

# The Ridgeline

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Newsletter of the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center

## Animal Behavior Alone Not Reliable Rabies Indicator

Contrary to popular belief, most rabid animals appear calm and friendly, not aggressive and drooling as portrayed in books and movies. The Blue Ridge Wildlife Center receives numerous calls every year about animals suspected to have rabies, but, fortunately, the majority of these animals are not rabid.



*A rabid raccoon*

We also admit many sick animals not suspected of being rabid because they are not showing the commonly known symptoms of rabies, but do, in fact, have rabies.

Rabies is a fatal viral infection of the brain spread through the bite of an infected animal. It exhibits two forms: the "furious" form, where the infected animal behaves aggressively, biting at everything in sight; and the more common "dumb" form, where the animal appears quiet and unafraid.

Most rabid animals are ataxic, meaning they are unsteady on their feet and often wobble or stagger as they walk. Any mammal can contract rabies, but the species most commonly infected are raccoons, skunks, foxes, bats, and groundhogs.

It is important to remember that rabies cannot be diagnosed by appearance alone. Not all ataxic or friendly wild mammals have rabies, and neither do all nocturnal mammals that are seen during the day. The only way to know for sure if a wild animal has rabies is to test its brain.

If you notice a wild mammal acting abnormally, please call the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center for advice before approaching or trying to catch the animal.

At the BRWC, we help control the spread of rabies by vaccinating the raccoons, foxes, skunks, and bats we release. You can help by making sure your pets are vaccinated for rabies. Also, do not leave pet foods outside because this can cause raccoons, foxes, skunks, and opossums to congregate and fight, potentially spreading rabies.

## Ban on Feeding Deer

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries has banned the feeding of deer year round in Frederick, Clarke, Warren, and Shenandoah counties to help slow the spread of chronic wasting disease (CWD).

This slowly developing fatal disease of deer is caused by an unusual infectious protein called a "prion", which is shed in the saliva of healthy appearing deer that are carrying the disease. Deer gathering at feeding stations spread this disease more quickly than if they were not gathering to feed, so please remind your friends and neighbors NOT to feed deer.

You may see deer food still being sold by your local Wal-Mart or Southern States stores in those counties, but that does not mean it is legal to use it. Individuals caught feeding deer in those counties will be prosecuted. Please follow these rules to protect the health of our deer population.

## Saving Bats Grows in Importance

Bat populations are declining rapidly due to white nose syndrome, a cold-loving fungus which killed more than one million bats in the United States since its discovery in 2006.

The fungus that gives white nose syndrome its name, *geomyces destructans*, infects the skin of the bats while they are hibernating. It is believed that this infection causes the bats to wake from their hibernation so they can warm themselves to fight the infection. But staying warm requires energy and food, and, unfortunately, because the bats' insect food supply is not available in the wintertime, they starve to death.

It is thought this fungus was inadvertently carried to our east coast caves on the equipment or clothing of cavers. To prevent further spread of this devastating disease, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and U.S. Forest Service have closed many caves known to be used by hibernating bats.

Because of their declining populations, saving the lives of individual bats is more important than ever.

The Blue Ridge Wildlife Center is one of only a few facilities in the state capable of treating sick bats and raising orphan bats.



*Feeding orphan brown bats.*

## The Ridgeline

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The Blue Ridge Wildlife Center is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that was established to provide assistance for native injured and orphaned wildlife and other helpful information to the public in the northern Shenandoah Valley. The Center provides quality rehabilitative care for wildlife and operates the Wildlife Hotline at 540-837-9000.

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

The Center relies on private donations exclusively; no governmental funding is utilized.

People who share concerns for wildlife and the environment can help the Center by becoming individual or family supporters.

Businesses are invited to become sponsors.

Contributions are tax-deductible.

# Lead-free Ammunition Safer For Animals and Hunters Alike

The BRWC has been monitoring the blood lead levels of hawks, eagles, owls, and vultures admitted to the center, and this research has shown that lead levels in our native meat-eating birds increase in the fall and winter and decrease in the spring and summer. The most likely cause of this increase in blood lead levels is the increased use of lead ammunition by hunters during the fall and winter hunting seasons.

Lead poisoning develops when animals consume lead, not when they are wounded with it. Lead in the muscle of an animal does not cause lead poisoning, but lead in the digestive tract will be broken down and absorbed into the blood. Lead bullets sometimes shatter when they enter an animal, spreading very small fragments of lead throughout the muscle which then poison anyone eating that muscle.

Testing of hunter harvested venison in several states has found unacceptable levels of lead. This means not only meat-eating wildlife is at risk of developing lead poisoning from lead ammunition; in addition, hunters can also develop elevated levels of lead in their blood when they consume game killed with lead ammunition.

Because it is well known that lead shot causes fatal lead poisoning in condors, eagles, and other meat-eating birds, a coalition of conservation, veterinary, and hunting groups have recently filed a petition with the Environmental Protection Agency to ban the use of toxic lead in hunting ammunition.

Lead ammunition is already banned in southern California to protect the California condor, and there is a voluntary ban in Arizona. Ammunition companies have already developed good non-toxic lead-free alternatives that are being used by environmentally-conscious hunters to decrease the amount of toxic lead introduced into our environment, and to decrease the toxicity to our wildlife.

