

# The Ridgeline

PUBLICATION OF BLUE RIDGE WILDLIFE CENTER

ISSUE 46



## Wildlife Rehabilitation During a Pandemic

*This Eastern Cottontail was released in Clarke County after recovering from cat attack wounds.*

One Health | Vulture Volunteering | Supporter Spotlight | Rehab Corner | Training Opportunities

# Growing a Membership Program



2020 not only marks the 20th year for Blue Ridge Wildlife Center, but also the 16th year for *The Ridgeline*. That's right, *The Ridgeline* had its humble beginning in the winter of 2004, just shortly after moving into the old cottage on the Burwell van-Lennep Foundation property. Early on, it was a four to eight page, black and white mailing that was distributed to fewer than 1,000 households.

We have seen a lot of change and growth since our humble beginnings. We admitted 370 patients in all of 2005 and we admitted 2,020 patients in the first seven months of 2020. *The Ridgeline* gets distributed to over 7,000 households today. Since 2004, *The Ridgeline* has been distributed freely to BRWC supporters and finders of wildlife to help educate the public on human-wildlife interactions and what to do in wildlife emergencies.

COVID-19 has caused a lot of change for everyone! For BRWC specifically, it has changed how we receive animal finders and perform patient intake, how we interact with each other within the hospital, and how we interact with the public at local events. We have had to cancel our annual gala, our largest event to raise the funds necessary to operate the Center.

All of these changes have had an impact on our income. One of the largest expenses of our Education Program is the distribution of *The Ridgeline*. You have told us that it is an informative and worthwhile publication, so we certainly do not want to stop producing it. To help us offset the costs, we are establishing a membership program, beginning with the fiscal year starting July 1. **Everyone who gives a gift of \$40 or more (after July 1, 2020) will receive four issues of *The Ridgeline*. If you make a donation of \$1,000 or more, you will also receive an exclusive gift with your membership!**

I hope that you feel as strongly as we do about *The Ridgeline*. If you wish to continue receiving this publication for the next year, please donate a minimum of \$40—either by using the attached envelope or going to our website to donate. Please include your current US mailing address.

Wishing you good health,



Hillary Russell Davidson



## 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](mailto:info@blueridgewildlifectr.org)  
Web: [www.blueridgewildlifectr.org](http://www.blueridgewildlifectr.org)

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Beatrice von Gontard, *Chair*  
Russ McKelway, *Vice Chair*  
Susan Galbraith, *Secretary*  
Amy Moore, *Treasurer*  
Patricia Carter  
Andy Ferrari  
Mark Merrill  
J. Carter Wiley

### TEAM

Hillary Russell Davidson  
Executive Director  
[hillary@blueridgewildlifectr.org](mailto:hillary@blueridgewildlifectr.org)

Jennifer Riley, DVM  
Director of Veterinary Services  
[drjen@blueridgewildlifectr.org](mailto:drjen@blueridgewildlifectr.org)

Jessica Andersen  
Rehabilitation Program Manager  
[jessica@blueridgewildlifectr.org](mailto:jessica@blueridgewildlifectr.org)

Jennifer Burghoffer  
Education Manager  
[jennifer@blueridgewildlifectr.org](mailto:jennifer@blueridgewildlifectr.org)

Keith Davis  
Operations Coordinator  
[keith@blueridgewildlifectr.org](mailto:keith@blueridgewildlifectr.org)

Cara Masullo, LVT  
Licensed Veterinary Technician  
[cara@blueridgewildlifectr.org](mailto: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.

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

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

### FOLLOW US



Newsletter designed by Dara Bailey Design

Cover photo by Michael Oak.



# One Health in Action

By Jen Riley, DVM

We frequently talk about One Health in this publication, in our education programs, and on our social media posts, but this year, everyone has experienced the importance of One Health firsthand. Coronaviruses are quite common across a wide variety of species and in 2020, the world has been dealing with a coronavirus that jumped from wild animals to humans. We know this pandemic has caused you to change many aspects of your routine and the Center has made changes as well. We hope that everyone can use this pandemic as a learning opportunity to understand the importance of One Health and to help us better prevent and manage pandemics in the future.

## Working Safely During a Pandemic

COVID-19 has certainly had an impact on the Center, but as always, we are here to help wildlife in need by providing the highest quality veterinary and rehabilitative care.

Since mid-March, our state-of-the-art wildlife hospital has been using new patient admission protocols. Finders no longer enter the building to drop off patients and fill out paperwork. All necessary information is collected over the phone and animals are placed outside our door for a staff member to bring inside. This limits exposure to both the public and our staff/volunteers. Best practices are followed inside the hospital as well, with staff and volunteers wearing facemasks, social distancing as much as possible, frequently disinfecting surfaces, and wearing gloves/hand-washing regularly. Beginning in March, volunteers were asked to stay home short-term and assist with activities like transportation and food/supply pick-ups. The Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR, formerly VDGI) put an emergency regulation change in place allowing subpermittees at facilities like ours to take

some healthy babies home for rehabilitation to keep volunteers out of centers as much as possible (See the **Supporter Spotlight** on page 6 to learn more about this temporary regulation change and the volunteers that have been assisting).

Starting in June, we began a phased process to get volunteers back into the facility. Our most experienced volunteers came back first to help with our ever-increasing patient load—we often had as many as 200 patients in care at any given time, a number that holds through most of the summer. Next came some of our newer volunteers and finally summer interns and veterinary students. All staff/volunteers/interns are required to do temperature checks each morning and anyone with a significantly elevated temperature or anyone feeling unwell must go home. We are doing everything we can to keep our workforce as strong and healthy as possible during these uncertain times.

## Patient Admissions

With more people staying home and more people working flexible schedules that allow them time to transport animals in need, we have seen a dramatic increase in patients. By the end of July 2020, we had taken in over 2,000 patients—more than we admitted in the first full year in our new hospital just four years ago! With nearly 20% admission increases each year (and a nearly 30% admission increase this year over the same period in 2019), we are working extremely hard to provide the best care possible for our patients.

