



Volunteer Information Packet

Thank you for your interest in volunteering with the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center!

Who Are We?

The BRWC is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization and relies heavily on volunteers to achieve the goals of rehabilitating and releasing native Virginia wildlife back to the wild, as we do not receive any funding from state or federal sources. We are the only wildlife-exclusive full-service hospital in the Northern-Virginia area and provide no charge for our services. As a Wildlife Hospital, we have full-time veterinary staff to provide medical care and staff and volunteers to provide rehabilitative care to the animals we treat. We offer educational programs to the public with biofacts and non-releasable animal ambassadors that represent their species to audiences of all ages and backgrounds. We also partner with other organizations to take part in research projects to further studies regarding wildlife health, diseases, and other pertinent information.

As a volunteer, YOU make all of this possible! Your dedication and selfless giving of your time and effort allows us to stretch our resources to be able to care for over 2,000 animals a year. For every hour given to feed a baby squirrel, prepare diets for the next day, or clean a cage so that a new animal can be moved outside, you are giving an animal another chance.

So what is being a volunteer at a Wildlife Center like?

Volunteering at a wildlife facility is 90% custodial. This means that the majority of work done here is spent cleaning – whether it's cleaning cages for new patients, cleaning dishes for diet preparation, cleaning laundry, or cleaning the facility. Cleaning is incredibly important in keeping our current patients healthy and less stressed, and overall increases their chances of being released. Just as with anything we care for and maintain, the more we take care of the Center and its rooms and enclosures, the longer these things will last and allow us to care for the animals needing our help.

Our volunteers are trained based on their attention to detail, ability to follow instruction, show of commitment, and willingness to learn. No previous experience is necessary to be a volunteer with us. The animals we see here are highly seasonal – our baby season starts in early March and extends through August, while the majority of our raptor patients are normally seen July through December. There is no guarantee that you will be trained on all of our animals or species – training is determined by our staff on a volunteer case-by-case basis. Learning to handle some of our education animals may be available but is not guaranteed.

Volunteer Expectations and Requirements:

Volunteers should be enthusiastic, hard-working, and able to work in all weather types. Wildlife Rehab volunteers need to be able to climb stairs and be able to lift at least 30lbs. We require our volunteers to commit to at least one 4-5 hour shift one day per week, every week, for a minimum of 6 months. Individuals who are unable to commit to this time frame are not eligible to participate in BRWC's Wildlife Rehabilitation volunteer program at this time. Please make sure to detail on your application what shifts you are interested in and what days you are available so that we can contact you when an availability becomes open that coincides with your schedule.

Our shifts are as follows:

AM Shift (March – September) 8am – 1pm

(October – February) 9am – 1pm

PM Shift (March – September) 1pm – 6pm (or until finished)

(October – February) 1pm – 5pm (or until finished)

Dress & Parking Requirements

Volunteers are required to wear closed-toed shoes at all times. T-shirts and shorts are allowed, but no tank-tops, short-shorts, or crop tops. We recommend volunteers wear clothes that are comfortable and functional, but are items that will not be missed terribly if stained with bleach or torn, etc. Volunteers are required to park by the Wildlife Walkway in the parking area. Parking spots directly in front of the building are for animal drop-offs, handicap parking, and staff only.

Vaccinations

We recommend being up to date on your tetanus vaccination and have great use for volunteers who are rabies vaccinated. Please note that any volunteers who have not had a rabies pre-exposure vaccine or do not have proof of a rabies titer in the last 2 years will not be allowed to handle any *Rabies Vector Species (RVS)* which are: **Raccoons, skunks, groundhogs, bats, foxes, and beavers, as well as any carnivores (Bobcats, weasels, etc.)**

Volunteers without a pre-exposure vaccine or proof of rabies titer will still be allowed to learn how to care for all potential bird species, reptiles, amphibians, and our small mammals (squirrels, opossums, and eastern cottontails). All bites from mammals, RVS or not, should be reported immediately to staff.

If you cannot meet the physical requirements necessary for an animal care volunteer position, please consider Transport, Administration or Docent/Event positions. These volunteer positions are still extremely important for the functioning of the facility, and your donated time still allows us to care for animals, educate more people, and coordinate events! Please see the Volunteer application for details on what is expected of these other positions.

