

The Ridgeline

NEWSLETTER OF THE BLUE RIDGE WILDLIFE CENTER

ISSUE 37

Keeping Wildlife in the Wild

*Spring Peeper ready to take
one giant hop back to the wild.*

Rehab Corner | 2018 Baby Shower | Frog Lifecycle | Wildlife Discovery Camp | Well Wishes to a Wildlife Warrior



Happy Centennial to the MBTA!

In 1918, the US and Canada signed the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) to curb the killing of thousands of birds each year for sport/fun and for their feathers to be used in men's and women's fashion accessories. The Act also came just four years after the last Passenger Pigeon died in captivity. The Passenger Pigeon, a native, migratory bird of North America, was thought to be indestructible because of the very large populations in the mid-19th century, but due to hunting and habitat destruction, it suffered a collapse in numbers near the end of the 19th century. Its population never rebounded.



The Act prohibits the hunting, killing, capturing, possession, sale, transportation and exportation of migratory birds, or any part, nest, or egg of any such bird, except under the terms of a valid permit issued pursuant to Federal regulations. The MBTA has been through many amendments, refining the specific provisions, including bringing three other countries into the Act (Mexico, Japan, and the Soviet Union (now Russia)). More recent changes have relaxed some provisions, making the MBTA less effective at protecting our migratory birds.

I contemplate this Act now as the spring bird survey season begins to take shape. I recall last year, on a bird watching trip with Amy Johnson, that after raising my binoculars to see a distant bird perched in a tree, I commented "oh, it is just a blue jay". She gave me this disgruntled look and followed up with some admonishment to the effect of "every bird is unique and should not be considered just a bird". How right she was. Since that day, I have taken a new perspective on bird watching and appreciate each native bird for its own beauty and contribution to the ecosystem in which humans are a part — no matter how common it may be today.

The time to save a species is while it is still common.
- Rosalie Edge (1877 - 1962), Hawk Mountain Sanctuary

At BRWC, we treat each patient, not just the birds, with care and respect and the strong desire to do what is best for that animal. Our key driver is to get that animal back into the wild so that it can be a contributing member in the food web and breeding population. And, while it may be true that the loss of any one specific animal will not cause the population to crash, we must endeavor to save it.

And, most importantly, we must teach all generations to appreciate all life and its specific role/niche in the ecosystem at large.

I hope you find this issue of *The Ridgeline* interesting and informative and that you endeavor this spring to keep the wild in the wild — for the benefit all species, including humans.

Hillary Russell Davidson



Cover photo by Dr. Jennifer Riley

The Ridgeline

Published by
Blue Ridge Wildlife Center
106 Island Farm Lane | Boyce, Virginia 22620

Wildlife Hotline: 540-837-9000
E-mail: info@blueridgewildlifectr.org
Web: www.blueridgewildlifectr.org

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Lisa Goshen, Chair
Beatrice von Gontard, Vice Chair
Susan Galbraith, Secretary
Mike Morency, Treasurer
Timothy Bates
Tricia Booker
Andy Ferrari
Judy Landes
Russ McKelway
Patricia Robinson

TEAM

Hillary Russell Davidson
Executive Director
hillary@blueridgewildlifectr.org

Dr. Jennifer Riley, DVM
Director of Veterinary Services
drjen@blueridgewildlifectr.org

Jessica Andersen
Rescue and Rehabilitation Associate
jessica@blueridgewildlifectr.org

Jennifer Burghoffer
Education Manager
jennifer@blueridgewildlifectr.org

Cara Masullo
Licensed Veterinary Technician
cara@blueridgewildlifectr.org

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

The Center operates the **Wildlife Hotline at 540-837-9000.**

The Center also presents education programs for people of all ages.

For more information contact education@blueridgewildlifectr.org.

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, Twitter, and Instagram



Designed by Dara Bailey Design
Printed by Winchester Printers

Wild Animals Belong in the Wild

Story and photos by Jennifer Riley, DVM

Spring is the time of year when you are most likely to come across a wild animal baby. Seeing no parent, you assume that this infant is in distress and needs help. But now what do you do?

Luckily, many people know that the answer is to leave the baby where it is and immediately contact their local permitted rehabilitator for advice. If the baby is healthy, the rehabilitator will discuss that animal's natural history with you and likely instruct you to leave it undisturbed. Mom is probably doing well and will return for it. If indicated, they may advise you that it needs to come in for care.