Our front desk staff is taking over 150 phone calls each day. Most calls only require advice, not necessarily admission into the hospital. **We appreciate the patience and understanding callers have had during this unprecedentedly busy time.** Given the small number of individuals available to answer calls please remember



Staff tube-feeding a lead poisoned eagle with a critical care diet. Photo by Cara Masullo.

to leave a message if we are not able to pick up your call immediately. Be sure to leave your name, location, and details about your wildlife situation. We check voicemails throughout the day and after hours and will call you back as soon as possible.

## Using COVID-19 To Better Understand One Health

The novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2 or COVID-19, demonstrates the importance of the One Health approach that we emphasize at the Center. This virus is thought to have spilled over from bats, either directly or after adaptation to another wild species. At the time of this publication, there is no evidence that bats in the U.S. can carry this virus. Though spillover from animals is not at all uncommon (think of diseases like HIV, Ebola, Lyme Disease, SARS, West Nile Virus, etc.), our current situation has made people think more about the interconnectedness between human and animal health.

Historically, the fields of human, veteri-

nary, and environmental health have been relatively independent, though the interconnectedness has long been apparent. As our human population continues to expand, the effects of this interconnectivity will continue to cause more and more health threats to all involved. Improving how we work together across these related fields will improve our ability to anticipate and avoid pandemics in the future.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), **scientists estimate that six in ten infectious diseases can spread between people and animals and that three in four emerging infectious diseases in people come from animals.** This can be through direct contact with animals, contact with areas where animals live or have contaminated surfaces, vector-borne routes of transmission (e.g. ticks, mosquitoes), or through contaminated food or water.

Now that COVID-19 is a global pandemic, we see examples of professionals from different backgrounds working together to find solutions. Veterinarians are testing pets and captive wildlife/zoo animals for diagnostic purposes and to learn more about which animals are susceptible to this novel virus. Veterinary knowledge of animal coronaviruses and associated treatments has been used to assist with recommendations for human



Our veterinary team routinely takes blood on patients, like this Double-crested Cormorant, to look for antibodies to diseases that may cause illness in humans or our livestock. We work with universities and other researchers to get the samples we collect tested. *Photo by Jessica Andersen.*

treatment studies. Health professionals are working with ecologists and biologists to learn more about where this virus came from and how we can manage it. Scientists are studying our native bats to look into the possibility of humans spreading SARS-CoV-2 to bats in the U.S. (*Bats and*

*COVID, 2020, <https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/bats-and-covid>). Officials are beginning to recognize that diseases like this are a One Health issue and the human medical field cannot stand alone to solve the problem. We must invest more in One Health to protect ourselves and our environment in the future.*



### Wildlife Hospitals and One Health

Wildlife hospitals like BRWC are constantly working within a One Health framework. Every one of the 2,000+ patients we treat can help us better understand the health threats to our native wildlife and to our own species. Our patient exam results, diagnostics, and treatment plans are meticulously logged in our medical record system so that we can regularly look into the data compiled and focus on possible concerns. For example, when we see large numbers of West Nile Virus cases in our birds, increased human cases are often seen in the same year as both are dependent upon mosquito populations and virus prevalence. We work closely with our state wildlife agency and local health departments to share this information. When humans are exposed to potentially rabid animals, we work with



our local health departments, as required by our permits, to determine if testing is necessary to protect public health. Wildlife hospitals are on the front lines, monitoring for emerging diseases that may impact humans, such as avian influenza, or diseases like Newcastle Disease Virus that may impact poultry and agriculture. Our staff includes both veterinary professionals and biologists who are specially trained to be on the look-out for such outbreaks. Our Board of Directors also includes human medical professionals who have a deep understanding of One Health and how the Center can assist in public health.

Blue Ridge Wildlife Center is heavily engaged in One Health research, focusing on diseases and issues that affect both humans and animals. We are involved in long-term studies relating to ticks and tick-borne diseases through Virginia Tech and Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study. We also work with Virginia Tech on viral prevalence studies, including La Crosse virus in squirrels and St. Louis encephalitis virus in raptors. Aside from infectious diseases, we routinely test blood lead levels in-house. Lead certainly affects our scavengers, but it is also an issue in humans, especially those eating game meat shot with lead-containing ammunition. Ultimately, anything that affects the health of our wildlife affects humans. We all share the same planet!

### Looking Forward

The current pandemic should serve as a warning to people that we must all focus more on One Health in the future. Human population growth, habitat destruction, ecological disturbances, and other human activities increase the frequency of human-wildlife interactions. This increased level of contact increases the chances of exposure to animal viruses. Our expansion has pushed our species into areas where certain diseases would have naturally stayed confined and our behaviors put us and the wildlife at even greater risk. Making the environment and its protection a priority will be essential to preventing more severe pandemics in the future. We hope that individuals and governments will take the lesson of COVID-19 to heart and continue to support One Health endeavors for our future. ■

## The Impact of Outdoor Cats

### One Hospital, One Month, One Photo

This summer, we decided to do our own month-long version of WildCare's "Caught by Cats" photo project to show the damage that domestic cats cause to our wildlife when humans allow cats to roam. Every animal in this photograph died or was euthanized due to damage caused in an altercation with a domestic cat in the month of June.



In June, we took in 531 patients. Of those, 77 were confirmed cat attacks (many more were suspected cat attacks—though no one saw a cat with the animal, its injuries were the types classically caused by cats). The CONFIRMED cat attacks accounted for nearly 15% of intakes—on par with our annual average.

Of those 77, only 17 survived their injuries. Even with surgical intervention and antibiotics, only about one in four cat attack patients will survive. This means 60 cat-attack patients in June still lost their lives due to a completely preventable human-caused issue despite receiving the best possible medical care.

