

# The Ridgeline

Newsletter of the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center

Issue 21 • Summer 2013



Orphan Baby Wildlife Rehab | Fishing Line Rescues | Summer Interns at the BRWC

# Letter from the Director .....



## Spring and Summer Usher the Arrival of Wildlife Babies

At the BRWC, our wildlife hotline rings off the hook this time of year with questions about injured wildlife and their young. Development and habitat destruction have created a shortage of nesting and denning sites, and have resulted in increasing numbers of wild animals nesting in close proximity to homes and businesses. This proximity to people increases the chance of accidental injury to these animals and damage to their nests.

The BRWC was created to help with these situations. When accidents happen and an animal becomes injured, or its young become orphaned, the BRWC takes these animals in, gives them the care they need, and then rehabilitates them for release back to the wild.

In addition to helping the animals, we help the public with all kinds of emergencies involving wildlife, and we help teach how they can help prevent some of these accidents from happening in the first place.

This year, the BRWC has already admitted more than 1,400 animals in need of help and answered more than 4,000 calls on our wildlife hotline. More than 3,800 children and adults have enjoyed our education programs, and have had the opportunity to see some beautiful wild animals up close. We do all of this with a staff of four people in a house that has only 800 square feet of floor space. We couldn't do all of this without the help of our volunteers. This year, unfortunately, we have needed to turn away some animals because there is not enough room for them at the Center.

In spite of our cramped and uncomfortable working conditions, at the BRWC you will see some of the most hard-working, compassionate, and dedicated people you will ever meet. Some say ours is a thankless job because our patients cannot talk, cannot say thank you (or pay their bills), and are anxious to leave and get back to the wild. But our reward is helping those who have no one else to care for them, and watching them grow strong so they can fly or run away. We commonly hear from the people who find and rescue these animals, "We are so glad you here!" I believe the animals feel the same way.

Thank you!

Above: Dr. Burwell with the BRWC's red-tailed hawk, Briar Rose.

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Published by  
Blue Ridge Wildlife Center  
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The Blue Ridge Wildlife Center is a 501(c)3 non-profit 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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Printed by Winchester Printers.

## Fishing Line Rescues

### Baby Barred Owl Found Hanging from a Fishing Line



On June 24, a group of river riders spotted a bird hanging from the branches of a tree. The unfortunate bird was too

high for them to reach, so the leader of the tour figured out how he could use the roof of their tour bus and a ladder to reach the bird and cut it free. It was a young nestling barred owl wrapped in discarded fishing line. The rescuers drove an hour to bring the injured owl to us for medical care. The first thing we had to do was to remove the rest of the fishing line wrapped around his body. After that, the wounds on his wing, leg, and neck needed to be treated. Most difficult of all, the fly eggs that had been laid all over his feathers needed to be removed before they hatched into maggots that would invade his wounds. The type of maggots in this area that invade wounds are the dangerous kind that secrete enzymes that will



kill and digest flesh. If they got into this bird's wing, they would destroy the fragile tendons and ligaments and he would never be able to fly again.

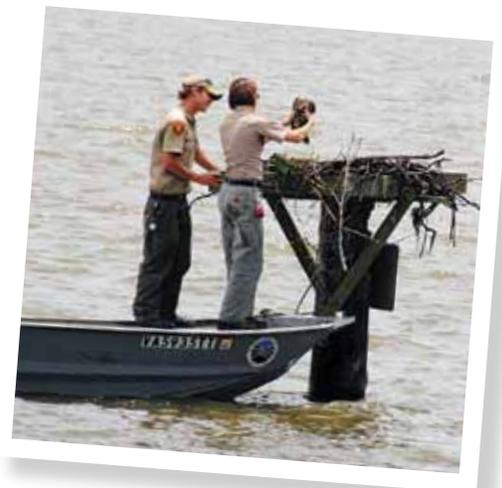
After a couple of days of medical care, the wing was healing and this baby began to eat on his own. Four weeks later he had healed enough to join the other orphan barred owls at our Center. Seymour, the handicapped barred owl who lives at our Center, acts as a surrogate parent to these babies.

Once these owls are fully grown and have learned how to fly and hunt, we will find them homes in healthy habitat.

