

# The Ridgeline

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Newsletter of the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center

## Need-to-Know Wildlife Rabies Facts

When we hear the word “rabies,” we usually envision a mad dog foaming at the mouth, attacking everything in sight. This is a misconception. Most rabid animals behave in a quieter and friendlier manner than they would normally.

Every year, several animals in our community become infected with rabies, so it is important to know when to be concerned that an animal may be rabid.

Rabies is a virus that infects the brain and nervous system, eventually killing the victim. It is spread when an infected animal’s saliva containing the virus enters a bite or scratch on another animal. Incubation of the disease may take a few weeks or many months before symptoms appear.

The symptoms of rabies can take two forms: “dumb” rabies and “furious” rabies. The furious form is the type often described in books and movies where the infected animal becomes overly aggressive. This form is actually less common than the dumb form, where the animal becomes very quiet and does not show a normal fear of humans. These animals do not behave normally; they may walk in circles, appear to be blind, and often are drooling because of an inability to swallow.



*Do not assume that every raccoon (or skunk or fox) you see during the day is infected with rabies. They can sometimes forage for food during the day.*

Any mammal can become infected with rabies, but particular species, such as raccoons, skunks, foxes, and bats, are

more likely to be infected than other wildlife in our area. Because the symptoms of rabies may be difficult to recognize, always avoid direct contact with any of these wild species.

Be especially cautious when approaching a raccoon, fox, or skunk that appears to have been hit on the road. That animal may be acting abnormally because it was hit in the head, or it may have been hit because infection with rabies made it less alert than normal.

Do not assume that every raccoon, skunk, or fox you see during the day is infected with rabies. Even though these species are mostly nocturnal, they can sometimes be seen foraging for food during the day.

They also might be out during daylight hours because they are sick or injured and unable to hide for reasons other than rabies infection. A healthy wild animal should be fearful of humans and run and hide if approached.

Healthy bats will roost in trees or buildings during the day and usually are reluctant to fly if disturbed. But a bat found on the ground day or night is either sick or injured and needs assistance.

Many of us who work at the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center have been vaccinated for rabies, so we are not at risk when handling these animals. We also vaccinate for rabies all the orphan raccoons, foxes, skunks, and bats we release, so they do not contribute to the spread of this terrible disease.

If you see an animal that might be infected with rabies, please call the Wildlife Center at 540-837-9000.



*Foxes, including babies like this, raccoons, skunks, and bats are more likely to be infected by rabies than other wildlife.*

## 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 available. 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.

## Seeking Expert Help

This summer the BRWC was atwitter with the sounds of dozens of baby songbirds. These hatchling and fledgling birds required an extensive amount of work to keep them fed and properly housed. Baby birds require feeding every half hour from dawn to dusk seven days a week, and though this work is exhausting, it is exceptionally rewarding.

On a few occasions we had the opportunity to receive help from the true experts at raising young song birds: wild adult songbirds.

Earlier this summer, the BRWC received a young downy woodpecker that had been snatched from its nest by a cat. Caring individuals rescued this young bird and brought him to the Center for care. When he recovered from his injuries and was ready to explore the outside world, he was placed in an outdoor release cage. Within minutes, a wild downy landed on the cage. After it was clear the visiting downy was not exhibiting aggression, the cage was opened and both birds flew off together. Having a real expert show the young downy how to survive in the wild greatly improved his chances of survival.

We also received expert

assistance with the raising of a clutch of two hatchling eastern phoebes. When these babies arrived, we also had a wild phoebe nesting outside our wildlife center that had a clutch of babies about the same age.

Our orphans were placed in a cage near the nest, and the adult phoebes immediately began trying to get into the cage to feed the orphans. Once we opened the cage, the female began to feed them, and both adults took over their care.

It is always better for a wild animal to be raised by its parents, but when this is not possible, expert assistance from other wild adults greatly increases the chance an orphan raised at our center will have the skills required to survive in the wild. The Blue Ridge Wildlife Center will continue to seek this expert assistance to increase the survival of all of our patients.



*These baby cedar waxwings, like all young orphans, benefit from skills taught by wild adults.*

## A Most Misunderstood Species

Bat—the word strikes fear in many people. There are many myths about bats including that they are vicious and carry disease or that they purposely attack humans.

However, the truth is that bats rarely interact with humans. They are shy creatures and are rarely seen because they are nocturnal. Using a sophisticated system called echolocation, they are able to avoid objects in the dark and still find the tiny insects they are hunting.

Diseases such as rabies are rare in bats. Studies have shown that the actual incidence of rabies in bat populations is less than 0.05% in most areas. You have a much greater chance of dying from being struck by lightning than to die from rabies received from a bat bite.

Belonging to the scientific order *Chiroptera* (meaning “hand wing”), bats



*Bats are suffering a new disease causing a white fungus to grow on their face.*

are the only mammals with the ability to fly. Like all mammals they have fur, are warm blooded, and nurse their young.

There are 16 bat species in Virginia, three of which are endangered, three are species of federal concern, and the rest are all protected. Local bats can be divided into two groups: crevice-dwellers and tree-dwellers. The crevice dwelling bats, like the big **(continued next page, see Bats)**

**Bats (from p. 2)**

brown, little brown, and the mouse-eared bat, are colonial and often use buildings for their homes. Tree-dwelling bats, such as the eastern red bat and the hoary bat, are solitary and usually roost in trees. Some bat species stay in Virginia year around, hibernating in caves or attics. Others migrate south in the fall.

