

The Ridgeline

Newsletter of the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center

Issue 26 • Summer 2015



*Green Herons
Get a Second Chance*



A Parliament of Owls | The Year of the Duck | New Building Takes Flight | Summer Interns

Letter from the Executive Director



New Beginnings and Continued Success

Dear Friends of Wildlife,

I have been on staff as Executive Director for about five months now and everyone has been so warm and welcoming—including all the wildlife at the Center!

Just to give you a little background, and for those I have not had a chance to meet, for seven years I was President of the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay—the premier environmental partnership organization in the seven-state, Mid-Atlantic region focused on habitat restoration, agriculture, forestry and development.

More recently, I led sustainable agriculture initiatives when I partnered with Gary Hirshberg of Stonyfield Farms as the founding Executive Director of Organic Voices/Just Label It pushing for federal labeling of GMO (genetically modified) foods and was Chief Operating Officer of the U.S. Healthful Food Council promoting “farm to table” REAL Certification of restaurants.

Earlier in my career, I served as Deputy Executive Director of the Council of the Great Lakes Governors, Executive Vice President of the Solar Energy Industries Association, and Director of Washington D.C. Relations at the University of Wisconsin Foundation, working with Donna E. Shalala.

It is my hope to build on the Center’s past successes and use my years of environmental and administrative experience to leverage our expertise and resources for the further growth and development of the organization to benefit our region’s native wildlife.

Since I have been on board, there have been many exciting highlights, including:

- *Treating over 1,400 animals so far this year, compared to a total of 1,883 last year, and we still have four months to go;*
- *Hosting a wonderful Baby Shower in early June where we educated hundreds of families on wildlife issues, raised over \$7,000 in cash and brought in several thousand dollars more in in-kind donated products;*
- *Educating over 100 students, ages 7-11, at our weekly Summer Camp series with sessions focused on topics like Ancient Reptiles, On Silent Wings: Owls, Hawks & Eagles: Amazing Hunters, and Two Amazing Acrobats; Bats and Flying Squirrels; and*
- *Educating almost 1,700 people through our yearly education programs.*

*Probably the biggest thrill of my initial five months has been to see the actual groundbreaking for the new Center building, and watch it progress to have it under roof. Foul weather will now not slow down construction during the fall. In addition, the little gravel road leading to the Center now has an actual name: **Island Farm Lane.***

*Over the coming months, I will continue to update you on the Center’s current rescue and rehabilitation work as well as new education, research and policy initiatives. I hope to see all of you at the **Creatures of the Night Soirée** being held on September 26.*

Please feel free to contact me anytime with concerns, advice or just to chat about wildlife issues. Thank you for all of your support—we could not do our work without you.

Sincerely,

David B. Bancroft

PS: A word about this newsletter. The Center is blessed with a wonderful staff who are well-trained in wildlife rescue and rehabilitation. Their first hand experiences are reflected here as they write about the cases they handle every day. The Center is so fortunate to have such a talented team of wildlife rehabbers who also have a gift for writing. Enjoy!

The Ridgeline

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

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

The Center relies on private donations exclusively. It receives no funding from federal, state, or local governments. Contributions are tax-deductible. The BRWC is very grateful to the Burwell-van Lennep Foundation for the free use of their cottage and 18 acres of land on the Island Farms in Boyce, Virginia.



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Cover Story:

Green Herons Get a Second Chance



This summer, two young green herons were brought in with similar foot/leg problems. The first, that we received in June, was a nestling whose leg was splayed back behind him. He seemed unable to bring his leg forward properly when perching or walking and would drag it behind him. His foot, however, seemed to be working fine, with the toes gripping well. Ten days later, a fledgling

green heron was brought to us, rescued after a storm put him out of his nest. He seemed to be having problems with opening and closing one of his feet. Both injuries could have been caused from getting a leg caught in the nest when either patient was trying to fledge out or during some other event that would cause them to fall. Fledging is a natural part of every bird's life cycle, a time in which they voluntarily leave the nest before they are fully able to fly. Sometimes things don't always go as planned and birds can end up with leg or foot injuries during their attempts to leave the nest. Thankfully, with physical therapy and a boot for each bird's injured foot, both herons fully recovered. They were given a second chance here at the Center and were able to be successfully released together.