However, for some well-intentioned finders, the thought of locating and contacting a rehabilitator does not cross their mind. The draw of raising a baby wild animal, although illegal, sometimes seems like the most attractive option.

This article will provide those of you with the urge to raise a wild baby to resist that urge! Attempting to raise a wild baby without proper training and licensing is a cruel and often fatal mistake for the animal involved.

BIRDS

Fledglings, birds that are just starting to develop feathers but cannot yet fly, are commonly found on the ground. During that time on the ground, they are at great risk from humans, dogs, cats, and wild predators, but this stage is critical to their development. Their parents are assisting them — helping them find food and evade predators. They use this time to learn about foraging for food and practice flight. Unless the fledgling has an obvious injury, this bird needs no assistance.

Unlike fledglings, hatchlings and nestlings are too young to be out of the nest. They may have been blown out by storms or knocked out by predators. If uninjured, these babies need to be re-nested right away. Please call a rehabilitator for advice in these situations.

Why shouldn't I raise it myself?

• Diets for baby birds vary greatly and can be challenging to replicate at home. A proper diet is critical to their successful development. For example, our educational Red-shouldered Hawk, Lucy, was raised by well-meaning individuals for nearly two months before coming into care. Being fed a diet of chicken and beef caused her bones to grow abnormally and caused permanent medical issues that made her non-releasable. If re-nested at the time or taken to a rehabilitator, Lucy could be flying and living in the wild now.



Lucy, our educational Red-shouldered Hawk.

• Baby birds need to be raised with conspecifics (i.e., birds of the same species) and taught to forage or hunt on their own. These social skills are learned in the nest and will help them survive throughout their lives.

• They may accept food from a human and gape hungrily, but this does not mean they need to be hand fed. Nestlings that cannot forage need to be hand fed by trained individuals to prevent aspiration and other issues that occur with inexperience. Fledglings are old enough to learn to forage. When birds are released without proper foraging skills, they often starve to death.



Eastern Screech Owl fledglings.

• It is illegal to raise native baby birds unless you possess a rehabilitation permit from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) AND a Federal permit from U.S. Fish and Wildlife. In addition to protecting baby birds, the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) also protects the adult birds, nests, and parts such as feathers or eggs. You cannot possess these items without proper permits.

Helpful tips:

• Healthy hatchlings and nestlings should be re-nested so that parents can continue to raise them. Raptors can be more challenging, and you should call the Center or your local permitted rehabilitator for assistance.

• Fledgling birds should be left where they are found. They will only be on the ground for a few days, so if they are in your yard, make sure to keep pets leashed for a few days until the animal is flying on its own. Cats should always be housed indoors for their benefit and for the benefit of wildlife.

• Birds, regardless of age, that are on the ground and not behaving normally may be injured. If you see blood or obvious fractures, please call a rehabilitator right away. If the bird has been in a dog or cat's mouth or attacked by another predator — even if you see no obvious wounds — that animal needs to come in for care.

Renesting Example



If you cannot find or reach the original nest, place nestlings in a make-shift nest. We recommend berry containers as they do not get damaged in the rain and allow for drainage of water. If you use another plastic container, be sure to poke holes in the bottom so the birds do not drown in rain water. Then add straw or other nesting material to the bottom.



The nest DOES NOT have to be as high as the original. Place the nest as high up as you can go on a ladder or as high as you can reach from the ground. Use bungee cords, string, or duct tape to secure the nest to the tree. Once it is secure, ignore the birds! If you stay nearby or watch like a hawk from the window, parents will not come back. If you check the next morning and the babies are still alert, a parent is feeding them. If they look cold and minimally responsive, please call the center for further instructions. If all went well, remember to remove and recycle your nest materials after the birds fledge!



Crow fledgling starting to get it's flight feathers.

- Once a bird has flight feathers instead of down, even if it is a small bird, it is old enough to be on its own. If you see an adult bird on the ground unable to fly away, call a permitted rehabilitator.
- When in doubt, call the Center before intervening!

Raising birds properly to be successful in life requires significant expertise as well as appropriate diets, caging, and socialization. If not raised properly, these animals will have short, unnecessarily difficult lives.

