, the parents will feed both.

Fledglings are the most common age group of "young out of the nest," but it's a natural part of a bird's development process. Around six weeks of age, most songbirds are about 3/4 of their adult size and have most of their feathers grown in. Feathers grow from the body out, like hair. To protect the feather as it grows, it's encased in a waxy substance, which makes the feather look like it is growing through straws. These feathers, as shown in the photo, are some-



times referred to as "pin feathers" or "blood feathers."

By the fledgling stage, the only evidence of these "straws" is on the underside of the wings. The wing feathers need to be completely grown out for flight, but the young birds often will practice in the nesting tree, and they may fall to the ground in the process. Fledglings on the ground are not on their own, however. Both parents will take turns going down to feed the young and encourage them to fly. If you are concerned for a young bird in your yard, call the Center. ■

LEFT: Pin feathers on an American Crow.

Photo by Dr. Riley.

Raccoon Roundworm

By Jennifer Riley, DVM

Many of the diseases that affect our wildlife patients are zoonotic, meaning the disease has the potential to be transmitted to humans. An important zoonotic disease we deal with at the Center is an internal parasite called *Baylisascaris procyonis*, more commonly known as the raccoon roundworm.

Baylisascaris procyonis (*B. procyonis*) is a zoonotic disease of concern because of its non-discriminatory behavior—it has potentially debilitating effects on as many as 150 species of birds and mammals in North America and has been reported as a significant cause of natural death in many rodent species.

One responsibility of wildlife centers like ours is to monitor zoonotic diseases that often escape public notice. Most of the victims of this parasite go unnoticed as they are small rodents in isolated areas that are readily picked up by scavengers for food. By actively screening for it in our patients, we can work with other centers and health professionals to determine prevalence and raise awareness.

Symptoms and Diagnosis

Unfortunately, once neurologic signs, the most severe of the symptoms, are seen, treatment is not successful. Neurologic symptoms such as, circling, wobbly walking, rolling, and seizures, are often confused with better known zoonotic diseases such as rabies or distemper. Of the thousands of rodents that have been submitted to labs for rabies testing each year in the U.S., 99% are NOT rabies positive, but are attributed to other diseases such as *B. procyonis*.

For patients that come in with neurologic symptoms but without a history of trauma, *B. procyonis* is one of our top suspects. We always assess neurologic patients for treatable issues such as ear infections or

head trauma, but once obvious signs of neurologic disease develop in a mammal due to *B. procyonis*, it must be euthanized as this type of brain damage is irreversible and often fatal.

Other Transmission Hosts

While raccoons are the predominant host of this parasite, a few other animals can also host mature worms and pass eggs in their feces without developing signs. We know that a dog, *man's best*



Robert Savannah, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Of the thousands of rodents that have been submitted to labs for rabies testing each year in the U.S., 99% are NOT rabies positive, but are attributed to other diseases such as *B. procyonis*.

friend, can carry many types of diseases and parasites, including the eggs of the raccoon roundworm. Luckily, your pet can visit the veterinarian for diagnostics and treatment. Your pet's veterinarian will likely recommend regular fecal exams and appropriate treatment if parasites are discovered in your pet's feces. With attention and monitoring, your dog is less likely to be a concerning source of infection.

Impact to Humans

Infections in humans, though rare, are caused by ingesting the eggs from fecal material or other contaminated sources. In almost all reported cases, humans that became infected were infants/toddlers, individuals with developmental disabilities, or those with drug addictions. These subsets of the population have been shown to more frequently ingest material in the environment such as dirt, sand from sandboxes, or feces found in their yards or parks. For this reason, extra care should be taken in situations where these individuals may be exposed.

Prevention

The most important way to prevent infection is through education. Although this article is about the raccoon roundworm, it is important to remember that any animal can potentially be carrying a zoonotic disease. Good hygiene is important in prevention of disease transmission. We encourage all parents to teach your children from an early age to avoid animal feces and to practice good hygiene such as washing hands after playing or before eating.

Also, never take in wildlife as pets! In addition to being illegal, infant raccoons and other mammals can carry *B. procyonis* and may not show signs of infection. Discourage wild animal visitations by securing trash bins, removing accessible food and feeders, and closing off access to den sites around

your house. Please contact the Center if you come across orphaned raccoons or other wildlife—we will provide guidance on what to do and how to handle the wildlife.

