

The Ridgeline

Newsletter of the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center

Issue 28 • Winter 2016



Roller Coaster Winter



Meet Dr. Riley | Rehabilitative Enrichment | Vulture Ed 101 | Sweet Medicine | Nature Camp



Timing is Everything

Dear Friends of Wildlife,

This winter has reminded me so much of book I read years ago entitled **Timing is Everything** by Denis Waitley. Mr. Waitley told his readers that winter is the time for making plans and setting goals. Spring is for breaking ground and planting seeds. Summer is for endurance and optimism. Fall is the season for harvest.

I certainly feel that the Winter of 2016 has been the season for planning and goal setting. This time of year we typically see a slowdown in the number of sick, injured and orphaned wildlife coming into the Center, and we have been able to make considerable progress in setting our sights for a great 2016. Some of the fruits of those plans are highlighted in this newsletter issue with an exciting announcement about a new staff hire, wonderful stories about wildlife, and expanded educational programs for this summer!

First, I ask that you be sure to read the article about Dr. Jennifer L. Riley, D.V.M. who has just joined our full-time staff as Director of Veterinary Services. We are thrilled to have someone with Dr. Riley's wildlife and management experience, her wonderful educational training, and her enthusiasm for getting started in this, her new home. When you meet Dr. Riley, please welcome her warmly.

In addition, the construction of our new facility is complete, and we are now entering the setup and furnishing phase. Our first task is to outfit the wildlife hospital with equipment, including a new x-ray machine, a surgical light and table, and exam room furnishings. In addition, we must prepare the rehabilitation rooms and education area with proper caging. While all this is well underway, we must follow stringent guidelines as set forth by Virginia Board of Veterinary Medicine, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and others. All this takes time, but we anticipate moving in the Spring 2016. Watch Facebook, www.facebook.com/BlueRidgeWildlifeCtr, and our website, www.blueridgewildlifectr.org for updates on our progress.

We are also pleased to announce our new format for the coming Summer Nature Discovery Camp. Jennifer Burghoffer, Manager of Education, is overseeing this program and has been working with area educators to be ready to present the best programs we can offer to our campers for Summer 2016. This year we are offering a new schedule of three five-day camps for different age groups. As soon it becomes available, we will post the information on our Facebook and website.

Finally, as you read through this issue, know that our incredible staff is about to enter into BABY SEASON! This is a time when all hands are on deck 24 hours per day, with 15 minute feedings and up to 1,000 babies passing through our facility over the year. Think of our staff fondly for the next three to five months as they will need positive thoughts coming their way!

I hope you agree, the BRWC has not been idle since you last heard from us. The Center is looking forward to a productive year in which we serve our wildlife patients, educate our children, and research wildlife issues. Please contact me if you ever have any questions about wildlife, or about Center operations. I enjoy speaking with each and every one of you.

We are grateful for all you do for the wildlife and for the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center.

Enjoy this Winter issue, and all best.

David B. Bancroft
Executive Director



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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.

Follow our wildlife stories on Facebook and Twitter!



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Meet Dr. Jen Riley

Dear Friends and Supporters of BRWC,

I am thrilled to be joining the team at Blue Ridge Wildlife Center as the Director of Veterinary Services. I have been working with wildlife and rehabilitators for over a decade in collaboration with a number of institutions domestically and abroad.

I developed a passion for wildlife at a young age, but my career goals only seemed possible after experiencing wildlife centers in action during my undergraduate studies at Cornell University and while at veterinary school at Tufts University. Both of these institutions have successful, well-run wildlife centers that inspired me further.

After graduating from Tufts, I held wildlife veterinary positions at the Belize Wildlife and Referral Clinic in San Ignacio, Belize where I learned to treat and rehabilitate wildlife with minimal resources, and discovered the kind of work involved in running such a center. After

Belize, I was lucky enough to work at The Center for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife (CROW) in Sanibel, Florida

My experience at CROW, working alongside board certified specialists and seeing a high volume of patients, further prepared me for my current position. I was able to treat many of the species that we see regularly at BRWC and develop my surgical skills in addition to mentoring students, staff, and volunteers. CROW allowed me to get involved in research and publishing as well as public outreach and education. I hope to use these skills to expand upon research and educational programs for our center.

My most recent position prior to starting at BRWC was as a veterinarian at Lion Country Safari in West Palm Beach, FL. Working with exotic species in a nearly wild setting further prepared me for my current position. Lion



Country Safari, an AZA-accredited zoological park, provided me with numerous surgical

and medical cases as well as experience working with educational raptors that were used for demonstrations on property.

I believe that my experience thus far in wildlife medicine has prepared me well for my dream job—Veterinarian at Blue Ridge Wildlife Center! Like the staff and all of you, I am extremely excited for the opening of our new state-of-the-art hospital and for the future growth of our organization.