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

Unlike many of the other species we treat, these babies don't get much parental assistance. Once they hatch, they are on their own. Please do not interfere with a wild reptile or amphibian simply because it appears too small to be on its own. If it has hatched, it's big enough! Unless there is an obvious injury, please do not disturb/touch these animals or bring these babies in for care.

If you feel you must intervene because the animal is in harm's way, remember that many of these babies can still bite and could even be carrying diseases. If possible, gloves should be worn to protect the

sensitive skin of amphibians and to protect you from carrying reptile or amphibian diseases home with you. These animals should never be moved further than across the street in the direction they were moving. When these animals are moved, they also move diseases with them. The simple act of catching a frog and releasing it in your backyard pond could cause the decimation of the local population of frogs.

Why shouldn't I keep it as a pet?

- "Head starting" is a term used when a reptile is raised in a protective enclosure and released once it has reached a larger size. There are arguments for and against it when done on a professional level. Given the challenges in providing appropriate husbandry, we never recommend that anyone do this at home.
- Even if the species is native and you know their found location, turtles raised in captivity cannot be released again. DGIF is responsible for the management of wildlife and has very specific regulations about keeping reptiles and amphibians. If an amphibian or reptile is kept in the care of a non-permitted person for greater than 30 days, then that animal can never be released back to the wild.

Feeding an unbalanced diet or not providing appropriate full-spectrum lighting can lead to abnormalities that condemn a wild reptile to a lifetime in captivity. Our wildlife ambassador Quasi, an Eastern Box Turtle, is with us due to this sort of situation. Inappropriate husbandry left Quasi with abnormally shaped bones in her entire body, including the shell. With the hinge of her plastron fused, she cannot "box"



Snapping Turtle hatchling admitted during cold weather event.



Quasi stretching her legs.

herself up. This means she will not have protection against predators if released. Though her legs are malformed, they still allow her to walk without pain and she has no problem eating or moving around her enclosure here at the Center. However, Quasi will never be able to contribute to the genetic pool of our wild population, which is facing numerous human-caused threats.

- Turtles can live a long time — some up to 100 years or more. If you are compelled to have a turtle as a pet, consider adopting an exotic turtle, one which can never be released in the wild (in our area). It is best to leave native turtles in the wild.

MAMMALS

Like most of the baby birds, reptiles, and amphibians that come to the Center, most of the baby mammals are healthy too. In some cases, they can be re-nested or raised here when necessary (See “If You Care Leave Them There” page 9).

Raccoons, skunks, bats, foxes, and groundhogs are considered the primary rabies vector species in our area. ANY mammal, not just the listed rabies vector species, can have rabies. This includes baby squirrels, deer fawns, Virginia Opossums, and YOU!

Though the rabies vector species are the most likely species to be infected, anytime someone has been bitten or scratched by a wild mammal, regardless of its age, or if they have had it in their care for an extended period with the possibility of exposure, we must notify the local Health Department. There are no valid tests for rabies that can be performed on a live,

As a Conservation Police Officer, I have seen wild animals held in captivity as pets. While the person may have good intentions in “raising” the animal, it most often has detrimental consequences. In Virginia, it is illegal to hold any wild animal (except certain species of reptiles and amphibians) in captivity. Wild animals may carry diseases and all mammals can contract rabies which is fatal if left untreated. If you see a wild animal that you think may be injured or abandoned, leave it alone and contact a licensed wildlife rehabilitator for guidance; refer to the Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries website at www.dgif.virginia.gov for listings. Human imprinting on wild animals can cause them to lose their natural fear of humans. Wild animals that associate people with food is a dangerous combination and regulations prohibit the feeding of certain wildlife. I see more fawns raised as pets than other wildlife species. As the deer gets older, their antlers and/or hooves can injure or even kill people. If you see a wild animal that you feel is abandoned or injured and you want to help that animal, contact a licensed rehabilitator and let’s keep the “wild” in wildlife!

Sgt. Carl Martin
Virginia Conservation Police
VA Dept. of Game & Inland Fisheries



wild animal. With something as important as a human rabies exposure, human safety is and must be the top priority. In situations where the Health Department deems it necessary, these animals are euthanized by our veterinary staff in accordance with the law for the Health Department to conduct the required testing.