Summary

Baylisascaris procyonis can be debilitating to wildlife and humans, but awareness and good hygiene go a long way in preventing this disease and keeping your family healthy. You should not be overly concerned about contracting this parasite as no rehabilitator (those most frequently in contact with raccoon feces) has ever developed clinical signs due to the disease, according to most recent reports. Armed with this information, you should unabashedly get out into nature and experience it fully—just don't put it in your mouth! ■

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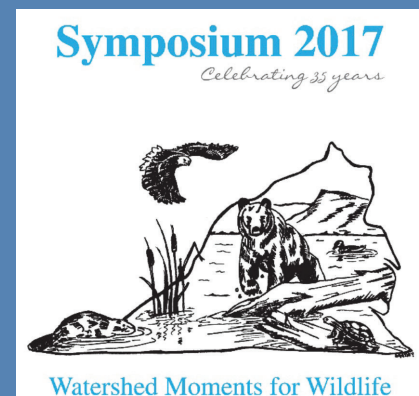
National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association (NWRA) Symposium

Some of our staff were able to attend the National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association (NWRA) Symposium held March 7-11 in Williamsburg, Virginia.

This symposium is a gathering of national and international rehabilitators and veterinarians to share case studies, research findings, training tips, and much more to help further the field of wildlife rehabilitation.

Continuing education helps rehabilitators and veterinarians stay at the forefront of wildlife techniques and issues so that they may better care for wildlife patients.

All of the Center's rehabilitators are Certified Wildlife Rehabilitators (via IWRC) and fully permitted by the State of Virginia and the Federal Fish and Wildlife Service. Continuing education is a requirement for the staff to retain their permits and certification.



Interesting Cases + Rehab Corner

Stories and photos by Jessica Andersen



RED FOX

(Vulpes vulpes)

Upon receiving a call about an injured fox, staff member Jessica Andersen captured and transported the fox back to the Center. During the physical exam, Dr. Riley noted that this fox was emaciated and suffered from two infected puncture wounds on its foreleg, another large wound on its hind leg, and a serious joint infection at the ankle.

The fox was prescribed pain medication and antibiotics and his wounds were flushed and bandaged daily. After a week, he showed no signs of improvement, appeared disoriented, and had developed neurological symptoms including tremors and excessive salivation—signs that strongly suggested rabies. Due to concerns of rabies and progressive worsening of his condition, the staff made the difficult decision to humanely euthanize the fox.

It is important to remember that any mammal can be a carrier of rabies, which is a zoonotic disease. You should never attempt to rescue an animal without precautions. Always call the Center before attempting any rescue so we can help you determine the best approach for the situation.



COYOTE

(Canis latrans)

Recently, the Center took in an injured coyote after it was found on the side of the road, likely hit by a vehicle. Though its injuries resulted in humane euthanasia, the state of Virginia describes coyotes as a “non-native, nuisance” species and prohibits their rehabilitation and release.

As wolves and other carnivores were wiped out by

humans, coyotes have pushed east and established territories in Virginia. A coyote “pack” consists of multiple animals. Many of these are related to the alpha pair, which is the only breeding pair in the pack. The size of a coyote pack’s home range varies greatly by the food and resources available and by the number of coyotes in that area. The coyote is strictly monogamous and all females will help raise the young.

A coyote’s diet includes rodents, insects, fruits, and vegetables and it also scavenges. Coyotes usually hunt alone unless they need to bring down larger prey such as deer. With the overpopulation of deer in Virginia and no natural predators to control their numbers, such as wolves and mountain lions, coyotes have become an integral part of the landscape.

Unfortunately, because coyotes are so well adapted to the landscape, they may also prey on livestock. The best way to protect livestock from coyote predation is with a guard animal such as a guard dog, llama or donkey. Coyotes may also become habituated to an easy food source so refrain from mass feeding of animals such as feral cats and always secure trash.

Coyotes are a very adaptable species and studies have shown that if either member of the breeding pair is killed, it will increase reproduction in other females who will try to establish new families and territories. Coyotes are here to stay and having respect and understanding for these animals is the best way to co-exist with them.

Rabies 101

It is important to remember that not all cases of rabies, a viral disease, look the same. There are actually two general categories of how this disease may present in wildlife and our companion animals.

“Furious” rabies is the form most people think of—the animal is often aggressive, attempting to bite, irritable, and often salivating excessively. There is another form of rabies referred to as “paralytic” or “dumb” rabies. This is more common in some species than others. Paralytic rabies presents as nearly the opposite as furious rabies. The animal becomes quiet and often isolates itself. It may become uncoordinated and progress to complete paralysis. Later, it may become extremely sleepy and eventually lose consciousness before the inevitable end stage (death). This is what we suspect happened to the Red Fox discussion above.