A Parliament of Owls

The Center has had a record-breaking number of Eastern Screech Owls (EASO) to raise this year. Early in the spring, within days of each other, two nests were discovered when their respective trees were cut down during yard work. EASO prefer to nest in tree cavities, where a small opening can allow them to easily defend their young.

With no way to replace the nests, and in one case, no information on where the nest was found, the Center began the long process of raising the young raptors. A few weeks later, the six owlets were joined by two others—one who a dog brought home as a gift for its owners, and another, too young to fly, found hopping across a highway. As the babies grew and began the stage



of "branching"—leaving the nest and exploring nearby perches—the group was moved to an outdoor cage that was furnished with a jungle-gym of branches for exercise and exploration.

Not long after, the Center was contacted by the Wildlife Center of Virginia (WCV)—they had received a screech owlet, and reluctant to raise it by itself, requested that the Center add it to our

Thank You Dr. Burwell

After over 15 years of full involvement with the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center, Dr. Belinda Burwell, DVM, has resigned her position as Director of Wildlife Services, but will continue providing veterinary care to our wildlife.



Dr. Burwell founded the Center in 2000, opened its doors in 2004, and cared for 117 animals that first year. Through her hard work, her ability to promote the Center in the communities we serve, and her sheer determination, today the Center has seen that number expand more than tenfold. Dr. Burwell has done every job at the Center, from handling the books, to providing leadership for the staff and Board, and presenting programs to the public—she did it all.

Under Dr. Burwell's leadership, the Center attracted a strong base of donors and wildlife lovers who continue to sustain the organization. In addition, she participated in the Search Committee responsible for the hiring of our new Executive Director, David Bancroft, and worked tirelessly with a Board committee to restructure the organization in preparation for future growth.

As Dr. Burwell told the Center's Board and staff when announcing her decision in June, that she was not leaving the BRWC completely, but does need a break from the long hours. In addition to her veterinary work, Dr. Burwell will continue to serve on the Center's Board of Directors. Her legacy is the countless native animals released back to the wild, the relief of suffering in those that could not be saved, and the education of thousands of children and adults about the threats to wildlife.

We thank you, Dr. Burwell, for all of your hard work and dedication on behalf of wildlife and are grateful that you will provide continuing veterinary care at the Center. ■

already thriving parliament (which is the term for a group of owls). In the next week, a second from WCV would be brought in as well.

EASO's fledge after about a month, and then begin the long task of learning to fly and hunt. Our screeches had the advantage of watching an expert: an adult screech owl recovering from head trauma. They are currently participating in "mouse school", where we supply the young with live mice to hunt. The staff is able to watch the babies' progress on a closed circuit camera system. Once they have been observed successfully catching a live mouse, they will be ready to "graduate" to the wild—the Center's Class of 2015.

Baby Shower One of Our Best!



The Center would like to extend a warm "thank you" to all involved in this year's Baby Shower! Volunteers and donors helped make this event a huge

Rescued Baby Bald Eagle

At the end of May, the Center received a phone call from a Good Samaritan in Middleburg, Virginia. While horseback riding, a friend had found what they believed to be a young Bald Eagle on the ground. With the caller on the way to assess the situation and provide us with more information, the staff of the BRWC prepared for the possibility of an incoming injured bird of prey.

When the caller arrived at the scene, she provided a description of the bird, confirming that it was a young Bald Eagle. Though the nest was nearby, and the parents had been seen this year, it



was apparent by the bird's depressed behavior that he had not been receiving care from his parents for some time. The caller was advised to bring the bird in to the Center for treatment and care. Upon his intake, the severity of the situation became apparent. Weak and emaciated, the eagle was also covered in maggots, another sign of his lack of parental care.