As you can imagine, euthanizing a visibly healthy animal is very hard on our staff, the Health Department staff, local law enforcement involved in the individual

case, and the well-intentioned finders. It is frustrating for everyone involved and very sad for the animal in question. Had these orphans been brought to the attention of a permitted rehabilitator immediately, before there was any potential for exposure, these patients would still be alive and could have been released. Though few of these animals are suspected to be rabid, we must follow the direction of the local health departments in order to make sure humans are safe.



Baby Red Fox kit being handled by a permitted rehabilitator.



Baby Eastern Cottontail after a cat attack.

Baby, You Were Born to Run! Or Maybe Not...



The development strategy of the young of all species can generally be considered either precocial or altricial. Precocial young are those that are sighted and mobile at hatching/birth or shortly thereafter. Examples of precocial bird species are ducks, geese, and turkeys. Precocial mammals include deer, horses, and cows. Reptiles and amphibians are precocial.

Altricial young are those that are not sighted nor mobile at hatching/birth. All passerines (perching birds) are altricial. Examples of altricial mammals are foxes, rabbits, and opossums.



Understanding the development of our native species is important for proper care and return to the wild. *Photos by Dr. Jennifer Riley*

In addition to legal issues, wild mammals make terrible pets. Cute babies can grow into destructive and potentially violent adults. Even if their behavior is manageable, their risk for disease spread is significant.

Sadly, many people illegally raise squirrels or other small mammals as pets, then release them when they get “big enough”. What they don’t realize is that without proper training (foraging, hunting, life skills) and without knowledge of how to communicate with others of their species, these animals will become prey quickly, or worse, starve to death over time. It is not humane to release hand-raised babies that have not had proper training for survival in the wild.

So, what should you do if you find a baby mammal?

- Any baby mammal that is bleeding, bruised, or has a known history of being in a pet’s mouth needs care. Please do not handle these animals yourself — especially rabies vector species. Call a rehabilitator right away.

- If your pet catches a rabies vector species, be sure to follow up with your veterinarian. Pets may need rabies vaccinations or boosters after an interaction with wild mammals.

- For some mammals including Eastern Cottontails, Eastern Gray Squirrels, and others, healthy animals should be left alone or re-nested. See our article “If You Care, Leave Them There” on page 9.

- Virginia Opossums are an exception. Most of the opossum babies we raise are true orphans, found still attached to their dead mother on the side of the road. In cases where the mother gets into a fight and flees, babies are often dropped. Un-

like other mammals, mother opossums are unlikely to return for a baby that has fallen off, so a baby found alone may need care. Young opossums become fully independent when they are still quite small. If the opossum’s body is 6-8” long and the animal weighs half a pound or so, these youngsters are old enough to be on their own. If you are having trouble determining size/weight or just want more information, please call the Center before intervening.

- For any rabies vector species, attempting to reunite with mom is the best option for healthy babies. Please leave these babies alone. If they are hurt or in danger, please call the Center for further assistance. **DO NOT** handle these babies on your own!

Human safety must always be the highest priority. Never put yourself in a dangerous situation with wildlife. If you see a friend or family member has taken in a wild animal and is attempting to raise it, speak up. Remind them that in addition to being illegal, this attempt at care could cause the animal’s death. When it comes to wild babies, leaving them alone is generally the best option. Re-nest or reunite with mom when possible and call a rehabilitator when necessary for truly orphaned or injured babies. Please remember that each case, regardless of species, is unique. We recommend contacting the Center with specific concerns. ■

~ Save the Date! ~ 

BLUE RIDGE WILDLIFE CENTER INVITES YOU TO

BORN to be WILDLife

2018  Gala

• A GALA TO BENEFIT OUR NATIVE WILDLIFE •

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 29

LOCKSLEY MANOR • MILLWOOD, VIRGINIA

Be prepared for a night of beautiful landscapes, wildlife surprises, local food and live music.
More than the animals will be wild!

For more information, contact Hillary Davidson at hillary@blueridgewildlifectr.org

Interesting Cases Rehab + Corner

Stories and photos by Jessica Andersen



BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle alcyon*)

This female Belted Kingfisher came to the Center with a wing injury after it was found beneath the Route 7 bridge at the boat ramp of the Shenandoah River. After a few days of hand-feeding, she began eating voraciously on her own. Her injury was soft-tissue, and we are hopeful with time she will recover fully to be released.