With our new facility and our amazing staff, the future is very bright for BRWC!

Sincerely,

Dr. Jen Riley

Director of Veterinary Services

Cover Story: Mild Season Temperatures Bring Changes to Wildlife Activity



Although we've seen our fair share of typical winter weather—cold and snowy—this season has been inconsistent. In December, many people found themselves questioning if winter would ever arrive as the days continued to boast mild temperatures. Even recently,

after the bouts of freezing days, we've had days that gave us hope that spring would be right around the corner. But humans are not the only ones getting confused by the weather.

Our normal winter intake is much slower than our baby boom of the spring and summer months, with many species migrating south or hibernating. Winter normally brings us emaciated hawks and owls as it gets more difficult to hunt for prey in snow and freezing rain. Starving waterfowl are common as well, as their usual ponds freeze over and prevent them from foraging, or the ice makes them literal "sitting ducks" to predators that can reach them by treading on the frozen water. Occasionally we will get opossums suffering from

frostbitten ears and tails.

However, this year we have received higher numbers of certain species than we normally see at this time. This includes the several squirrels we've received, injured mostly by cars, since they've been more active with the warm weather. Squirrels do not hibernate, but they will spend the majority of the cold days hidden in warm places, snacking on cached foods. For a typical winter, squirrels will increase their weight by almost double, which they will slowly lose over the lean months, as they burn more calories to stay warm than they can replace. This year, however, with mild average temperatures, our squirrels bulked up, but did not need to use these extra pounds, leaving them chubby.

We've taken in quite a few bats as well, found outside on warmer-than-usual days, but weren't able to be left outside with colder weather coming. Bats should be hibernating this time of year, and like the squirrels, put on extra weight to survive the cold. Bats depend on the cold to help keep their body temperature lower, but higher temperatures this year have kept their favorite cool spots warm. Unable to hibernate completely, the bats' bodies continued to burn more calories, causing them to venture out from their hibernaculum in search of food. Unfortunately for them, the insects have not been fooled by the weather, and the woken bats are without a food source.



Thankfully, the Good Samaritans who found the bats brought them to the Center, where staff will care for them until the bats' food source returns this spring.

Even though some species have been negatively affected by the warmer-than-usual winter, other species are enjoying it, and doing well. Predators such as hawks and owls have been able to easily find food and we haven't received as many emaciated raptors. Waterfowl such as ducks and geese have been able to forage on unfrozen water sources longer this winter, and escape potential dangers. This only shows that even in nature, one species' loss is another species' gain. ■



their cages. This requires mammals to use their sense of smell (olfactory) to forage for their food. We can do this for all of our animals whether they are a mammal, bird, or reptile.

Some of our items can serve more than one type of enrichment. For example, we may place branches with berries on them in a songbird's cage. This is both food presentation and environmental enrichment. It gives them a change in their environment and gives them a more natural way of eating rather than eating off of a plate. This will also help to teach them that they will sometimes have to work for their food.

One of the most enjoyable types of enrichment we can give is manipulative enrichment. Manipulative enrichment is anything that requires the animal to feel or physically interact with something. This can be done in many ways; one is to give our raccoons live goldfish. We place the goldfish into their pool and the animals will watch the fish and try to catch them. This will keep them entertained and reward them with the chance to eat fish. This learning process will help them in the wild when they are by a creek or river and are hungry.

An important type of auditory (hearing) enrichment that we do is playing different calls outside an enclosure. We can also put their cage outside so they can hear other sounds from nature. For example the growing robin can get accustomed to and recognize the call of their own species and other animals in the wild.

While most people don't necessarily think of enrichment as a part of wildlife rehabilitation, it is very important for the wellbeing of the animals. It helps our babies to develop important skills necessary for survival and helps all of them to stay wild. ■

Keeping Busy

Rehabilitative Enrichment Helps Our Patients Fine-Tune their Innate Behaviors



What do you think animals do in captivity between eating and sleeping? They can explore their environment, but that can get a bit dull if you are surrounded by the same things from day to day. For this reason we have an enrichment plan for all of our patients and education animals at the Center. Enrichment helps to keep our patients from being bored, and some can encourage natural behaviors. There are five types of enrichment: auditory, olfactory, manipulative, environmental, and food presentation.

For our patients, we use only natural means that mimic what they would encounter in the wild. The animals will eventually be released into nature, and we want them to get used to things they may encounter in their natural habitat. We don't want them to get used to anything associated with people.

Some of the enrichment also helps our animals develop important skills needed to survive in the wild. An example of this is hiding mouse bedding or food in



Black Vultures

A Policy Perspective



By David B. Bancroft

Like most lovers of wildlife, I grew up appreciating the cycle of life where baby animals are born, they mature, and the cycle ends upon the animal's death. This is more frequently known in ecological circles as the grazing food chain, where the energy from the system comes from green plants. The green plants are eaten by herbivores which are further eaten up by carnivores or omnivores.