The veterinarian and helping staff member proceeded to bathe and treat the eagle, attempting to remove as many of the parasites as possible from the bird's body and between the feathers. Without removal, the parasites can cause loss of blood flow to the feather tracks, resulting in an irreversible loss of feathers. These parasites can also be the cause of secondary infection, which was prevented with a course of antibiotics. After a slow recovery over several weeks, which included tube feeding a liquid diet and then hand-feeding meat, the eagle recovered well enough that his life was no longer in danger.

It is extremely important to raise birds of prey with others of their species so that they may learn proper social behaviors, and to reduce the chances of them imprinting on humans. To aid in this, the nestling was transferred to the Wildlife Center of Virginia, where two other nestlings were being raised in their flight cage.



success and attendees helped to supply the Center with the much needed donations to raise all our orphan patients this year. The event raised over \$7,000 in cash and many thousands more in in-kind donations. As the busy season winds down, we know we could not have done it without you! We hope to see you all again next year!

Cuckoo Calling



The Center received a very unusual nestling this summer. With his striking colors and very long toes and beak, he could only be one species: a Cuckoo! The Center has only had eleven of these birds as patients since it's opening, and this year we received the youngest of its kind. These birds live mostly in the canopy of the forest and are very secretive. They spend the day slowly and methodically searching for large caterpillars and can eat as many as 100 in a single sitting.

While both parents will build the nest and raise the young, the male takes the night shift. When he returns to the nest at night, he brings a gift of nest material, which the female works into the nest. When there is a large supply of caterpillars and other similar insects during the summer, Cuckoos will lay their own clutch. Cuckoos however, can also be brood parasites, meaning they will lay their eggs into the nests of other birds including Thrushes, Robins and even other Cuckoos, leaving the eggs and subsequent nestlings to be raised by the other bird. ■



New Building Reaches First Floor



As you read the amazing stories of this summer's prodigious work load at the Center, remember that all of this is taking place in an 800 square foot facility, inadequate for man and beast. Fortunately, our devoted staff and interns are excited about the work they do and the wildlife rehabilitation success stories they are able to facilitate. There is precious little in the Center's current cramped environment that would otherwise excite them.

In a matter of six to eight months, we will move into a facility that provides for the care of our many species with adequate space, a safe and comfortable environment, and the equipment to make the job so much easier to perform.

The new Center will be an 8,700 sq. ft. building including a partial basement. Adjacent to our existing flight cage and new education animal exhibit, the new facility will house a veterinary clinic and surgery room, rehabilitation spaces, administrative offices, reception area, species-specific rooms, and an education classroom to serve local students, families and youth groups.

This is becoming a reality because our many donors are stepping forward with two- and three-year commitments to help us get this important facility on line. If you have not yet made a gift, there is still plenty of opportunity. We have raised \$1,170,000 to date and need another \$370,000 to complete the construction that will rival other state-of-the art rehabilitation centers in the United States.

Contact Franny Crawford, Director of Development, at (540) 550-3057 to discuss naming opportunities and allow us to honor your generosity. We have some campaign materials we would love to share with you.

Local Fuel Spill Injures Three Geese

When thinking about oil spills and the wildlife that suffer from them, most people conjure images of half sunken oil ships, with black pools spreading from their cracked hulls. This past March, however, we received a call from the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) with a problem: a tractor trailer carrying diesel fuel had flipped over and spilled its contents all along the highway. Workers were still rushing to clean it up, but the highway ran along ponds and marshlands where wildlife gathered. The officer called to report that he had confirmed three oiled geese found and captured, there were other oiled wildlife seen but they were unable to be captured for treatment. The USFWS needed a facility to treat them, and the Center was the closest option.

As the geese arrived in their large cardboard boxes, the smell of diesel fuel was overwhelming. Each goose's feathers were slicked down, but unlike thick oil, the diesel fuel was almost impossible to see. They were greasy to the touch, but it was difficult to determine where the fuel had or hadn't covered them. Most oil spill recovery centers have large facilities with the room to have multiple rows of baths in which to dip and clean the birds. In our tiny cottage we had to improvise with our single bathtub.