Fun fact: Belted Kingfishers are one of few bird species where the female is more colorful than the male; females have both a gray-blue band and a chestnut band across their front, whereas the males only have the gray-blue. ■



SPRING PEEPER (*Pseudacris crucifer*)

Meet our tiniest patient yet! This 1.5g Spring Peeper, found on the property by one of our volunteers, had a broken femur. This patient was much too small for any sort of pin or fixator to stabilize the bone, and a bandage would require this amphibian to stay dry, which would compromise its overall health. With a little creativity and compromise, our veterinarian applied

sutures from the leg to the body wall to prevent movement in the leg, thereby stabilizing the fracture while allowing the frog to stay in a moist environment and soak multiple times a day in an antibiotic solution. Pain medication had to be diluted to be dosed out in the smallest amounts! This patient was released on May 1, the earliest annual date that an amphibian can be released, according to the DGIF. ■

GUNSHOT VICTIMS



While many of our wildlife patients come in to our Center as a result of non-intentional trauma, some of our wildlife are harmed more deliberately.

Four patients came in for care recently, all of whom were shown to have suffered from gunshots with pellets still embedded in their bodies. Out of these four, only one was fortunate enough to survive its injuries. The **Red-tailed Hawk** (*Buteo jamaicensis*), who was successfully released, had been shot without any bone damage done. The hawk came in displaying head trauma, and it wasn't until we took radiographs that we saw the pellet lodged near its shoulder blade. Most likely the bird had been shot while flying, causing it to fall and sustain injury to its head. Thankfully, no other damage was caused, which statistically is very rare in gunshot patients we receive. The other two hawks and the opossum that came in for care had to be compassionately euthanized due to the severity of their injuries; all four patients were reported as wildlife crimes to the DGIF to be investigated by Conservation Police Officers. ■



VIRGINIA OPOSSUM **WITH SKULL FRACTURE** (*Didelphis virginiana*)



Humans often misunderstand animals and react poorly in their presence, such as with this Virginia Opossum. This opossum was meandering near a gentle-

man's house when he, reacting out of fear, struck the opossum with a broom handle, fracturing its skull. The attack also caused the left eye to rupture and it is now no longer functional, but the right eye is still visual. This opossum was given pain medications and soft foods for the first few weeks while his injuries healed, then transitioned onto a harder, more natural diet before being acclimated to the outside and subsequently being released! As with other recent cases, this opossum's incident was brought to the attention of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. While we may not personally enjoy every wild animal that we share the world with, we should at least respect them and their role in their environment. ■



**GREAT HORNED OWL
FIGHTING FOR ITS TERRITORY**
(*Bubo virginianus*)

Early winter is when owls and eagles are beginning to fight for territory and find their mates, and this Great Horned Owl was no exception. She was found down and unable to fly, with multiple puncture wounds and lacerations along her chest and shoulder, indicative of an animal attack, most likely by a rival Great Horned Owl in the area. She suffered from infection in the puncture wounds, as well as damage dangerously close to the bone and nerve of the wing closest to the injury. Even with these injuries, she was fiercely aggressive towards us, and had to be sedated once a day for bandage changes and medication to prevent undue stress on herself and to keep both our patient and our staff safe while handling her. It took several months for her wounds to finally heal, as is visible in the collage, but this owl was more than willing to fight for her recovery. ■



SHARP-SHINNED HAWK
(*Accipiter striatus*)

Many people view their bird-feeders as providers of food for native passerines, such as the Northern Cardinal or Eastern Bluebird, but hawks view them as a food source as well! This Sharp-shinned Hawk was brought to the Center after it had been trapped inside of a Lowes store and struck a window trying to escape. Often these hawks, and others like Cooper's Hawks, are attracted to areas where many songbirds gather, such as at birdfeeders or in large open warehouses where sparrows and pigeons find shelter. However, hawks that feed on birds are also at risk of contracting other bird diseases, such as trichomoniasis, like this Sharp-shinned Hawk had. Also known as trich, this disease causes plaque growths inside a bird's mouth, which can lead to painful sores, infection, and ultimately death, as trich makes it difficult for the bird to swallow food. ■



EASTERN BOX TURTLE
(*Terrapene carolina carolina*)

This patient was our first Eastern Box Turtle fracture case of 2018! Though 95% of our box turtle fractures are caused by vehicle strikes as the patient crosses a road, about 3% are caused by landscaping accidents. This patient was hibernating when a Bobcat tractor crushed her carapace. This resulted in a 11-piece fracture! Luckily the many fractures did not cross the spine (which can cause paralysis), nor did they enter the body cavity (which greatly increases the risk of infection).