Many people are unnecessarily scared of animals and suspect rabies when there is no real cause for concern. Seeing a nocturnal mammal out during the day does not mean that animal is rabid. This time of year, many raccoons, skunks, or other nocturnal animals may be seen in daylight as gestation/lactation causes a need for increased calories. To support this demand, they often have to forage during the day. Still, it is best to avoid these animals as you do not know their health status, but do not panic just because a skunk is out during the day. It is important to exercise caution with any wildlife as they could be carrying rabies or other diseases whether it is “acting rabid” or not, but the act of simply seeing a wild animal, regardless of the time of day, should not cause panic.



EASTERN SCREECH OWLS

(Megascops asio)

From January through March, over 30% of our patients had been Eastern Screech Owls (shown here are just a few), all but one of which were found by a roadway and presumably struck by a vehicle. Injuries ranged from mild head trauma to broken wings to damaged eyes and skull fractures. These small owls rely in part on rodents as

prey, many of which may be found by roadways attracted to litter and discarded food items. Lights along roadways also draw insects, another food staple, which may entice more screech owls to the streets.

Keep your eyes peeled while driving, and hold onto food and other waste until you get home!



GREAT HORNED OWL

(Bubo virginianus)

Barbed wire can be an effective fencing material for livestock, but it can also pose a threat to wildlife. Raptors often fly through branches with ease and do not understand the dangers of human-made boundaries. Their skin is strong considering it is only a few cell layers thick, but it is not strong enough to withstand the thrashing from attempts to become unbarbed. Many fences must be cut around the raptor and then

have the barbed wire surgically removed to prevent damage to the patagium, the skin and tendon that stretches between a birds wrist and shoulder and allows full range of motion. If this area is too severely damaged, the bird may never be able to fly successfully again.

This Great Horned Owl was lucky enough to be contained after being cut out of a barbed wire fence and transported to the Center. Surgery was performed the Saturday afternoon of admittance. Due to agitation and annoyance with his bandage, a second surgery was needed to repair the self-inflicted damage. Once the wound was completely healed, the owl was moved into outdoor caging to rebuild its flight muscles prior to release in early April.

If you ever find an animal caught in barbed wire, call the Center first to discuss the situation and the next steps needed to get the animal medical attention. ■



2017 Wildlife Discovery Summer Camp at BRWC

Looking for summer activities for the kids? Join the Center for our Wildlife Discovery Camp for ages 7-10 and 11-14. Your kids will learn about Virginia's native wildlife, habitats, ecosystems, animal tracks and signs, and more!

The Camp runs from 9:00 a.m. 3:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Campers can sign up for single days or the entire week! Every day will feature short lessons, games and crafts, and face-to-face interactions with the Center's wildlife ambassadors. Visit our website at www.blueridgewildlifectr.org for dates, topic descriptions, and the registration form.



When to Help Wildlife

By Jennifer Burghoffer



Early one morning you let your dog out into the yard, and he immediately rushes to a seemingly random spot and starts barking and digging. When you go over to inspect, you're surprised to see four small, fluffy rabbits simply sitting still, letting the dog sniff and lick them. You can't remember seeing any rabbits in your yard in the past few days, and you can't see any now. What do you do?

When it comes to wildlife rescue, almost everyone's first reaction to babies seen alone is that they must need help, and humans are so eager to be helpful that they don't consider that sometimes "helping" wildlife can actually be hurtful.

There are several species, such as cottontails, that will leave their babies alone for long portions of the day, trusting that the babies will stay still and be there when the mother returns.

Cottontails are naturally shy creatures and will purposefully stay away from the nest when predators, including humans, are near in order to keep the nest from being discovered. Depending on the weather, cottontails begin nesting as early as March or April, and they can continue to have young through October.

The nesting cavity isn't elaborate. Usually, mother rabbits, called does, will make a small depression in the ground and line it with fur to insulate the babies, called kits. These nests can be in any place, such as garden beds, in the middle of the yard, or up against your jungle-gym.

Newborns are about three inches long, naked and pink, and have sealed eyes and ears. The babies effectively fill the nest. At feeding time, the doe will lie across the top of the nest, and the babies will reach up to nurse—mom doesn't need to fit in the nest with the kits.