We want to stress that this is not a "cat" problem—this is a HUMAN problem. Humans have allowed domestic cats to roam and continue to allow their pet cats outdoors to kill wildlife, spread diseases, and struggle to survive. Cats are a domestic species, not a native predator, like our local bobcats, foxes, and birds of prey. They require human care and leaving them outdoors to suffer is an animal welfare issue. Outdoors, these domestic cats are at great risk from predators, poisons, gunshots, vehicle collisions, weather, and disease. It is a situation that is unfair to both domestic cats and wildlife. This is not the same as a native predator controlling native prey populations. The killing of these native wild animals is not "the circle of life", it is human interference in ecologically appropriate predator-prey interactions which greatly shifts the natural balance. Adding domestic cats to the environment does NOT replace native predators as many people believe. In fact, the loss of prey species and spread of disease negatively impacts our native predators.

Please, for the safety of both your cat AND our native wildlife, keep your pet cats inside. Provide them with enrichment indoors, take them for walks on a leash, or build them a catio or enclosed porch so they can safely enjoy the outdoors.

The destruction of wildlife and the environment by domestic cats is a human-caused issue that will require large-scale management to improve. We must all do our part to help cats and native wildlife.

# Vulture Rescue, Rehabilitation, and Captive Breeding in South Africa

By Heather Shank-Givens

**When** I told people that I was heading off to volunteer for two months in South Africa many assumed I was doing mission work, building a hospital, or saving the elephants. When I shared that I was going to Africa to work with vultures, I received more than a few confused looks and a lot of “Really? Vultures?”

Vultures are not among the charismatic “big five” of Africa. Most people hardly even think about the possibility that they could be endangered (in reality over 50% of the world’s vultures are endangered or critically endangered). They are often considered to be “ugly” and “gross.” I think vultures are extraordinary.

I love the unloved and misunderstood creatures. And I love vultures especially for their unique role in transitioning death to life (I also work in Organ and Tissue Donation—so there is a theme in my life). They are one of the few creatures that that can live and sustain themselves and “do no harm” to others.

I’ve been incredibly lucky over the past couple of years to have personal experience working with some of our New World vultures (those found in the Americas) after obtaining my state and federal permits to keep non-releasable vultures as wildlife educational ambassadors. My first vulture, Gryphon, was a Black Vulture, and my current vulture, Vega, is a Turkey Vulture.

While researching about vultures for my education programs, I discovered that the leading vulture conservation program in South Africa—VulPro—took on international volunteers. I realized then I needed to travel there and work in the frontlines of conservation for African vultures. Lucky to have a spouse that would stay home and take care of a menagerie of pets, a wonderful wildlife center (thank you, BRWC!) that would temporarily house and care for Vega, and a supportive and

encouraging family—I headed for VulPro in January 2020 for a two-month volunteer stay.

## VulPro

The Vulture Conservation Programme i.e. VulPro was founded in 2007 and their captive breeding program was established in 2011. VulPro is one of the foremost organizations providing an integrated, multidisciplinary approach to protecting endangered African vultures. The program includes rescue, rehabilitation, captive breeding and reintroduction, monitoring of wild breeding colonies, education and outreach, research, and satellite tracking. The VulPro team rescues vultures from all over South Africa, providing medical care and rehabilitation for release when at all possible. For birds unable to be released, VulPro has facilities for these birds to remain as resident colonies on site. VulPro is South Africa’s only Cape Vulture captive breeding program for release to the wild.

VulPro currently has a resident population of non-releasable African White Backed (AWB) Vultures, a breeding colony of Cape Vultures, another resident colony of Cape and AWB vultures who can’t be released due to injuries and amputations, and several pairs of Lappet Faced, White Headed and Palm Nut vultures. There are also some other residents who came to VulPro from other facilities who needed to relocate birds or from rescues/confiscations from the wildlife trade—a fish eagle, a black vulture, a king vulture, and Andean condors.

All vultures that come into VulPro are tagged (numbered leg bands) and all captive bred birds are fitted with satellite trackers when they are released. VulPro staff conduct daily monitoring of all tracked birds to see their movements as well as identify if there are problems (e.g. noting a bird who has been in the same



Heather Shank-Givens volunteers at the leading vulture conservation program, VulPro, located in South Africa. Photo courtesy of Heather Shank-Givens.

location for several days will get a team sent out to check on the bird and possibly retrieve it).

## Day in the life

So, what does one do as a volunteer at VulPro? Work at the center varies throughout the seasons. Summer/Fall (our north American winter) is primarily focused on rescues and rehabilitation, whereas Winter/Spring (our North American summer) is breeding season, colony monitoring, and raising baby vultures! Volunteers and staff work five days with two days off—our off days vary so that we always have a team on. My experience was day-to-day care and upkeep, helping on rescues, assisting with medical care, health checks, and powerline surveys.

## South African Vultures

Nine vulture species have historically been found in South Africa, although the Egyptian Vulture is now considered



extinct in the country. The Cape Vulture, which is only found in southern Africa, was designated as Endangered in 2015. (IUCN—International Union for Conservation of Nature).

There are myriad challenges that South African vultures face, and these echo problems facing vultures around the world. Some of the biggest threats are:

- **Poisoning (deliberate)**

Vultures and other wildlife are often deliberately poisoned when they are believed to compete with domestic livestock herds. Usually it is the predators (wolves, etc.)

that are targeted and vultures are killed when they also consume the bait or the carcass of the poisoned predator. Another scenario, more catastrophic in terms of sheer numbers of animals killed, is poisoning by wildlife poachers in an attempt to avoid detection by park rangers. Normally, large flocks of vultures circle over the carcass of an elephants or rhino—to avoid this very visible display, poachers put out poisoned carcasses prior to poaching large game—killing the local vulture population. These poisoning events are known to wipe out entire colonies of vultures in one targeted event.