With anesthesia and pain medications, our veterinarian was able to realign the fracture segments and pull the pieces together. To achieve this stabilization, we use hook and eye closures that are stuck to the shell using epoxy. Once the epoxy has dried, suture is used to "stitch" the hooks together. Shells are made of bone and these bone fractures take much longer to heal in reptiles than birds or mammals. At this time, this patient has been in care for nearly three months and the fracture is almost completely healed. She will be ready for release in the next few weeks! ■

Become a Transporter

Are you interested in helping BRWC, but cannot commit to a regular volunteer schedule? Consider becoming a transporter! Due to the small number of wildlife hospitals in the state, we get animals from all over the Commonwealth of Virginia. Getting those patients to the Center quickly can literally be a life saver!

There is no required time commitment for transporters — we will simply call you when there is an animal that needs transport from your area. You are never obligated to transport and can always say NO if it does not fit into your schedule that day. Transporters cannot handle animals, so you will never be put in a dangerous situation trying to capture anything. This type of volunteer work only entails moving a box or crate between the found location and our Center.

We always welcome new transporters from anywhere in Virginia, but the need is greatest in Fairfax, Prince William, Shenandoah, Stafford, and Culpeper Counties. Call us today if you are interested in being a transporter! *Photo by Dr. Jennifer Riley*



If You Care, Leave Them There

By Jessica Andersen

Most permitted wildlife rehabilitators, and those that work closely with them, are familiar with a phrase; “if you care, leave them there.” This phrase refers to people who are concerned with a young animal’s welfare and may take inappropriate action when coming upon a baby animal. There are a few species that you should keep in mind when it comes to whether they need to be rescued.

Always use gloves, towels, and other personal protective equipment when dealing with wildlife and never touch directly to minimize disease transmission.

1. Squirrels: Squirrels build their nests out of hollowed-out trees or loose piles of leaves tucked into the branches. During strong storms or tree-trimming, these babies can be displaced from their nests. However, most squirrel mothers have multiple nesting sites, and if still in the area, she will attempt to move her babies to a new location. If you find healthy baby squirrels out of the nest, you can attempt to reunite them by following these steps:

- Place the babies in a box with a towel or blanket to keep them warm. If it is cold out, heat up a plastic water bottle until it is warm to the touch and place under the blankets to keep the babies warm.
- During the day, place the box at the base of the tree they fell from or the closest tree to their destroyed nest. When mom returns to look for them, she will go to the area in which she left them, and radiate out from there, listening for their cries.
- Healthy, warm babies can go 24-48 hours without food or water safely. Babies should be left out for the entirety of the day they were originally found. If they are still there at the end of the day, contact the Center or a wildlife rehabilitator for further guidance.



Example of a cottontail’s den with warm, healthy babies cuddled up.

2. Eastern Cottontails: Cottontail mothers reproduce every 4-5 weeks during the spring and summer months. They make their nests out of small depressions in the ground, often covered over by grass and other foliage. Mom does not stay with her babies so as not to attract predators to them. She visits her nest twice a day to feed her young and they remain quiet while she is not around. Often people become distressed when they find a nest of cottontails alone and cannot see an adult in the immediate area, assuming they have been abandoned. Here are a few ways to see if cottontails need help, and how to keep them safe in your yard:

- Are the babies warm, quiet, and snuggled in their nest? If so, these are happy, cared for babies. The best way to determine if mom is caring for your young is by the demeanor and health of the babies. Babies that are cold to the touch, dispersed outside of their nest at too young of an age, or have visible injuries, are bunnies that need help.

- Keep your pets inside or on a leash, or isolated to a separate area of the yard while babies are growing. Baby cottontails do not open their eyes until they are four to five weeks old. They only need another week to two before they leave the nest or can be moved to a safer area of your yard. Using a laundry basket with adult-rabbit-sized holes, large-hole garden netting, or even a weighted cardboard box with a hole large enough for mom can also protect the nest from pets while allowing mom to continue to care for them.