If you find a nest in your yard and are concerned about whether or not the mother is returning, the attitudes of the babies are the best indicator. Plump, warm, quiet babies are being cared for, while babies with no fur or closed eyes

that leave the nest are hungry and desperate to find food. We recommend watching the nest for 24 hours to see if the kits display this behavior.

Development happens quickly for cottontails. By only four weeks old, they are weaned, and they look like miniature adults. The mother has most likely moved on by then, and in some cases, may even have given birth to another litter.

Since cottontails have such a short nursing period, the best and easiest solution is to protect the nest. Garden fencing with four-inch squares surrounding the nest area is enough to keep out predators and has holes large enough to allow both the doe in for feeding and the juveniles out when they're ready to brave the world.

If you're keeping an eye on the nest and see fewer babies as the days go by, don't panic. Around four to five weeks, the kits are ready to adventure from the nest, but not all will leave at the same time.



ABOVE: A 4-5 week-old baby Cottontail nestles up with a piece of donated fur coat.

Photo by Jessica Andersen

Fawns are another example of babies that are left on their own at a young age. Newborn fawns are unsteady on their feet and vulnerable to predators. Mother deer, also called does, will leave their babies in what they believe is a safe place, assuring that the fawns will not have to struggle to keep up with their mothers, and that the doe will not have to worry about protecting the young should she come across a predator.

However, what looks safe to a deer

may not always be the best choice. Suburbs, industrial parks, and roadsides all have their own dangers, but does typically leave their fawns in these areas in the early morning hours, when no human activity is taking place.

Fawns instinctively will stay in one place, or in a general area, from the time their mother leaves until she returns. This instinct means that some young fawns will allow humans and dogs to walk right up to them, without moving, believing that the best way to stay safe is to stay still, as many of their predators are stimulated by the chase of moving prey.

As with cottontails, the fawns' behavior is the best indicator of abandonment. Quiet, calm fawns are waiting for mom, while fawns that are seen crying or wandering large areas of the property for more than 48 hours are more likely to have been orphaned.

In some cases, other does may adopt such orphans. If they don't, the fawn may need help. Rehabilitation of deer is legal in some counties and not others, so please call the Center for more information.

There are other species that may seem abandoned or orphaned at first glance. Skunks and foxes are denning mammals, meaning that they give birth to their babies in an underground cavity or brush pile, and the babies will not be seen for several weeks.

You might one day suddenly see three or four small foxes or skunks playing on your property, however, with no parent in sight. As long as the babies appear healthy, there's no need to be concerned.

If you've seen wild babies that you believe need assistance, please call the Center before taking any steps. Our rehabilitators are more than happy to discuss the situation and see if we can determine if the babies need our help, and what the best help would be. ■

Tips for Rescuing Wildlife

1. Prepare a container. Use a cardboard box with a lid **AND NO HOLES** or a small pet carrier large enough for the baby or babies. You can add air holes with a pen. Line the bottom with a towel or washcloth, or some paper towels.

2. Gently pick up the animal and place in the container. **Wear gloves or use a thick towel or blanket when handling wildlife.** Even young, sick, or injured animals will protect themselves or accidentally bite or scratch a rescuer.

3. Keep the baby warm, in a dark, quiet place. To keep warm, use one of the following:

- A heating pad on the **LOWEST** setting and put one end of the box or carrier on the heating pad
- A sock filled with rice, warmed in the microwave or
- A water bottle filled with warm water.

Always test the heat of microwave-warmed items by holding against your skin for 30sec to ensure it is not too hot. Place hot item in the box under the towel. Do not put in direct contact with the baby—weak or injured babies may not be able to move away from the heat source, and can become overheated or be burned.

- Find a dark and quiet place to keep the box away from household pets and children. The dark atmosphere and quiet will help the baby feel safe, lowering stress, and allowing them to sleep and conserve energy until they can be cared for by a rehabilitator.

4. Tape the box shut, if needed, and cover the box/carrier with a towel or sheet.

5. Wash your hands after contact with wildlife. Wash anything the animal came in contact with—this will prevent the spread of any diseases or parasites the animal may have from being spread to household members or pets.

6. Contact the **Blue Ridge Wildlife Center (540-837-9000)** or a local permitted rehabilitator. A full list of permitted rehabilitators for the Commonwealth of Virginia can be found

on the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries website. For out-of-state wildlife issues, please contact your local wildlife department or department of natural resources for information on local laws and contact information for local rehabilitators.

7. While waiting to hear from a rehabilitator or to transport wildlife to care, **DO NOT** attempt to feed or offer water to wildlife.