Transport Volunteers

If you are unable to commit to a daily/weekly schedule for animal care, please consider becoming a volunteer transporter for us! Half of the trouble to begin treating an animal in need starts with getting them to our facility. Many finders are able to contain an animal but are not available or able to drive the animal to us for care. Please let us know in your volunteer application what areas you frequent/are willing to travel to and what days/times you are most likely available. When we have an animal in those listed areas needing transport, we will call down our transport list looking for available transporters. You will never have to catch and contain the animal and you are never obligated to transport; if you are unavailable, we will simply continue calling down the list until we can find someone who is.

Our Patients and their Rehab Journey

Since our patients are wild, easily stressed, and should have a healthy fear of humans, we **do not** handle or view our patients unless necessary, such as for behavioral observation, medication, or cleaning out enclosures. Our permits do not allow our rehab patients to be on display. We are neither a petting zoo nor a sanctuary for non-releasable animals – we take great care in making sure our patients are not habituated or friendly towards humans. Understanding this is critical in their recovery.

Because our wild patients must be able to function at their best once they are released, many patients that come into our care have injuries or debilitations that would not allow them to survive in the wild. While some animals can be happy and successful as ambassadors in captivity, the majority of these

animals cannot. Many injuries can lead to chronic pain, discomfort, behavioral issues, and the majority of wild animals are exactly that – wild. Their instinct to avoid humans causes stress, which can lead to illness or further injury. Quality of life is more important than simply forcing an animal to live for human benefit.

Euthanasia is sometimes the kindest thing we can offer to suffering patients. You are never required to be in the room while this is occurring, but we encourage you to ask questions and understand how our staff came to the decision for these specific patients. As a Wildlife Center, we can only rehabilitate native animals that can be released back into the wild. Because of the State's laws and our limited resources, we do not care for European Starlings, House Sparrows, or Rock Doves (Pigeons), or any other species the State of Virginia considers invasive/non-native. If you have any questions about this, please ask a staff member, as we'd be happy to discuss what this means.

Releases

If an animal makes a full recovery, we try to get them back to the area from which they came if possible, especially as adults. If they cannot be returned, they're babies, or RVS (rabies-vector species), they can be released in the county in which they were rehabilitated (Clarke). If you would like to take part in releasing, please let our staff know – you will need to also be listed as a Transport Volunteer for us to allow you to do this. See more about transporting above.

Zoonotic Diseases

Wildlife can be hosts and carriers of a multitude of diseases that can be spread from animals to humans, so proper PPE (personal protection equipment) and hygiene are required when handling animals or in animal care areas. There is no human food prep or eating in animal care areas. Please wash your hands often and whenever finished directly handling animals or animal laundry/dishes/furniture. The following list of diseases are simply the most common ones our wildlife can spread – there are many more not listed here for time and space's sake:

Rabies

Baylisascaris procyonis ("Raccoon Roundworm")

Salmonella

Chlamydia

Many diseases can also be transferred from wildlife to domestic animals, like parvovirus and distemper – we recommend wearing proper PPE or changing clothes when returning home, and to keep domestic animals up to date on vaccinations to protect your pets from any potential transfer of diseases.

Wildlife are inherently dangerous to work with, so we ask that you do not try to handle any animal without being trained first or put yourself into any situation in which you feel unprepared or unsafe. Many animals can bite or talon through welding gloves, and others still have strong wings that can injure you if not handled properly.

Permits

We rehabilitate and house wildlife thanks to permits issued to us by the state and federal government. These permits do not allow our wildlife patients to be on display, and so pictures of patients are not allowed unless exclusive permission is given via our staff. Our permits also allow us to keep feathers, bones, and bodies of deceased wildlife, which cannot leave our possession. Taking home native bird feathers is illegal without a permit according to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and doing so can jeopardize our permits and abilities to help wildlife in need, so taking any animal products from BRWC is strictly prohibited.

- As a sub-permittee, you are only allowed to handle wildlife here at the Center, and only animals that we have authorized for you to handle in a written letter that will be kept in your volunteer

file on site. Breaking the laws outside of the Center will result in direct termination of your volunteer status, but could also have negative consequences on the Center's permit status. Please be mindful of the laws surrounding wildlife – ask a staff member if you have any questions.

- If you would like to become a Cat 1 or 2 rehabilitator (Home Wildlife Rehabilitator), please discuss with the staff on how to become sponsored and the expectations and requirements of becoming a home rehabilitator. We are always looking to help expand the network of home rehabilitators and would be happy to help you pursue that process if that is something you'd like to seriously consider.