It wasn't until I started studying ecology that I realized that was only half the system, and the other half was the detritus food chain. The detritus food chain starts with dead organic matter. Within the detritus food chain there are decomposers, like bacteria. They consume microscopic portions of dead materials and break them down into chemical parts such as nitrogen, carbon and other nutrients that can then be used again by plants and animals.

However, before the decomposers can do their work, scavengers typically come into play. Scavengers, using beaks or jaws, physically eat dead animals, and help break down or reduce organic material into smaller pieces.

One of the more prevalent scavengers in Virginia is the Black Vulture. It plays a critical ecological and economic role by removing the carcasses of dead wildlife from fields, roadways and neighborhoods. The exceptionally strong stomach acid of vultures eliminates the bacteria and viruses found in the dead bodies they consume. Immune to botulism, anthrax, rabies, and other diseases, vultures can safely consume rotting and infected carcasses. Other scavengers, such as rats and feral dogs, are far more likely to spread these diseases to humans.

Recently a bill has been advanced in the Virginia Legislature, and as of this writing has passed the Senate, that

would exempt the Black Vulture from its current protection by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF). It also would prohibit DGIF from using any state resources to enforce federal rules under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act that protect the Black Vulture

The bill was introduced because some farmers had reported that Black Vultures were attacking their newborn calves in pasture land. Calves which typically are unable to move for a few days after being born, may give the impression that they are dead or dying. The bill creates a permitting system for shooting Black Vultures, and allows farmers with a permit, to kill the vultures if they are endangering their livestock.

There are few scientific studies on the extent of Black Vulture attacks in Virginia. The most frequently cited study, "Damage by Black and Turkey Vulture in

Virginia" done by Martin S. Lowney in 1999, notes that 115 incidents of Black Vulture/livestock interactions were reported in Virginia from 1990 to 1996.

The Virginia State Legislature and the Virginia Governor should practice due diligence in enacting any new legislation or creating any regulation affecting Black Vultures. The extent of the problem, the number of incidents, and the economic losses need to be quantified. Just like in other matters dealing with wildlife and human interactions, if Black Vultures are placing an undue burden on the farm community, lethal methods should not be the first tool pulled out of the toolbox.

Let's hope our policy makers are not swayed by emotions or anecdotal examples, but let facts and science be their guide. ■



Campaign Progress Report



Rarely in the history of construction does a project finish on time and on budget. Never does a project finish ahead of schedule, but our amazing contractor, Art Saffelle Construction of Front Royal, Virginia did just that. We are excited that once we have secured all the necessary permits for the new space, we will be moving in later this Spring.

Our progress toward raising the money to pay for the building has been slow but steady. We need a final \$300,000 to finish paying for all construction costs (hard costs) and to fully outfit the new facility (soft costs). Once complete we will not only have the building fully furnished with appropriate medical equipment such as exam tables, surgery table and light, x-ray equipment, and anesthesia equipment, we will also have outdoor caging for all our Education Ambassadors.

We are still paying visits and making calls on our potential donor friends. If we have not yet



spoken to you about our incredible wildlife hospital and rehabilitation facility, let us know you are interested by calling or e-mailing **Franny Crawford (540) 550-3057, gaveap@verizon.net** or **David Bancroft (540) 535-9201, david@blueridgewildlifectr.org**. We can't wait to tell you all about it. There are still some naming opportunities available at certain gift levels—a wonderful way to honor or memorialize a family member or friend! ■



The Healing Touch of Honey

Wildlife medicine is something that is constantly evolving. It is reliant on the veterinarians and rehabilitators encountering new patients and developing protocols and treatments relative to domestic and human medicine.

Recently, a Red-shouldered Hawk patient was scheduled for release. When it was captured in preparation for transportation to the release site, a small wound was noticed in between the toes on one

of its feet. With any open wound, there is risk of infection, so the hawk was brought back to an outdoor cage in the Center's backyard where it could receive antibiotics and have the wound be treated daily.

After two weeks, the wound had not improved, and one of the toes started to swell and become irritated. The growth on the toe resembled avian pox, which is very contagious to other birds and normally spreads on the non-feathered areas of a bird, such as the feet and around the eyes. In addition to

the oral antibiotics, the bird's foot was soaked daily in diluted betadine to clean the original wound. For another week or so, the wound looked to be visibly improving; the dead tissue was reduced and healthy tissue around the open skin was beginning to grow back. The growth on the toe receded slightly, and no new growths appeared, but after a number of days the progress stalled and the wound didn't seem to be healing any further.