- Healthy babies should have enough reserves to last 24 hours without food or water. They may also bite or scratch during feeding accidentally or out of fear.
- Injured or sick babies may be too debili-

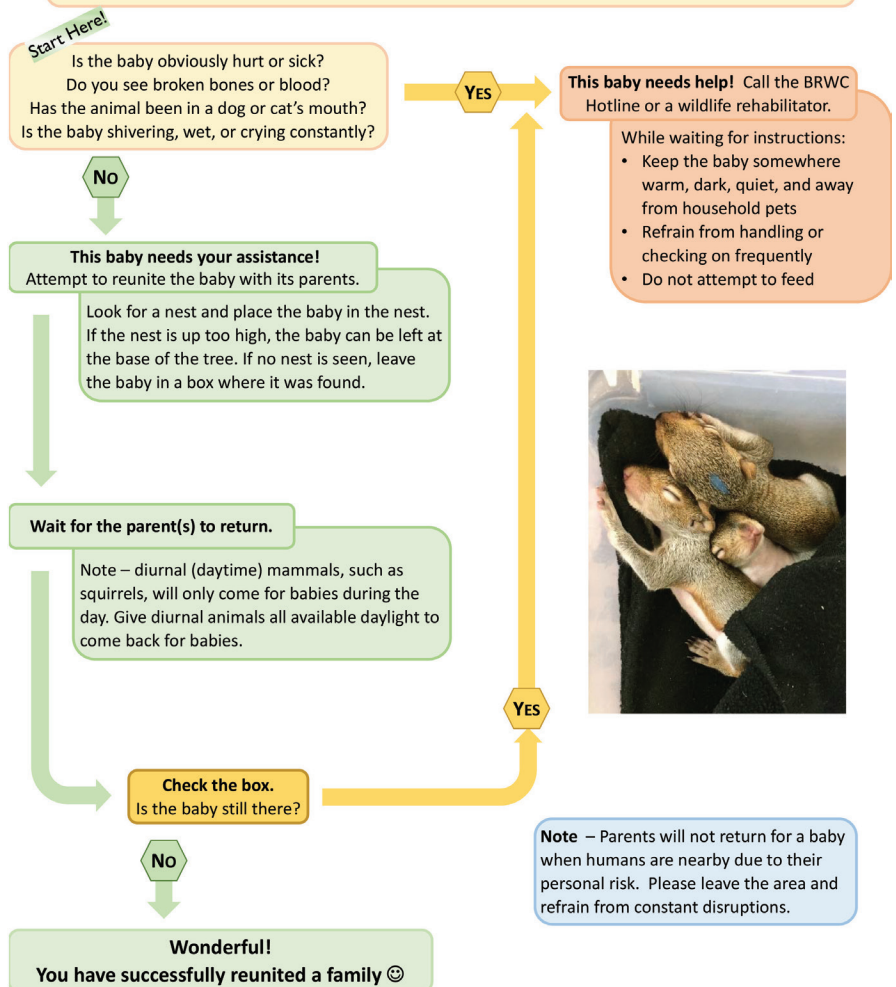
tated to properly process food – food given in this state may cause secondary problems and impact healing. It is also easy for sick and injured babies to aspirate—breath fluid into the lungs—which can turn into pneumonia.

8. As soon as possible, get the animal to a permitted wildlife rehabilitator. Successful rehabilitation is dependent on time: the less time between you finding an orphaned or injured baby and it being taken in to care with a rehabilitator, the better its chances of being healed or raised to release. ■

HELP! I found a baby squirrel ...

A BABY MAMMAL'S BEST CHANCE OF SURVIVAL IS BEING CARED FOR BY ITS PARENTS!

Please use this chart when considering if, and when, to help young wildlife.



What's That Sound?

By Jennifer Burghoffer

Do you think you hear birds in the chimney? What about the dryer vent? Are they stuck? The good news is that you're not imagining it. However, the bad news is that you might have birds nesting in your home.

Chimney Swifts (*Chaetura pelagica*) are a specialized species of insectivores that, you guessed it, nest in chimneys. These small birds have short legs, long toenails and specialized tail feathers that allow them to perch vertically, making chimneys a perfect nesting spot.

Chimney Swifts most likely used to nest in hollow trees in the forests, but urban development has made these places less common and competition for them fierce. They responded by moving into the next best thing: open-top chimneys.