- **Poisoning (inadvertent)**

Many approved and effective veterinary medications are used in ranching and farming, yet may be fatal to vultures who consume carcasses of animals treated with the drugs. The common NSAID Diclofenac, used in cattle, was responsible for decimating India's three major vulture species (the worst impacted was the White-rumped Vulture whose population dropped by 99.9%). Lead is another example of inadvertent poisoning that is seen worldwide, including here in the U.S. Over 80% of the vultures admitted to BRWC have lead in their blood.

- **Loss of Habitat**

Changing land use patterns due to increasing human populations and conversion of wild landscapes to agriculture and urban environments, results in the loss of land areas needed for vulture breeding and nesting. Also, these geographic and landscape changes alter the movement patterns of other wild species which impacts vultures' ability to obtain their normal food sources.

- **Powerline Collisions and Electrocutions**

Vultures are large birds with huge wingspans. In landscapes changed by human development, distribution poles are the tallest structures in the area, and in the absence of tall trees vultures tend to land and rest on them. When powerline lines (esp. smaller distribution lines) are not designed and built appropriately, perching birds hit lines with their wings or excreta and are electrocuted. Large transmission lines are also a risk for fatal collisions as the narrow lines are nearly invisible to birds soaring and looking for food. This occurs in the U.S. as well. If you see vultures or other birds electrocuted, please report it to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, your state wildlife agency, and your power company as repairs can be made to make these electrocutions less likely.

- **Traditional Medicine**

Another significant risk factor for vultures in African nations is their use in traditional medicine. Vulture parts are believed to bestow foresight or clairvoyance on those who consume them, and thousands of vultures are killed and portioned out in this local trade.



White-backed Vulture. Photo by Heather Shank-Givens.

# Virginia Vultures!

There are two native vulture species in our area—the **Black Vulture** and the **Turkey Vulture**. Both species are important scavengers that reduce disease spread in our area by consuming decaying and diseased carcasses. They can destroy infectious agents such as anthrax, botulism, and rabies virus, protecting public health and keeping our planet cleaner.

Black Vultures can be identified by their black plumage, bare grayish-black heads, and white coloration on the underside of their wing tips seen when flying.

Turkey Vultures can be identified by their red heads (as adults), brown to black bodies, and grayish coloration under their flight feathers when viewed in flight.

The main reasons that vultures come into care are gunshot wounds, lead poisoning, and vehicle collisions.



Heather Shank-Givens with Black Vulture Ambassador, Gryphon, showing white wing tips. Photo by Jennifer Burghoffer



Vega, the Turkey Vulture Ambassador showing off the undersides of her wings. Photo by Cara Masullo

This year, more than 50% of our vulture patients (both black and turkey) have come into care due to gunshot wounds. Though both eat predominantly carrion, Black Vultures will occasionally kill poorly protected neonatal livestock or wild neonatal orphans that are unable to defend themselves. This may prompt some to look for lethal control options. If you raise livestock, we highly recommend putting shelters and guard animals in place to keep them protected from all wild predators. Remember that it is illegal to shoot these federally-protected

birds and doing so could result in fines and jail time. If you know of someone shooting them, information can be reported to **Department of Wildlife Resources at 1-800-237-5712** and **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at 1-844-397-8477**.

Approximately 80% of our vultures come to the Center with lead in their blood. No level of lead is ever normal. Animals that scavenge (like vultures and eagles) are at especially high risk of lead poisoning. They ingest fragments of lead-containing ammunition from gut piles and shot nuisance wildlife or other hunted game left in the field. Please consider switching to non-lead ammunition to help these important scavengers.

Always stay alert while driving to avoid accidentally hitting our vultures and other wildlife!

## • Reproductive Rates

Compounding all the aforementioned impacts on the population—these birds generally have low reproductive rates; in the case of the Cape Vulture, the survival from egg to adult in the wild is only 5%.

## In Conclusion

Vultures around the world are facing diverse and escalating threats to their survival. When vulture populations decline, a critical ecological niche—environmental cleanup and nutrient recycling—is severely compromised. And the loss of these unique species impoverishes the global environment as a whole. Yet, there are numerous people out there who are passionate about these birds and their conservation—an incredible international community—of which I am now privileged to now be a part.

How can you help? Support your local wildlife and wildlife center! If you want to extend your support internationally, VulPro can use volunteers, donations to support the equipping of a new onsite hospital, and there is even an “adopt a vulture program!” (The dollar to rand is very much in our favor, so even a small donation in U.S. currency can go a long way to helping the work of VulPro.)

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me: [hshankgivens@gmail.com](mailto:hshankgivens@gmail.com) and for further information about VulPro, please visit [www.Vulpro.com](http://www.Vulpro.com). ■

# Nature Photography Contest

In June we held an online nature photography contest for **Nature Photography Day**, a day to highlight how photography can bring the natural world to everyone and inspire those who view it to help care and conserve our natural spaces. The winner of this contest (out of many, many amazing submissions!) was **Erik Brito**. His photo of this Osprey carrying a fish after a successful dive was selected by our staff as one of our “Top Ten” photos, and then won the contest by receiving nearly 1,000 votes on Facebook. Congratulations, Erik, and excellent shot!





## Supporter Spotlight:

# Ashleigh Bohlmann

The current pandemic has not only increased patient admissions, but it has also temporarily changed rehabilitation policies throughout the state. One change in policy allowed for qualified volunteers at facilities to take home healthy baby small mammals to raise until ready for outdoor caging or release. This change has helped us move healthy babies out of the hospital to alleviate pressure on the few animal care staff members that were allowed in the building and instead save our limited resources for medical and surgical patients.

One of the volunteers that offered to help us was Ashleigh, a volunteer and subpermittee who is also currently in training to attain her Category 2 permit to become a permitted, home rehabilitator! Ashleigh was a huge help this season, taking baby squirrels in early spring and Eastern Cottontails throughout the spring and summer. She came to us with excellent wildlife rehabilitation experience from Florida and she quickly caught on to caring for our native Virginian wildlife! Learn a little more about Ashleigh below.