We took each goose individually for a bath, using Dawn dishwashing soap and warm water to wash every inch of their feathers. Without the luxury of multiple stations, we had to wash them, rinse and clean the tub, then wash them again, until the water rinsing from the goose was free of dirt and bubbles. Each goose was then toweled off, given heated rice bags to help them

retain their heat while they dried, and put in a crate inside the house, since it was still too cold for them to be outside.

The diesel fuel was a serious concern for their health, as it destroys their feather's waterproofing, which allows the geese to float on ponds and keeps their feathers from getting wet and them from getting cold. Without their waterproofing at such a cold time during the year, hypothermia was a definite threat. Geese will also regularly preen themselves, to clean dirty feathers or

replace the waterproofing. In doing so, these patients ran the risk of ingesting the fuel that was covering them, which could make them sick. To prevent this from happening, each goose was given liquid charcoal through a tube directly into their stomachs, which would bind to the

fuel, and help the body pass any that had been ingested.

The entire house smelled of diesel fuel, especially the bathroom and the second floor where the geese were being housed. After their initial baths, the geese each got two more baths the next day before their feathers were considered clean enough to allow the geese to preen themselves. After one last exam by the vet, they were considered waterproof and well enough to be placed into one of our outdoor enclosures, where they could stretch and move around, with a pool to swim in.

After letting them put on a little weight, all three geese were taken to the Shenandoah River and released together. Each goose made a mad dash to the water, but all three of them floated downstream, sticking close together and hopefully relishing in their second chance at a wild life. ■



Meet Jess Andersen



A new addition to our crew arrived earlier in 2015: full-time wildlife rehabilitator to help us with the ever-growing number of animals we were expecting this year. Jessica Andersen had just finished her tenure at Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation, a facility in Texas where she was an apprentice for a year and cared for native injured and orphaned wildlife, as well as exotic and domestic animals that were given sanctuary at the facility.

Her prior experiences include an internship at the Marine Mammal Center in San Pedro, California, where she did a summer internship, and then continued as a volunteer through the rest of 2013. She has always been passionate about the survival and well-being of animals for as long as she can remember. Jessica is excited that she can continue helping wildlife here in Virginia, close to her original home of Maryland and her alma mater, Randolph College, where she graduated with a Bachelors in Biology.

Here at the Center, Jessica has become a "permitted rehabilitator" in the Commonwealth of Virginia. With her training, she has been able to help us with intake of animals, answering our wildlife hotline, administering medication, and helping with our education programs, as well as a myriad of other things that need to be done to allow the Center to run as smoothly as possible. As we continue to take in more and more animals every year, we are continuously pushed beyond what we are able to do with the personnel we have. With generous donations from people like you, we are able to hire the help we need to provide the best care for the animals we take in. ■

The Year of the Duck

Several new and odd duck species were patients at the Center this year. Most were patients in the winter, coming in with similar diagnoses of starvation due to the harsh weather.

First, we received a Ruddy Duck, a smaller, more compact species, which feeds mostly on insects and nests in the marshes throughout the United States. Found in Warren County and unable to fly, he was diagnosed as emaciated. Birds carry most of their weight in their flight muscles. This means that the bird will start to burn muscle for energy if they are struggling to find food in the winter. The longer they struggle, the more muscle definition they lose, causing flight to become difficult and then impossible. The staff helped this duck quickly gain weight with supplemental tube feeding, and he was successfully released on the Shenandoah River.

The river was graced with another new inhabitant in early spring: a Northern Shoveler brought in from a veterinary clinic in Fairfax, Virginia. With a long bill, wider at the tip than at the base, this dabbling duck has a very distinct look. Also emaciated and with an old puncture wound in his shoulder, he needed both supplemental feeding and swim time in our bathtub to improve his waterproofing. Once his feathers were fully waterproof, he was released.