Bats are very beneficial animals. The majority of bats in the U.S. are insectivorous and play an important role in the control of insect populations. A little brown bat can eat up to 1,200 mosquitoes in an hour, and studies have shown that insects will leave an area with a bat colony.

World-wide, bats are very important to the ecology by pollinating plants and dispersing seeds. Bats are responsible for controlling many of the insect species that spread diseases such as malaria.



Currently, our Northeastern bat populations are in jeopardy due to a new disease called "White-nose syndrome." Last winter thousands of bats came out of hibernation too early and were found dead in and around their caves. These bats had a white fungus growing on their faces, giving the syndrome its name.

Scientists don't believe this fungus is the primary cause of death and are researching other possible factors such as toxins or microbial infections.

The public is being asked to stay away from caves where bats hibernate to prevent the accidental spread of this disease from cave to cave.

We treat many injured and orphaned bats at our wildlife center. A bat needs to be rescued if there is an obvious injury or if the bat is on the ground.

The best way to rescue a bat without getting bitten is to scoop it into a container with a towel or leather gloves. Never pick up a bat with your bare hands.

## Animals Treated Since January 2007

Wildlife can be so secretive we are often unaware of the tremendous variety of birds, mammals, and reptiles inhabiting our backyards. The following are species brought to the Wildlife Center from the surrounding community since January 2007. Most of these animals were injured, orphaned, or displaced by unnatural events created by human activities, such as collisions with vehicles, attacks by pets, window strikes, poisonings, and habitat destruction.

American Crow	9	Herring Gull	4
American Goldfinch	16	Hoary Bat	1
American Kestrel	13	Horned Grebe	2
American Robin	64	Horned Lark	1
American Toad	1	House Finch	22
Bachman's Sparrow	1	House Mouse	3
Bald Eagle	2	House Sparrow	16
Baltimore Oriole	4	Killdeer	3
Barn Owl	3	Little Brown Bat	2
Barn Swallow	5	Mallard Duck	78
Barred Owl	6	Meadow Jumping Mouse	6
Beaver	2	Merlin	1
Big Brown Bat	20	Mourning Dove	45
Black Vulture	9	Northern Bobwhite	1
Black-capped Chickadee	1	Northern Cardinal	19
Black-crowned Night Heron	2	Northern Goshawk	1
Blue Jay	26	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	1
Boat-tailed Grackle	1	Osprey	1
Broad-winged Hawk	9	Ovenbird	1
Brown Thrasher	2	Pied-billed Grebe	1
Brown-headed Cowbird	5	Pileated Woodpecker	1
Canada Goose	18	Purple Finch	9
Carolina Wren	9	Raccoon	63
Cedar Waxwing	8	Rat Snake	2
Chimney Swift	10	Red Bat	2
Chipmunk	5	Red Fox	32
Chipping Sparrow	10	Red-bellied Woodpecker	7
Common Garter Snake	2	Red-eyed Vireo	1
Common Grackle	25	Red-shouldered Hawk	19
Common Loon	5	Red-tailed Hawk	25
Common Musk Turtle	1	Red-winged Blackbird	3
Cooper's Hawk	14	Ring-billed Gull	2
Coyote	2	Rock Dove	6
Dark-eyed Junco	2	Ruby-throated Hummingbird	3
Downy Woodpecker	3	Rusty Blackbird	2
Eastern Bluebird	9	Sharp-shinned Hawk	4
Eastern Box Turtle	38	Snapping Turtle	2
Eastern Cottontail	107	Sora	1
Eastern Fox Squirrel	3	Southern Flying Squirrel	5
Eastern Gray Squirrel	155	Striped Skunk	41
Eastern Kingbird	1	Tree Swallow	8
Eastern Painted Turtle	10	Tufted Titmouse	4
Eastern Phoebe	2	Turkey Vulture	5
Eastern Red Bat	4	Virginia Opossum	146
Eastern Screech-owl	32	White-tailed Deer	6
European Starling	15	White-throated Sparrow	1
Field Sparrow	7	Wild Turkey	4
Fish Crow	1	Wood Duck	12
Gray Catbird	3	Wood Thrush	1
Gray Fox	3	Woodchuck	17
Great Blue Heron	5	Yellow Warbler	1
Great-horned Owl	5	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1
Green Heron	2	Yellow-billed Cuckoo	2
Hermit Thrush	1	Yellow-shafted Flicker	15

## Become a Supporter 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 supporter or wildlife sponsor of the Center. Supporters and wildlife sponsors receive *The Ridgeline*.

Your donations 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 choice of support on the form below and mail it with your check to the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center, Post Office Box 326, Millwood, VA 22646. All fees are effective for one calendar year.

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*This baby barred owl was brought to the Center after the tree in which her family was living fell down in a storm. She was raised at the Center in the presence of other barred owls so she would learn how to be an owl and not a human being. Now that she has grown up and has shown us that she knows how to hunt for mice, she is ready for release.*



*When this young great-horned owl was found, she was very hungry and alone. Somehow she became separated from her parents and was slowly starving to death. Since arriving at the Wildlife Center, she rapidly put on weight and should be ready for release soon.*

*We are grateful to Winchester's Impressions Plus for helping to support the cost of this newsletter.*

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