While only one bonded pair will nest in a chimney, related family members



ABOVE: A young Chimney Swift waits for its meal. Photo by Jessica Andersen.

will live with them, helping to take care of the young. The nest is built against the wall, held in place by the birds' spit. If the nest or any of the young fall, they can be returned to their parents as long as they can be placed back into the chimney on a textured surface above the flue. Do not put the babies outside.

Parent birds cannot carry their young back to the nest, and their parents will not land on the ground to feed them.

The species most commonly found in dryer vents and other home cavities is the European Starling, an invasive species that has no fear of nesting near humans. The adults are black with iridescent green-and-yellow spots on the body. They can have up to seven babies in a nest, and they can be loud. If you hear these babies in the vent, you can take steps to move the nest to the nearest tree, a much more suitable nesting spot for everyone.

If you suspect birds have built their nests in or on your home, feel free to call the Center for advice or help identifying the species. ■

Seventh Annual BRWC Baby Shower!

Sunday, June 4, 2017 | 12:00 - 3:00 p.m. | Long Branch Historic House & Farm | Millwood, Virginia



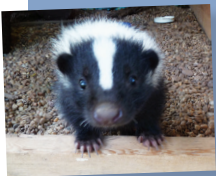
Every year the Center raises almost 1,000 orphaned birds and mammals, and we need your help! Attend our annual Baby Shower event Sunday, June 4, at Long Branch Historic House and Farm in Millwood, Virginia. The event is free to the public—though we ask that you bring a “shower gift” from one of our “Wish Lists”. Items from these lists help us care for the babies that arrive at the Center beginning in March. Come out from 12:00 - 3:00 p.m. to meet our staff, see our wildlife ambassadors, win raffle prizes, and more!

Visit our Facebook page or the “How to Help” tab on our website for more information about the event, directions to Long Branch, and links to our Amazon Wish List.

COME HUNGRY! BBQ plates, hotdogs and drinks will be available for purchase from Boyd's Nest Family Restaurant.

WANT TO BE INVOLVED?

Volunteers are always welcome! If you are interested in helping gather items for our raffle, please call the Center at 540-837-9000 or email Jennifer Burghoffer at jennifer@blueridgewildlifectr.org.



Investing in Tomorrow, Today

By Franny Crawford

AS you have no doubt heard, the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center (BRWC) has established a new annual giving campaign, the *Society of Wildlife Guardians*, as a way for those of you committed to wildlife and biodiversity to support the vital service we provide in our community. The Campaign is well underway and people are demonstrating their commitment to our mission and this Society because they understand that the animals in our care have daily needs that can last for months until rehabilitated.

Releasing a wild animal back to its natural habitat is an amazing and rewarding experience. The BRWC releases many animals in a year and yet in the grand scheme of wildlife populations, the number is quite small. So why do it? Of course, it is the right thing to do, first and foremost. But beyond the moral obligation comes a greater calling—each animal we rescue or treat has a story. What better way to teach the children about our native wildlife than to tell those stories.

Understanding native wildlife, their habitats and natural life in the wild is important, not only to their future, but also to our future as well. Each animal



ABOVE: Bald Eagle release. **BELOW:** Heather Sparks conducts a lesson in the Ronald M. Bradley Learning Center during last year's Wildlife Discovery Camp.

that is brought to the BRWC tells a story; one of survival, one of human/wildlife conflict, and one of its individual role in our environment.

The staff of the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center love to share these stories. The BRWC has the Ronald M. Bradley Learning Center, our Wildlife Walk and Raptor Observation Deck (soon to be completed), and our education ambassadors to help us. This summer, we are expanding our Wildlife Discovery camp sessions (see page 7) and throughout

the year we offer programs to schools and civic groups in a six-county area. Thousands of children and adults meet our education ambassadors each year; hear from our front line participants in rescue and rehabilitation, and learn about our environment and wildlife.

Your investment in the *Society of Wildlife Guardians* is the single most important thing you can do on a yearly basis to ensure the future of our native wildlife through rescue, rehabilitation and education. The BRWC does not charge for medical and rehabilitation services, and our only steady source of funding is from individual gifts and grants.

We hope you will look to see where you are in your yearly giving and consider joining the *Society of Wildlife Guardians*. An envelope is enclosed with this newsletter for your convenience. To those who are already Society members—thank you for your commitment to our native wildlife!

For further information about the *Society of Wildlife Guardians* or to talk about a future estate gift to ensure the future of the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center, call Franny Crawford, Director of Development, at (540) 550-3057. ■



Photo by Tricia Booker.



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If You Find A Baby Songbird Out Of The Nest