If you hunt, please use non-toxic, non-lead ammunition. If you allow hunting on your property, please ask those hunters to use non-toxic, non-lead ammunition, or supply it for them. This is safer for our environment, and safer for the hunters themselves.

## Have You Seen Any 'Flying Cigars' Lately?

Chimney swifts are one of our area's most unusual summertime birds (they winter in South America.) They are amazing aerial acrobats that eat, drink, and even bathe while flying. They eat their body weight in insects every day! Because of their very short legs, they cannot perch or stand, but can only rest by clinging to the sides of walls, propping themselves up with their tail. They have long wings and short bodies and are sometimes described as "flying cigars."



## A Fox With Hair Loss? Could be Mange

If you live in the country, it is likely that one time or another you have seen a fox with mange. These foxes will have patchy hair loss, thickened crusty skin, and they are often observed scratching themselves.



Mange in foxes is caused by a microscopic mite called *sarcoptes scabiei*. It infects red foxes, coyotes, and dogs, and is spread through contact with infected individuals or with contaminated dens or burrows.

Sarcoptic mange is treatable if caught early. If you see a fox exhibiting signs of mange, please call the wildlife center for advice.

## Kestrel Completes Healing and Flight Training

Kestrels are one of the smallest hawks in our area; they are also the most colorful. The male and female are sexually dimorphic, meaning they have differing markings, which is not true of most of our other native hawks.

Kestrels are falcons belonging to the same family as the peregrine and the merlin. Their favorite foods are rodents, large insects, amphibians, and small birds. They are usually seen hunting from an elevated perch on a utility wire or a tree branch, but they can also be seen

hovering over a field looking for prey.



This male kestrel broke its tiny wing when it was hit by a car. At the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center, very small surgical pins were used to put the bird's tiny bones back together.

After months of healing and flight training, this bird is finally ready to return to the wild.

## Surgery Puts Snake Back to Work

Most people are aware of the valuable role of snakes in rodent control, so when this black rat snake accidentally ate a stone egg from a chicken nest, the owners of the chickens wanted to find help for the snake.



They brought this 5 1/2 foot rat snake to the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center, where surgery was performed to remove the large stone from the snake's stomach. This snake recovered quickly and was consuming rodents again in no time.

She was then returned to the farm to continue her rodent patrol.

## Beware of Glue Traps

Glue traps cause the slow and painful death of many animals, not just rodents. Valuable wildlife such as bats and snakes are commonly caught on glue traps and killed.



If you have a rodent problem around your house, please do not use glue traps or poisons. It is safer and more humane to use live traps or snap traps which kill quickly and usually kill only rodents. Better still, encourage a snake or an owl to move in and eat your rodents.

## Rescued Owls Released

When these beautiful barn owls were babies, they fell from their nest atop a tall silo and were trapped at the bottom. Because they could not be put back in their nest and were at risk of being killed by a raccoon or cat while on the ground, they were rescued and raised at the center.

When fully grown, they were released where they were found.



The owls were featured in a front-page story in *The Winchester Star* about the center and the care it provides for injured and orphaned hawks and owls ([winchesterstar.com/articles/view/362929](http://winchesterstar.com/articles/view/362929)).

## Become a Supporting Member of the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center

The Center depends entirely on private donations to pay for its expenses. It receives no funding from the federal, state, or local governments.

Please consider becoming a supporting member of the Center. Members receive our newsletter, *The Ridgeline*, and invitations to events.

Your donations are 100 percent tax deductible, and are used to supply food, housing, and medical supplies for the animals receiving care at the Center.

We are also in need of volunteers to help care for the animals and to assist with other related jobs. Please call if you are interested in volunteering.

Indicate your membership level on the form below and mail it with your check to the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center, Post Office Box 326, Millwood, VA 22646.

- |                            |                          |  |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Individual Membership—\$50 | <input type="checkbox"/> | Turtle or Snake Sponsor—\$25               | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Family Membership—\$100    | <input type="checkbox"/> | Songbird Sponsor—\$30                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Patron—\$250               | <input type="checkbox"/> | Bat Sponsor—\$50                           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Family Patron—\$500        | <input type="checkbox"/> | Waterbird Sponsor (heron, loon, duck)—\$75 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Eagle Club—\$1,000         | <input type="checkbox"/> | Mammal Sponsor (fox, opossum, etc.)—\$100  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                            |                          | Owl Sponsor—\$100                          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                            |                          | Raptor Sponsor—\$150                       | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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For invitations by email:

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ No. \_\_\_\_\_

Membership Level      \$ \_\_\_\_\_      Additional donation \_\_\_\_\_

Wildlife Sponsorship      \$ \_\_\_\_\_      Total enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

## Wish List

- Food scales for weighing patient meals and for weighing our small patients.
- Cordless drill/screwdriver
- Wildlife cameras to observe and gather information on the animals we've released (*Econyx rapid fire* or *Moultrie Trail Camera*)
- Reptariums (available at *Petsmart* or *Petco*)
- Gift certificates to Southern States, Costco, Amazon.com, Flukers.com, Lowes, or Home Depot.
- Old style heating pads. (We are in desperate need of the old style heating pads that do not shut off automatically. Most new heating pads have an auto shut off feature that will turn off the heat after an hour. We can't use those new heating pads because they leave our patients in the cold.)
- Acorns and hickory nuts to feed the wildlife we are rehabilitating.

**Thank you to all our supporters. We couldn't do it without you!!**

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