- Rabbits of all ages are especially high-stress and delicate patients while in captivity. Their survival rate is much better with their own mother than it is under the best circumstances in rehabilitation. This is especially important to keep in mind if you find a bunny that is actually in need; that animal needs to be brought to a professional as soon as possible to reduce the amount of time it is kept in captivity and minimize the overall stress it must endure.

- If you mow or weedwhack the grass that is covering a bunny nest, you can cover that nest with grass trimmings, leaves, or other natural material to keep the bunnies hidden and shaded from the sun. Your scent will not keep the mother from returning.

3. White-tailed Deer: We often get phone calls from concerned citizens after they’ve found a fawn and, like cottontails, they cannot see a mother in the immediate area. White-tailed deer leave their babies for hours at a time, just like rabbits, so as not to draw predators to them when they are too young to outrun them. Does are extremely good at staying hidden as well, and while you may not see a doe in the immediate area, that does not mean she is not nearby. If you find a fawn, these are some things to keep in mind:

- Is the fawn laying quietly without injury with its legs comfortably folded up underneath of it? If so, that baby is content and hiding. You may even be able to walk right up to it without it moving; instinct tells this baby that as long as it stays quiet and still, it will be hidden to a predator like a coyote or fox. Leave that baby alone for its mother to return.

- If a fawn is running around and crying, it is still in its best interest to be left alone for a few more hours. Even if mom is not in the area, if another mother doe is nearby and hears a crying baby, she may come and adopt the baby as her own. As long as the baby is uninjured and is bright and alert, it should be left to cry to get the attention of an adult deer in the area.

- Just like cottontails, keep pets away from areas where fawns are known to be. A doe may not approach her baby if she thinks she is at risk of attracting a predator, such as your dog in the yard.

- In Clarke, Shenandoah, Frederick, and Warren counties, fawns are not allowed to be rehabilitated or moved outside those counties due to the presence of Chronic Wasting Disease. This disease is extremely contagious and once it is present in an area, it cannot be eradicated. To prevent the spread to other counties and infecting other deer populations, fawns found in these counties must be either be left alone for a mother doe to return, or be euthanized.

4. Rabies Vector Species (RVS):

Raccoons, foxes, bats, groundhogs, and skunks are all rabies vector species (RVS) that can potentially be reunited with their mothers if healthy babies are found alone. In most instances, except for bats, most rabies vector species babies should be left alone and given time for mom to return for them. Many of these species actively transport their babies from den to den, and so finding one or two alone may be indicative that mom is in the process of moving them. This process can take a day or two,

depending on how often people are in the area, and so it is best to leave a baby for as long as is recommended by a rehabilitator to give mom plenty of time to return for them. NEVER handle a RVS with bare hands or attempt to feed them, as this can lead to the animal's unnecessary death if a rabies exposure is suspected. Always call the Center for advice on how to re-nest or reunite RVS babies to prevent possible exposure and maintain safety for all involved. ■



Well Wishes to a Wildlife Warrior



Heather Sparks, Manager of Rehabilitation, has decided to leave the Center and start the next chapter of her life. Though we are sad to lose her, we are excited for her as she pursues new opportunities and we know that she will be back regularly as a volunteer.

Heather's career at BRWC had humble beginnings — fresh out of college after service in the military, she began as a volunteer in early 2010. She transitioned to a full-time intern in the spring and proved to be a valuable member of the team. Impressed with her work ethic and commitment, she was offered a full-time, paid position that summer.

During her time at the Center, Heather has been a dedicated wildlife warrior. She has aided in the rescue, rehabilitation, and release of over 12,000 native wild animals. She was instrumental in improving the Center's volunteer and internship programs and had a role in providing educational presentations to over 3,000 children and adults each year.

Her devotion to the Center and wildlife is clear to all who meet her. Heather's passion for wildlife could be seen in the long days that she spent working tirelessly to care for the Center's patients and Wildlife Ambassadors. The staff, Board, and volunteers of BRWC wish her luck in pursuing her new passion.

The Lifecycle of a Frog

Story by Jennifer Burghoffer

As spring approaches, the baby season begins! Baby birds begin to hatch and young mammals are born in dens and nests. In our wetlands and ponds, a very different kind of cycle is occurring. In Virginia, we have greater than two dozen species of frogs and toads. Between 40-50% of the world's frog species are facing the threat of extinction, primarily due to habitat loss and disease. We need to protect these animals as they provide free pest control and provide a food source for other animals.