### What got you interested in working with wildlife in a rehabilitation setting?

My enthusiasm and passion for wildlife started when I was a child—I grew up with Steve Irwin as my hero and considered myself a “wildlife warrior” since then! I started volunteering with animals when I was 16 years old and over the past 15 years I’ve been able to help countless wild animals by rehabbing them and returning them into their natural habitat where they belong. Aside from that, I love getting people excited about helping our wildlife and protecting our planet.

### What's your favorite native Virginia animal to work with?

This is the toughest question of all! I honestly hold a special place in my heart for all species I work with. However, my favorites are squirrels, foxes, raccoons and bats!

### What's your favorite "fun wildlife fact" you like to share with people?

This one is about squirrels! A wonderful man and Washington resident named Amos Peters was concerned with all of the squirrels being hit by cars while crossing the street. In 1963, he constructed a bridge for squirrels to safely cross the road. Since then, the town of Longview, WA hosts an annual “Squirrelfest” and unveils a new

bridge every year! I hope I leave a legacy like this.

### What little piece of advice would you give to someone interested in becoming a rehabilitator?

Volunteer, volunteer, volunteer! Start early and gain experience at multiple facilities. Understand that each animal has a specific, well-balanced, species appropriate diet and that nutrition is key. Continue to educate yourself on native species, take classes in your area(s) of interest, and always keep the animal’s best interest in mind. Not only is our mission to raise/



Ashleigh Bohlmann weighing one of the infant cottontails she has been tube feeding.

Photo by Jessica Andersen

rehabilitate/release animals back into the wild, but it’s also to preserve, protect, conserve, educate and inspire others as well.

### Any favorite rehab memories you'd like to share?

Anytime a patient is released is a favorite memory! I love seeing them run free in their natural habitat. I really enjoy seeing our extensively rehabbed patients (for example: opossums with fractures or foxes with mange) heal with the help of our care and commitment and being released again. Giving them a second chance at life is what means the most! ■

## Cottontail Fun Facts

- Cottontails are NOT rodents, they are lagomorphs (the main difference being dentition).
- Cottontails practice coprophagy—eating their own feces—to maximize the nutritional value of their poorly digestible food.
- Cottontails are tougher than they look! Mother cottontails will actively defend their nests from predators and are often seen fighting back against snakes, crows, and others. We have treated cottontail-attacked patients at our hospital.
- In the winter, these herbivores survive on bark, twigs, and buds.
- Cottontails mature quickly—young are self-sufficient in just 4-5 weeks!
- Mom only feeds her young once or twice per day—at dawn and dusk. The only way to know if a nest has been abandoned/orphaned is the condition of the babies themselves. Call a rehabilitator if you have concerns!



# Rehab + Corner

By Jessica Andersen

## Teamwork Makes the Dream Work

The pandemic has caused a lot of difficulties for rehabilitators this year, but thankfully Virginia has a wide network of home rehabilitators and hospitals that collaborate to help the animals in their care. So far this year, we have taken in many animals from other permitted rehabilitators as well as transferred animals to others to be with conspecifics or for continued care. We have also worked with our state's wildlife department, the Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR), to assist on individual cases involving the public illegally caring for wildlife or situations where the public needs our state agency to intervene for various reasons.

### American Cliff Swallows (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*)



These American Cliff Swallows were removed from a nesting colony below a bridge requiring reconstruction. Prior to tearing down the bridge, the Virginia Department of Transportation made arrangements with the Wildlife Center of Virginia to admit these swallows into care. Nearly 100 swallows went to the Wildlife Center of Virginia! 100 baby birds at once is an extreme challenge for any facility to handle and a call for help went out right away. Permitted bird rehabilitators from all over the state were able to take some of the swallows to take pressure off the Wildlife Center of Virginia. We were able to take ten of the swallows as well as six Carolina

Wrens to help lighten their load—these birds have since been released.

Photo by Jessica Andersen.

### Wood Ducks (*Aix sponsa*)



We recently transferred a flock of ten Wood Ducklings (the most Wood Ducklings we've ever had at once!) to the Richmond Wildlife Center to be with a Wood Duckling they had in their care. We also received a juvenile Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*) from this facility, as we had two other juveniles, so that it could be raised with others of its kind as well. The Red-shouldered Hawk from RWC and one other have now been released.

Ducklings photo by Dr. Jen Riley.

Red-shouldered Hawks photo by Jessica Andersen.



### American Beaver (*Castor canadensis*)



We are fortunate to have multiple wildlife-exclusive hospitals in our state in Waynesboro, Roanoke, Richmond, and, of course, Boyce. In addition to these wildlife-exclusive veterinary hospitals, we have an amazing network of permitted rehabilitators as well! We often work with local non-profits, Valley Wildlife Care, Inc., and North Mountain Wildlife Rescue to ensure babies can be raised with conspe-



cifics. This baby Beaver is one example—it was transferred to Valley Wildlife Care, Inc. to be with another orphaned young beaver. In addition to groups like these, we are lucky to have many individual home rehabilitators that specialize in certain species and we make sure to stay in touch when we have wild babies that can benefit from their expertise and potentially other animals they already have in care (and vice versa). *Photo by Jessica Andersen.*

Lastly, this summer has been greatly helped by Kristi Titus, a permitted rehabilitator who volunteers with the Center, who has taken on about 200 mammals this year! She takes healthy baby mammals on formula feedings and will transfer them back to us when they are ready to be moved to our Pre-release caging, freeing up our hospital rooms for patients with more serious medical and surgical conditions.