Our strangest case arrived when a concerned citizen called about a duck in his chimney. He brought the bird in to us and we discovered that it was a Common Merganser, a diving duck that feasts mostly on fish. Mergansers are cavity nesters; the babies jump from the

nest very soon after hatching, and catch their own food from day one.

Perhaps mistaking the chimney for a good nesting spot, the adult bird was luckily unharmed, and after a brief stay in our bathtub, he was released.

The Center also successfully treated and released an emaciated gander (male) Gadwall. These birds nest in Canada, and eat mostly underwater vegetation, except when producing eggs, when they eat mostly insects to meet

their extra protein needs.

Unfortunately, not all stories have happy endings. Two other injured ducks, a Lesser Scaup and a Canvasback, despite our best efforts, were not able to be rehabilitated successfully.

The Scaup, another diving species, came in with a severely fractured beak, which seemed to be healing, but succumbed to pneumonia. The Canvasback also suffered a fractured beak, which made both self-feeding and tube-feeding impossible.

While not all our animals make a full recovery, each one provides an opportunity to teach us about their species, their special circumstances, and ways in which to handle the next case—making the loss an opportunity to try again.

Pictured above: Rescued Common Merganser.



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

Summer Interns Help with Busy Season



Every spring, as our hotline begins to buzz with phone calls about baby animals being found, we begin to prepare for the unofficial time known to rehabbers as “Baby Season.” During this three-month period we take in over half of the almost 2,000 animals we will likely receive this year.

Update on Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)

As of January 2015, the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) has extended the containment zone for this disease to include all of Frederick, Clarke, Warren, and Shenandoah Counties which means there will be no rehabilitation of deer or fawns permitted within these counties, and no deer can be moved from these counties into any others. By doing this, DGIF hopes to stop the spread of CWD to other areas of Virginia. CWD is a prion disease similar to Mad Cow Disease, which affects the nervous system of deer and other cervids. Unfortunately, deer can be carriers of this disease or sick without showing any outward symptoms. If you find a deer or fawn you believe is in need of rescue, please call the Center for advice on how to proceed. For more information on CWD, please visit DGIF’s website (<http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/diseases/cwd/>).

With the number of animals we take in, it would be difficult for us to care for all of them without the willing and hard-working efforts of our summer interns. These interns are a combination of part-time and full-time, and come from Virginia, as well as other states, such as Wyoming, New York, and Massachusetts. Housing is provided for full-time interns, thankfully, by generous hosts that donate their spare rooms for the three months they are here.

Near the end of baby season, we give an appreciation picnic for our interns, which includes food, games, a trivia quiz, and prizes. This year, we also

organized a canoe trip down the Shenandoah River for the interns (pictured left), funded and guided by one of our board members, Greg Ellison. We are extremely grateful for our interns’ commitment to the Center and wish them all good fortune in their future endeavors!

Our 2015 Summer Interns:

Bailie Marble – University of Wyoming; **Matthew Tennant** – Lord Fairfax Community College; **Jane Braswell** – Franklin & Marshall College; **Samantha Greene** – Shepherd University; **Jessica Hien** – University of Massachusetts – Amherst; and **Abigail Bierman** – Bates College.

My Summer as a Wildlife Intern

By Bailie Marble

As the summer comes to an end and everyone heads back to school, I think back on the many experiences, challenges, and skills I have acquired over the summer. I, like all the other interns, came here with the goal to work with animals. Starting back in May, I arrived at the Center and was immediately put to work doing the daily routine. As the summer progressed I quickly learned how to care for baby birds of all kinds, from the ever-so common Robins and Grackles to Blue Jays and Chimney Swifts. There were many times that caring for these little birds proved to be quite a handful, with begging mouths open every 30 minutes, for ten hours!

Even though taking care of baby birds seems tough, it’s worth it in the end when they are released and are able to live out in the wild. Further into the summer, I learned how to care for other animals such as opossums, squirrels, and turtles. Each animal is unique in more ways than one, like their care and their behavior, but in the end it’s always exciting to see these animals grow, heal and be released. While there may be many animals released back to the wild, there are some that are received at the Center that have injuries too great for any repair we can do. It can make this job a daunting one, but



where there are sad stories, there are also success stories, and they always outweigh the sad ones.