Amphibians, including frogs and toads, reproduce by laying eggs. Their young spend the first few months of their lives living as fully aquatic animals before undergoing a process called *metamorphosis* to change into their adult form. This lifestyle that includes time on land and time in water makes amphibians excellent indicators of water quality and environmental health. As the frogs decline, so does our environment.

In Virginia, some of our frog species, such as Spring Peepers and Wood Frogs, begin mating as early as January! Others, such as the American Bullfrog, start breeding much later in the spring and summer. These amphibians can lay hundreds to thousands of eggs at a time; frogs lay their eggs in clumped up batches, while toads will lay long strings. After the females lay the eggs in a moist environment like a pond, the male will fertilize the eggs from the outside.

After a few days to a month, the eggs hatch, and the tadpoles emerge. Small and weak, the young stay in large groups close to pond vegetation, attaching themselves to the plants until they become strong enough to swim. They are born with gills and a tail, and feed by filtering nutrients or algae from the water. After a month, the gills begin to get covered over by skin, and the tadpole start to glean oxygen from food sources. In the next few weeks, the back legs begin to form, then the front. During this period, regeneration of the tail and legs is possible if an accident occurs.

After a few more weeks, the young look like miniature frogs, with a tail. The tail begins to disappear until it is just a stump. The gills are covered completely, and the long tongue these creatures are known for develops fully. By just four months, the process is completed, from egg to adult frog. In some cases, tadpoles may spend the whole winter developing before completing the process and emerging as adults in the spring.

The success of amphibian populations depends on the health of our environment, especially our water sources. Harsh chemicals like pesticides can leech into small ponds decimating amphibian populations. Diseases can easily be transferred between ponds, often killing all of the tadpoles, which are at increased susceptibility at their stage of development. Never move an amphibian to a new pond and always be sure to clean your hands and boots between ponds when you're out exploring. Try to avoid touching amphibians with your

bare hands and always wash your hands between animals if you do. Our frogs are a precious resource and understanding their life cycle helps us understand how to protect them! If you're interested in helping with citizen science projects involving frogs in Virginia, check out the Virginia Frog and Toad Calling Survey, which is run in partnership with our state wildlife agency, the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries at <https://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/frogsurvey/>. ■



2018 Wildlife Discovery Summer Camp at BRWC



Enrollment is now open for BRWC's 2018 Wildlife Discovery Camp! Each week-long session features unique topics, activities, projects with hands-on learning, and appearances from our Wildlife Ambassadors. Come explore the woods around the Center while learning about birds and the mechanics of flight; insects and their life cycles; tracks, signs, and animal communication; and much more! Join BRWC staff to discover what wildlife rehabilitation is and participate in a mock rehabilitation case, from intake to release, with

the veterinarian. For more information on topics, dates, and a registration form, please visit our website (blueridgewildlifectr.org under Outreach), or email the education department education@blueridgewildlifectr.org. Bring out your wild side this summer with BRWC!

Social Media



If you enjoyed the stories found in this newsletter, don't forget to like our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/BlueRidgeWildlifeCtr/>) where we share stories about the Center, interesting patients, and educational information. You can also find us on Instagram @BlueRidgeWildlifeCtr for more pictures and videos about our patients and daily life at the Center.

BRWC HOTLINE: 540.837.9000 | www.blueridgewildlifectr.org | info@blueridgewildlifectr.org



• EIGHTH ANNUAL •

BRWC Baby Shower!

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



Mark your calendar and save the date for our 8th Annual Baby Shower! Held once again at the Long Branch Historic House and Farm in Boyce, Virginia, this event will take place Sunday, June 3rd from 12:00-3:00 p.m. Join the staff of BRWC to learn how we raise over 1,000 wild orphans each year, from the smallest baby songbirds to fox and raccoon kits! The event will also feature appearances from our Wildlife Ambassadors, a raffle, games and activities for the kids, face-painting, and more. Food will be available from several vendors. This event is free — we only ask that you bring a “shower gift” — much-needed items from the Center’s wish list (blueridgewildlifectr.org under How To Help). For more information and directions to Long Branch, please visit our Facebook Event page or call the Center.



TAIL END