### Baby Osprey Accidentally Hooked by Fishing Line

On June 25, a park ranger called us from Leesylvania State Park about an osprey nestling that was found hanging from its nest by fishing line. The chick had a hook in its leg and had been hanging upside down for an undetermined amount of time. They cut the chick down and removed the hook and the line from his leg, but the chick couldn't be put back in the nest because he was unable to stand and needed medical care. The ranger drove the osprey to the BRWC where we treated the injuries and cared for the chick while it healed. The Ranger kept an eye on the nest and saw that the parents were still there caring for another chick. We wanted to get this injured chick back in the nest

before the other baby fledged because it would be best for the parents to teach this baby how to catch fish and survive in the wild. At the BRWC we do the best we can using surrogates to teach orphans how to survive in the wild, but their own parents can do a better job of this than we can. When this young osprey had healed and was able to stand and walk again, the ranger picked him back up to take him back to his nest. We weren't sure if the parents would accept him back after he had been gone for more than week. Fortunately they did, and according to the ranger, they behaved as though the chick had never left.



*Park Rangers from Leesylvania State Park return a recovered Osprey chick back to his nest after it was found hanging from a fishing line.*

## How to Keep a Wild Orphan Wild



When a newly hatched red-shouldered hawk chick was rescued after the tree containing its nest was cut down, our first concern was how to raise this single baby without having it imprint on people. Imprinting is when a young animal bonds and learns its species identity from the individual caring for it. The age when young hawks imprint is five to 25 days. This new hatchling was too young to put with an adult red-shouldered hawk that was not its parent because the baby might be injured or even eaten by the adult. Instead we let the baby look at an adult hawk while we continued to feed the baby from behind a mask. When the baby was very tiny she couldn't see far enough to see our red-shouldered hawk, Lucy, in the next cage, so we borrowed a stuffed hawk from the State Arboretum of Virginia's education programs that we could hold in front of the baby while we fed her. When the baby was older and could hold her head up and look out of her cage, she was able to watch Lucy in a cage right in front of the young chick's incubator all day. We still had to hand feed the baby because Lucy would not do this, but we wore a cover over our faces while we did this and did not speak to the baby so that she would not realize she was being fed by humans. Later, we received four other red-shouldered hawk orphans who were past the imprinting stage, and now all of them are growing up together. They have grown in their feathers and have learned to fly. Now they are learning to hunt prey and will soon be ready to be released back into the wild.

## Young Wren Helps Feed Orphans

Bird parents feed their young all day long from dawn to dusk. At the Center, this is a very time-consuming endeavor, especially when we have 50-75 orphan birds here at the same time. Every time a nest of babies fledges and learns to feed themselves, it is reason to celebrate! An interesting thing happened when we received a new group of Caroline wren nestlings and put them in with an older wren fledgling who was feeding herself and was almost ready for release. We hoped this older bird would teach the younger birds to eat the insects we put in their cage. The older fledge did better than that—she began feeding the babies herself. She seemed to instinctively know that when a baby



bird begs with its mouth wide open, that means an insect should be put in that mouth. The older fledgling fed that nest of five babies and eventually taught them to eat on their own. We certainly appreciated the help! Later they were all released together.

## Red Fox Kits Survive After Mother Hit by Car

On a Saturday morning in March, we received a call from a young man seeking help with some orphan red fox babies known as kits. While driving the night before, he saw a fox struck by the car driving ahead of him. He stopped to check on the fox's condition, and found she had died, but noticed she was very pregnant and there was movement in her abdomen. Being familiar with anatomy from his experience hunting and fishing, he cut her open and delivered four young kits there by the side of the road.

He brought the slightly premature kits to the BRWC, where we gave them colostrum and a formula specially designed for raising fox kits. Two of the kits were too premature to survive, but after gentle

care and many sleepless nights, the other two survived.

These kits are now four-months-old and will be ready to release in late July. While raising them here at the Center, we have been very careful not to tame them because we want to release them back into the wild and we do not ever want them to approach people. A friendly wild animal could endanger people, and certainly will endanger itself. At our wildlife center, one of the criteria for

readiness for release is that the animals must avoid people at all times. Only if they run and hide when we approach their cage, can they be released.

We currently have 11 orphan fox kits at our Center who were rescued from different locations in northern Virginia. They have been raised in family groups and will be released in suitable habitat.





# Big Brown Bat Babies Rescued

The most commonly encountered bat in Virginia these days is the Big Brown Bat. Not a very “big” bat, big browns weigh in at only 16 grams, the weight of three quarters, and are only four inches long. Big Browns now outnumber what used to be the most common bat, the Little Brown Bat, whose populations have declined 98 percent in some areas as a result of a fungal infection called White Nose Syndrome (WNS), which is killing large numbers of cave hibernating bats including the little browns. Big brown bats are also a cave hibernating bat, but they can also be found hibernating in barns, attics, and abandoned buildings, a habit that is saving their lives.