We are incredibly appreciative of the dedicated rehabilitators, wildlife veterinarians, and state wildlife management employees in Virginia working together through this unprecedented time to make sure our wildlife gets the best care possible.



three times per day for the first month in care, as they were not old enough to be eating on their own. They spent their days outside in our largest flight enclosure with two adult eagles (coincidentally these adults were also from Stafford County). Finally, about a month after their arrival, they began eating on their own and using their wings to get up onto mid-level

perches to finally doing full laps around our flight ring. Now, after nearly three months months in care, they have finally been released. *Photo by Jessica Andersen.* ■



**Blue Ridge Wildlife Center  
Combined Federal Campaign  
CFC# 54098**

## Flying Free

### Bald Eagle

*(Haliaeetus leucocephalus)*



These two juvenile Bald Eagles came to us as nestlings from a fallen nest in Wide-water State Park in May. Unfortunately, biologists from the Department of Wildlife Resources determined that re-nesting was not an option for these birds, and so they were transported to us for care.

These birds required hand-feedings

## Resources in Virginia

We always recommend that wildlife in need go to the closest available facility for care to limit highly-stressful transport times. The facilities mentioned here can be contacted at the telephone numbers listed below. Many can be found on various social media platforms as well. Find a full list of permitted rehabilitators by county at <https://dwr.virginia.gov/wildlife/injured/rehabilitators/>.

- **The Wildlife Center of Virginia**  
(Waynesboro) 540-942-9453
- **North Mountain Wildlife Wildlife Rescue** (Winchester)  
540-877-1029
- **Richmond Wildlife Center**  
(Richmond) 804-378-2000
- **Wildlife Rescue League**  
(Northern Virginia) 703-440-0800
- **Southwest Virginia Wildlife Center of Roanoke** (Roanoke)  
540-798-9836
- **Evelyn's Wildlife Rescue**  
(Suffolk) 757-434-3439
- **Valley Wildlife Care, Inc.**  
(Middletown/Front Royal/  
Star Tannery) 540-465-5315



For bear-related issues and other wildlife concerns, contact DWR's **Wildlife Conflict Helpline** at 1-855-571-9003.

# Educational Opportunities

**Blue Ridge Wildlife Center** is a wildlife-exclusive teaching hospital, meaning that we train others to provide veterinary and rehabilitative care to native wildlife.

Each year, we train dozens of interns in wildlife rehabilitation, wildlife education, and wildlife medicine. With the pandemic, our ability to take on interns became severely limited in an effort to keep everyone as safe as possible. We made the decision not to offer or seek housing for interns who were too far to commute, not only to reduce travel, but also because most of our housing is provided by thoughtful members of our community that allow our interns to use their basements, guest rooms, and other areas of their residences. We did not want to put those homeowners and interns at risk! With these limitations, we were only able to accept 15 interns this spring and summer season. However, we were excited to have had them, and hope they enjoyed their experiences and learned a lot. Meet some of these interns.

**Anna Blight**, Education Intern



Anna Blight works with Education Manager, Jennifer Burghoffer, on diet preparation for our wildlife ambassadors. Photo by Jessica Andersen.

## Don't Let This Be Your Last Issue of *The Ridgeline!*

BRWC is establishing a membership program. Everyone who gives a gift of \$40 or more (after July 1, 2020) will receive four issues of *The Ridgeline*. If you make a donation of \$1,000 or more, you will also receive an exclusive gift with your membership!

BRWC is dependent on donations to help us care for so many patients and provide educational opportunities to the community. We do not receive any state or federal funding for wildlife rehabilitation. We are so thankful to those of you who have generously made it possible for us to help with so many wildlife emergencies!

My name is Anna Blight and I am a Wildlife Education Intern at the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center. I am from Berryville, VA and I am currently a Sophomore at Brigham Young University studying Biodiversity and Conservation. I came to BRWC to learn more concerning public education about our area's native wildlife, but I have also learned so much about wildlife rehabilitation, laws surrounding the treatment

of wild animals, and the natural history of native species! The staff are very encouraging and willing to share their knowledge about anything and everything they do. I have been exposed to more career fields here than I realized there were in animal science, and though I'm not sure what I'll end up doing, wherever I go, I will take the valuable skills I have gained!



**Emillie Dodd**, Ross University School of Veterinary Medicine,  
DVM Candidate 2021

My name is Emillie and I am a senior veterinary student. I completed a two-week externship at BRWC this summer (despite the pandemic!) and had an incredible time. Although I will primarily work with dogs and cats in the future, I wanted to gain more experience in species identification, case management, and emergency triage. My wildlife experience in the past was limited to birds only so I was really looking to work with a wider range of species. During the time I spent here, I worked with foxes, rabbits, squirrels, opossums, snakes, skinks, toads, and countless birds - just to name a few! I was also able to assist with hundreds of cases, both medical and surgical. BRWC does amazing work for the animals in this community and Dr. Jen does an amazing job at instructing. I highly suggest any veterinary student, or really anyone interested in animals, to spend some time at this facility. The knowledge and hands-on skills you will gain are invaluable!



Emillie Dodd enjoys rechecking one of the turtle patients that had surgery earlier the same week.  
Photo by Dr. Jen Riley.

**Tiffany Hough**, Rehabilitation Intern



Tiffany Hough prepares diets for our raptor patients outside in pre-release caging.  
Photo by Jessica Andersen.

My name is Tiffany Hough and I'm a junior majoring in Wildlife Conservation and minoring in Animal and Poultry Science at Virginia Tech with plans to attend their vet school after graduation. I have wanted to be a veterinarian since I was very young. As I grew up and continued my education, I realized I wanted to be a wildlife veterinarian, but I wasn't sure where to go to gain experience. My friend, who was a former intern at BRWC, told me how interning for a summer taught him so much about wildlife medicine and rehabilitation. Based on his experience I decided to apply for an intern position this summer. I thought through this internship I would just learn how to properly feed and handle wildlife, but I have already learned so much more.

