

The Ridgeline

Issue 9
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Newsletter of the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center

Letter from the President

As we begin our fifth season of rescue and rehabilitation, this is a good time to reflect on how much we have accomplished in the short time we have been in operation.

Our center has answered more than 10,000 calls on our wildlife hot line with all types of questions including "How do I get a bat out of my house?" to "I just saw a hawk get hit by a car. What should I do?"

We have assisted almost 2,000 native wild animals, most of whom became injured, orphaned, or displaced as a result of human activities.

We've published newsletters with information about wildlife and wildlife disease concerns, and have been quoted in the local newspapers on many wildlife issues. And we have given almost 100 wildlife educational programs in the local schools and in the community.

As our reputation grows, so has the number of animals coming into our wildlife center. The wildlife admitted to our center has been increasing by almost 50% each year, and now many local organizations such as the animal shelters, veterinary offices, and police count on us to rescue the injured and orphaned wildlife they receive.

To keep up with this demand, we are constantly building new rehabilitation cages, recruiting new animal care volunteers, and fundraising for food and medical supplies for these animals in need.

Since we do not receive any local, state, or federal funding, we could not have accomplished all that we have without the financial support of this community. With your continued support, there will always be a place for our native wildlife to receive help when they need it.

Belinda Burwell, DVM

Great Blue Heron Survives Gunshot

When this heron was found, he had a severely injured wing and was unable to fly. We knew he had broken a bone in his wing near the shoulder, but it wasn't until we took X rays that we knew he had been shot.

Not only was his wing bone shattered, but there were fragments of lead in the wound that told us this injury had been made with a bullet.

As is typical in most of these situations, this bird wasn't found right away, so the wound was a few days old and very infected.



Shooting a bird like this is a crime that is prosecuted under the Migratory Bird Act. We are required to report this type of injury to the US Fish and Wildlife Service so they can investigate. Harming any of the 800 species of birds protected under the migratory bird act can result in a fine up to \$15,000 and up to six months in jail.

If the species is endangered, the penalties are even higher, with fines up to \$100,000 and up to one year in jail.

We repaired the broken bone in this heron's wing and the pins will be ready to come out in the next few weeks. Then this heron will be ready to exercise as he prepares for release.

It's a good thing our large flight cage will be finished soon, because with a wing span of six feet, this heron will need a lot of room to exercise to prepare him for release.

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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.

Instrument Needed to Detect Lead Poisoning in Wildlife

Lead poisoning has been a problem for waterfowl for a very long time, but now it is being seen more frequently in other species such as birds of prey. Ingestion of lead causes birds to become disoriented and unable to feed. Then they die or become prey for other animals, who in turn become poisoned by the lead.

Waterfowl become poisoned by lead as they graze along the bottom of ponds and lakes where they inadvertently pick up lost pieces of lead shot and fishing sinkers. Birds of prey pick up lead as they feed on animals that contain lead shot.



This osprey is being treated for lead poisoning at the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife banned the use of lead ammunition in the hunting of waterfowl in 1991, and some states have additionally banned the use of lead sinkers used for fishing.

A few states are even considering a ban on all lead ammunition as a way to prevent lead poisoning in wildlife, but lead is still being used for hunting in Virginia.

Our wildlife center can help lead poisoned animals with a treatment called chelation therapy if we can diagnose it early enough. To determine if an animal has a high blood lead level, we currently need to mail a blood sample to a lab, then wait five to seven days until we receive the results.

If we had a blood lead analyzer at our center we could test suspect wildlife, get the results in minutes, and start treatment right away. We are asking for donations to purchase this equipment so we can test and start treatment for lead poisoning as quickly as possible.

The cost of this machine is \$2,400, which is equal to the cost of sending out tests for 100 animals. Considering we expect to see 800 to 1,000 animals this year, of which 50 to 100 may be lead poisoning suspects, this machine could pay for itself in one or two years.

If you can help us with the purchase of this machine, please send a donation marked "Lead Care Machine" to the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center.

Saved from Starving to Death

A young red-tailed hawk broke his wing in a very remote area, so he was not found until almost two weeks after his injury. During this time he could not catch food because he was unable to fly, so he was slowly starving to death. Somehow, he was able to avoid becoming food for another animal during that time.

When he was finally discovered and brought to our wildlife center, he was extremely thin and weighed less than half of what a healthy red tailed hawk should weigh. He was so weak he could not immediately have surgery to repair his wing, but instead, had to wait until we had built up his strength.

Once his wing was repaired and healed, and he had doubled his weight, he was sent down to the Wildlife Center of Virginia to practice flying and get in shape for release. After a month of conditioning, he was released into his home territory.

Immediate Treatment Saves Hawk

This red-tailed hawk was injured when she landed on a very sharp stick that completely pierced her wing and trapped her until help arrived.

Her wing was punctured just in front of the elbow where the major blood vessels are located, causing a large amount of blood loss.

Fortunately, this bird was found soon after the accident by some good Samaritans on a walk, and they immediately called our wildlife center. The hawk was rescued and received life saving treatment at the wildlife center that day.

It has taken months for the large hole in her wing to heal, but she has regained full function of her wing and should be released soon.



Another Hawk Not So Fortunate

A red tailed hawk was found on the ground in the woods behind a market with a wound on her wing. At first this didn't seem like a very serious injury, but on closer examination, something was very wrong with this hawk's wing.

There was a large open wound at the wrist and the flight feathers on that wing were bent and frayed, almost as though they had been melted. This was an electrocution injury and even though the wound at the wrist didn't look

very serious at first, a large amount of damage had been done to the blood vessels, nerves, and tendons in the wing.

Electrocutions can happen to large birds when they perch on power lines and they accidentally bridge two wires, or a wire and the pole with their wings or legs. Usually, when this happens, it is fatal for the bird, but in this case somehow just one wing was injured.

Unfortunately, this hawk would never have the use of her wing again, and we felt she was suffering, so she was humanely euthanized.

Two Owl Tales

On a cold February day, a family was traveling to a MacDonald's restaurant in their van. While in the drive-thru line someone noticed an eastern screech owl hiding under the van's luggage rack. They quickly gathered up the owl and placed him in a box for the ride home. The family contacted the Center to care for the bird.



The family was rethinking their trip to the restaurant and remembered hearing a thump they thought was ice hitting the roof of their van. On further consideration, that thump was probably the owl hitting the roof of their van. Fortunately, the screech owl only had a minor concussion and a fractured shoulder. The little fellow healed rather quickly. In early April, we joined the family at the site of the thump to return the owl to freedom.

We always knew that screech owls were a very sturdy bird. "Tough as nails" is a phrase that is commonly used to describe them. Interestingly, on the exact same cold day in February an eastern screech owl flew into a car that was slowing to approach a stop sign. The little owl hit the car hard enough to break the grill over the front bumper. The family gathered up the very dazed owl and contacted the Center to continue her care. This owl also had a concussion and a fractured shoulder.

We met up with that family in early April, too, and returned the owl to freedom.

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.

Individual Supporter—\$50.00

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