In addition to learning about the care that it takes to rehabilitate animals, I learned many skills that would benefit and further a career I hope to have in this line of work. I was taught things like how to properly hold a bird, how to tell if an animal is dehydrated, and how to bandage wounds. All of these techniques are crucial to being a good wildlife rehabilitator. Overall, this summer has been physically and mentally demanding at times, but as demanding as it may be it has helped me to further my education and prepare me for my future. The best part is knowing that I was able to contribute to the health of Virginia’s wildlife and ecosystems. It was truly a pleasure and honor to work alongside great people who were willing to take the time to teach me all that I have learned and who helped me to experience the work and life of a wildlife rehabilitator. ■



Blue Ridge Wildlife Center

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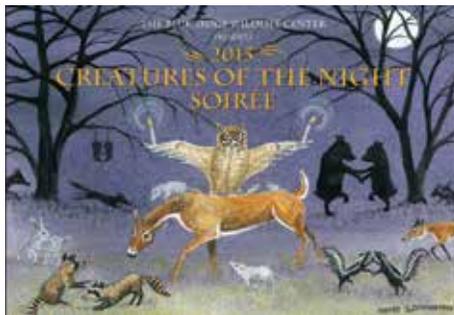
 Follow us on Facebook and Twitter! We post stories about the animals we rescue and rehabilitate. Learn about Virginia wildlife and some of the things that endanger them on our Facebook page. 

Creatures of the Night Soirée Fall Event September 26, 2015

Plans are underway for this year’s major fall event, the Creatures of the Night Soirée, to take place at the home of Barbara and Andy Ferrari in Clarke County. With sweeping views of the Blue Ridge Mountains and lovely gardens surrounding the Ferrari house, this promises to be another elegant evening under the stars.

Co-Chairs Bundles Murdock of Middleburg, Virginia and Anne McIntosh, of Millwood, Virginia have joined forces to bring together all the elements for a wonderful evening: an excellent menu, lovely décor, and an auction of items that will attract all interests.

Committee members Stephanie Bates, Trish Bartholomew, Tressa Borland-Reuling, Heather Bowen, Bailey Davis, Maria Eldredge, Cary Embury, Carolyn Farouki and Sharon Phipps are among those hard at work to make this year’s event memorable.



Highlights of this year’s auction include:

- **Beautiful bronze equestrian sculpture:** by world-renowned artist Lorenzo Ghiglieri - American, 20th Century. Titled *Airborne*, signed and numbered #317 in a limited edition of 475. 28” high on a 29” by 12” base. *Estimated value: \$35,000.*
- **Elizabeth Locke:** Stunning 19k gold earrings with 15x15 cushion Lapis and four 2.5mm round faceted blue sapphires! Exquisite, and ready to be worn home by the lucky winning bidder. *Retail value: \$4,450.*

- **Jamaican Dream Trip:** Contact friends and put together your group of six today to bid on this Jamaican dream trip. You will not likely forget your Six Night Stay in a Private Luxury Villa with staff of three at the Round Hill Hotel & Villa Resort, Montego Bay, Jamaica. *Estimated value: \$5,000.*
- **One Pair of Mark Miller Oil Studies on Panel:** Exquisite pair of landscapes. *Estimated Value TBD.*

So mark your calendars, buy a table, and come out on September 26th to show your support for the rescue and rehabilitation of our native wildlife. We can’t do it without you!

Our special Wildlife Ambassadors will also be on hand, if their social calendars are free. This may include “Beeker” the Striped Skunk, “Patsy” the Virginia Opossum and “Briar Rose” the Red-tailed Hawk.

For further information about buying a table (2, 4, 6, 8, or 10 tickets), giving a donation to the auction, or purchasing a ticket, please call Franny Crawford at (540) 550-3057. Don’t wake up on the 27th and wish you had joined the fun!