I started this internship with basic knowledge of animal handling, but had never worked with wild animals before. Within just a few weeks, my animal handling has grown far past anything I've expected. I've been trained on how to feed baby songbirds, how to tube-feed baby opossums, handle raptors, and

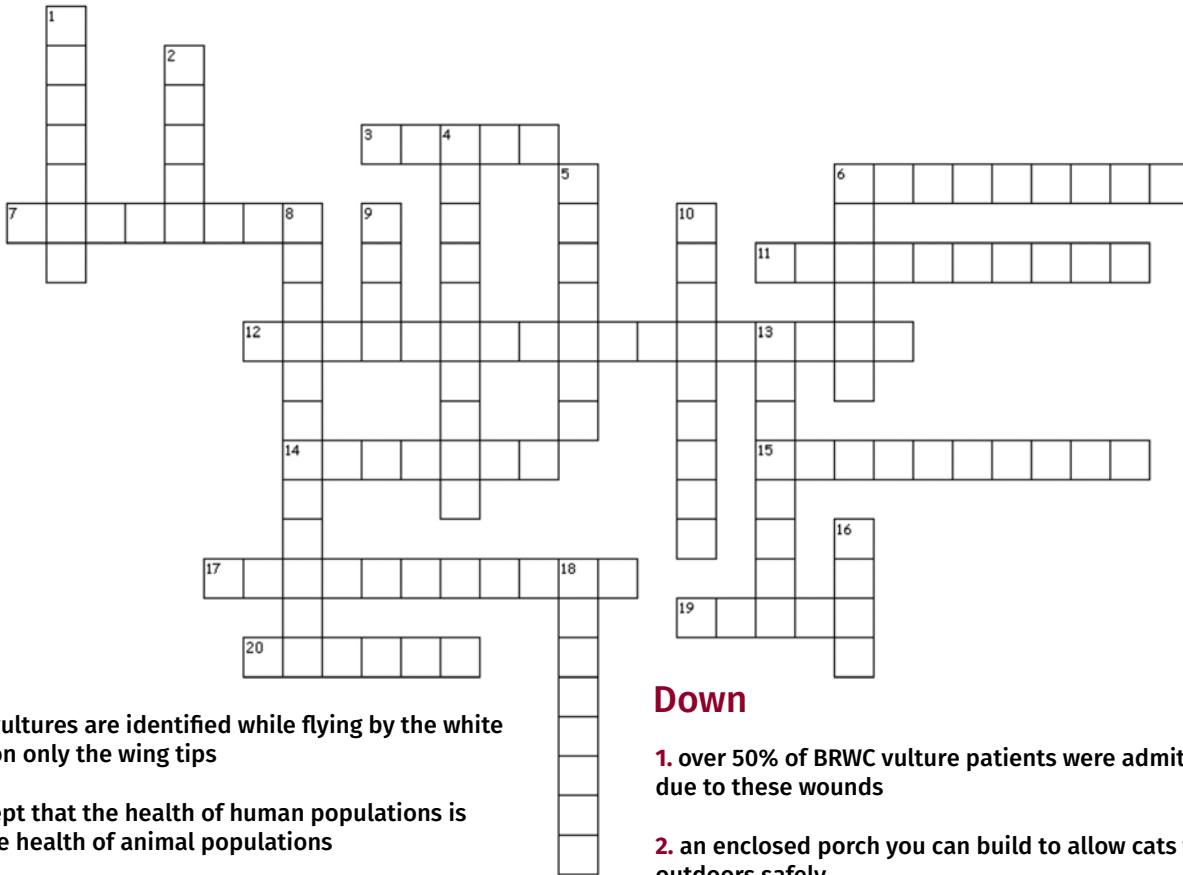
much more. Everything I've learned from this opportunity will be transferrable to my future career as a wildlife vet. Being this close to wild animals and watching them recover is the highlight. During this internship, I've met some amazing people who have inspired me and taught me so much. Dr. Jen is available to answer my questions and help show me what a wildlife veterinarian deals with daily. This internship has been everything I dreamed it would be and more. After leaving this internship, I feel more prepared for my future career and I hope to be able to continue volunteering during my breaks while finishing my time at Virginia Tech. ■

If you or someone you know is interested in an educational opportunity like this, please see our website at: <https://www.blueridgewildlifectr.org/new-volunteer>.

If you are interested in housing any out-of-state interns in the future, when it is safe to do so, please reach out to us at [info@blueridgewildlifectr.org](mailto:info@blueridgewildlifectr.org).

# Puzzle This

Test your knowledge of the topics presented in this issue of *The Ridgeline*. All answers can be found within its pages.



## Across

- 3. \_\_\_\_\_ vultures are identified while flying by the white coloration on only the wing tips
- 6. the concept that the health of human populations is linked to the health of animal populations
- 7. describing a disease that can spread from animals to humans and vice versa
- 11. rabbits practice this so that they can get more nutrients from their food
- 12. the governing body for wildlife in Virginia is the Department of \_\_\_\_\_ (2 words)
- 14. attacks by \_\_\_\_\_ cats account for 15% of patient admissions at BRWC.
- 15. 50% of the world's vulture species are considered \_\_\_\_\_ or critically \_\_\_\_\_
- 17. a member of the same species
- 19. the use of a certain medication in cattle decimated the vulture population in this country
- 20. diseases passed from one individual to another via insects (mosquitoes, ticks) are called \_\_\_\_\_ borne

## Down

- 1. over 50% of BRWC vulture patients were admitted in 2019 due to these wounds
- 2. an enclosed porch you can build to allow cats to enjoy the outdoors safely
- 4. lead-based \_\_\_\_\_ can be dangerous to both wild animals and humans if consumed in game meat
- 5. vultures are capable of destroying botulism, rabies, and \_\_\_\_\_ in their digestive system, protecting public health
- 6. the species of raptor featured in the winning photography contest photo
- 8. ability that practitioners of traditional medicine in Africa believe one can gain by consuming vultures
- 9. mother rabbits might only \_\_\_\_\_ their babies twice per day, so not seeing mom can be normal
- 10. the order classification for rabbits
- 13. despite the best possible medical care, only 25% of cat attack patients are \_\_\_\_\_
- 16. we frequently test admitted raptor patients, especially vultures, for this dangerous substance
- 18. we have had a 30% \_\_\_\_\_ in patients over this time last year