Believing that there may have been a secondary issue, the vet suggested beginning treatment for a possible fungus growing on the foot. Staff began a topical antifungal ointment and wrapping the toe to prevent the ointment from being wiped off on the hawk's perches. Despite these efforts, the wound seemed to be getting worse, and another growth started appearing on the next toe.

We had tried antibiotics, betadine, antifungals, topical ointments, wrapping the toe, nearly everything. The wounds were worsening, and the hawk's ability to use its foot was dwindling. Unsure of where to turn next, one of our staff made an interesting suggestion. She had recently attended a class on the medicinal uses of honey at a wildlife conference, and wished to apply her new knowledge to this case. After much discussion between the staff and the vet, it was agreed to give the hawk another chance. The staff began a daily regimen of soaking the hawk's foot in warm salt water, after which the wound and both swollen toes were covered in raw, unprocessed honey. Honey has been used for medicinal purposes since ancient times. It has antimicrobial and antifungal properties, and also promotes the growth of healthy tissue.

In just a week the wound was already improving, looking less "angry" as the dead tissue started disappearing and the healthy tissue grew from beneath it. The growths on the hawk's toes started receding, and after about two months the toes were completely healed, and the skin a fresh, healthy pink over what had once been red, black and swollen. This study is a testament to how important continuing education is to our field. ■



The above photos show the the hawk's foot wound and the healing progress after honey was applied.



2016 Nature Discovery Camp



The Center is excited to announce that registration for the 2016 Nature Discovery Camp is now open! Camp will be held at the Burwell-van Lennep Foundation Island Farms, in Boyce, as in the past years. Now featuring several five-day sessions by age, camp will be hosted in the brand-new education classroom. Dates and descriptions of the camp sessions and topics can be found on our Facebook

page: www.facebook.com/BlueRidgeWildlifeCtr as an event. The registration form can be found on our website www.blueridgewildlifectr.org. Completed forms can be sent to P.O. Box 326 Millwood, VA 22646 or emailed to education@blueridgewildlifectr.org. Let's discover nature together! ■



Call for Intern Housing



With summer and baby season fast approaching, the staff at the Center is busy making preparations, including reviewing intern applications. With so many animals brought to the Center during the next few months, the staff can use all the help it can get.

The number of out-of-state interns that the Center can accept is entirely dependent on housing, graciously donated by our supporters. If you or someone you know may be able to donate a room or two in your home for aspiring wildlife stewards, please contact the Center by phone or email Intern Coordinator Heather Sparks at heather@blueridgewildlifectr.org. ■



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!

Save the Dates!

Mark your calendars!

The dates have been set for the Center's major annual fundraisers. The **Baby Shower** will be held on **Sunday, June 12th** at Long Branch Plantation in Boyce, Virginia. Stop in between Noon and 3:00 p.m. to meet some of our wildlife education ambassadors, bid on silent auction items, win some awesome raffle prizes, or have your face painted!



Or join us on **Saturday, September 17th** at our **Soirée**. More details will be posted on our website and Facebook page as they develop.





Blue Ridge Wildlife Center

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New Website! www.blueridgewildlifectr.org • New Email! info@blueridgewildlifectr.org



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.



It Takes a Village

By Heather Sparks

I have been with the Center for over five years now and I love my job. For the rest of the staff and myself, some days are harder than others, as not every animal that comes to the Center survives. In the Summer we undergo a grueling schedule: early rise in the morning (around 5:00 or 6:00 a.m.) to feed babies we have taken home for the night, followed by a ten- to eleven-hour shift at the Center caring for upwards of 400 animals, finishing with nighttime feedings at our homes for those babies that need more care. Sometimes, these babies even need midnight feedings, just to start all over again the next morning. Despite the hard work, most days we can't believe how lucky we are, to be able to work each day at a job we are passionate about, doing such an important service to our community, and to the natural world around us.

We could never do this job without

people like you. There would be no patients at the Center without people who care enough about wildlife to stop and help. You call us with questions or about animals in distress, pulling over to move a turtle out of the road and out of danger, or you donate your hard-earned money or items we need. Even children are asking for donations of items for the wildlife instead of presents for their birthdays, and many people have donated funds in honor or memory of loved ones. Time is also so graciously donated: our volunteers often work a regular job five days a week, and then give up their nights or part of their weekend to help.

The list of the many ways people, businesses, and other organizations go above and beyond to do whatever they can to support the work we do for the wildlife in our region is extensive, sometimes even finding new ways to help not yet thought of before.



They say it takes a village to raise a child—we say it takes a village to raise the 900 orphans we will receive in a year. We know that the list of donors we had in our previous newsletter doesn't even begin to thank all of the people who make what we do at the Center possible. On behalf of the staff, volunteers, and all the animals past and present, we thank you!