ACROSS: 3. Black; 6. OneHealth; 7. Zoonotic; 11. Coprophagy; 12. WildlifeResources; 14. Outdoors; 15. Endangered; 17. Conspicuous; 19. India; 20. Vector  
 DOWN: 1. Gunshot; 2. Catio; 4. Lead; 5. Ammunition; 8. Clairvoyance; 9. Feed; 10. Lagomorpha; 13. Released; 16. Lead; 18. Increase

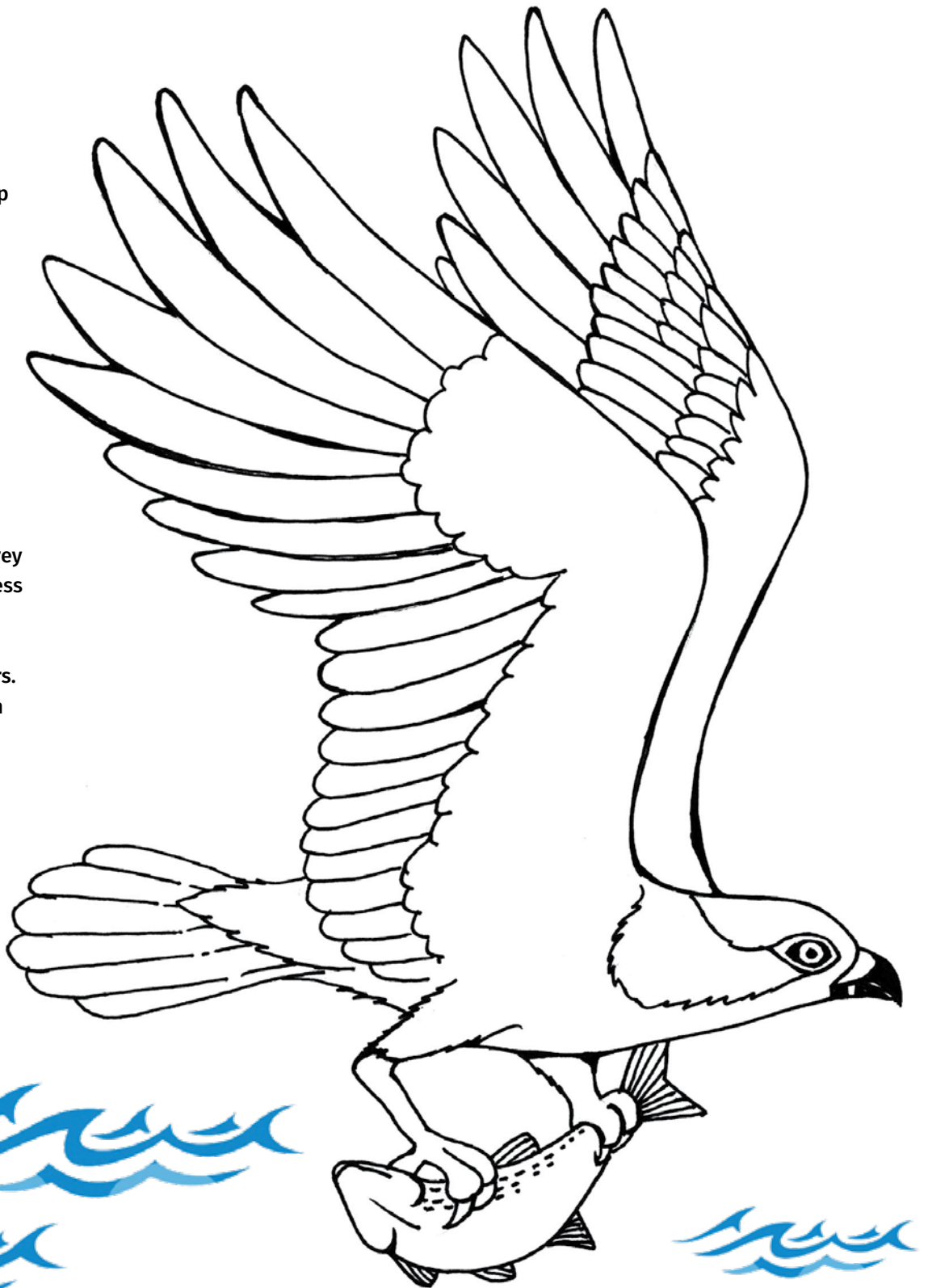


# Color Me!

Make your own award-winning art by coloring in this Osprey and its prey.

## Osprey Fun Facts

- Osprey have a reversible toe that allows them to grasp with two toes in front and two behind.
- Osprey have closable nostrils to keep water out while they are diving.
- Barbed pads on the soles of Osprey talons help them grip slippery fish.
- When flying with prey, Osprey hold the fish head-first for less wind resistance.
- Osprey are excellent anglers. Studies show that they catch fish on at least 1 in every 4 dives, with success rates for some individuals as high as 70 percent.



©Sheri Amsel [www.exploringnature.org](http://www.exploringnature.org)



106 Island Farm Lane  
Boyce, Virginia | 22620

Non Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Winchester, VA  
Permit #188



**FOLLOW US**



**BRWC HOTLINE:** 540.837.9000 | [www.blueridgewildlifectr.org](http://www.blueridgewildlifectr.org) | [info@blueridgewildlifectr.org](mailto:info@blueridgewildlifectr.org)



# Back to the Wild!

Two Bald Eagles were released in July back at their found location in Widewater State Park. Read more about them in Rehab Corner.

*Photo by Erik Brito*

TAIL END