During May and June, big brown bat females form maternity colonies in secluded areas in buildings and barns. Each female will give birth to one or two “pups” who cling to their mothers and nurse while their mother hangs upside down by her rear feet. If a baby falls, the mothers often cannot carry it back to the roost, so if not

rescued these babies will die. This summer we rescued many orphan big brown babies who had fallen from their roosts and could not be returned because we could not find the secretive roost. In two instances, the mothers were found on the ground holding on to their large babies. These brave mothers had joined their fallen offspring on the ground, putting them both in danger. Because the rest of the colony could not be found, the best thing to do was to rescue these mothers and their babies and bring them to the Center where they will reside until their babies are old enough to fly. Then they will be returned to the same farm where they were found to join the rest of their secretive colony.



The BRWC rescues and raises many bat orphans every summer. We work very hard to save every bat we can because bats are valuable species whose

populations will have a difficult time recovering due to their low reproductive rate.

If you have a roost around your home where baby bats sometimes fall, you can install a net under the roost called a “pup catcher.” This net is designed to catch the pups and allow them to climb back to the roost.

For advice or questions, please call our Center at (540) 837-9000.



## BRWC Baby Shower Donations Help With Orphan Wildlife



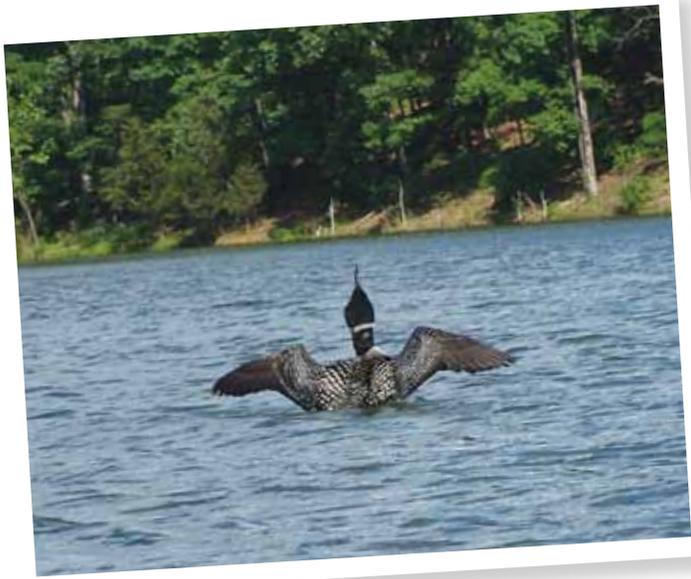
*BRWC's Wildlife Rehabilitator, Heather Sparks, educates the crowd about orphaned wildlife with Lucy, our resident red-shouldered hawk.*

*Mazie Davis Photo.*

Thank you to everyone who donated to our Wildlife Baby Shower. An estimated 250 people attended this event on June 9 and brought shower gifts to help the orphan wildlife at the Center. At the Shower, everyone had the opportunity to see wild animals up close, including owls, turtles, snakes, a red-shouldered hawk, a striped skunk, and an opossum. The guests learned from demonstrations and video clips how we rescue and raise orphan wildlife for release back into the wild. There were also games to play, owl pellets to dissect, and face painting. Some lucky guests won our raffle gifts donated by local businesses. It's not too late to donate to help us care for these orphan babies. Please go to <http://blueridgewildlife.org/Articles/BabyShowerGiftList13.pdf> to view a list of needed items.



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!



Happy to be back on water this Loon was released at Lake Frederick in Virginia to help with his migration north.

Ed Grainger Photo.

## Lost Loon Rescued and Released to Help with Journey North

After a rainy night, a common loon was found on Route 28 in Chantilly, Virginia. Loons are beautiful water birds that are designed to swim, dive after fish, and fly, but they cannot walk on land. So why was one found on a highway

in Chantilly so far away from water? Loons spend their winters off the coast of Virginia, then migrate to the northern U.S. and Canada to nest for the summer. During their migration north these

birds will stop over on lakes and ponds for a rest.

Unfortunately, at night, wet pavement can look like water to a bird flying overhead. We think that is why this loon landed on the highway. He had some abrasions on his feet and legs, but was very lucky he hadn't been more seriously injured before a Good Samaritan rescued him. After treatment for his wounds and a good meal, he was released on Lake Frederick to continue his journey north. Some of the local residents came out to watch him enjoy his release.

View the video of the release online at [www.blueridgewildlife.org](http://www.blueridgewildlife.org).

## Sick Red-tailed Hawk Gets a Second Chance

When a man in rural West Virginia found a sick red-tailed hawk that appeared to be dying, he did what many people in rural areas do to help relieve the suffering of dying animals: he went to get his gun. But when he returned, the suffering hawk looked up into his eyes, and the man hesitated, wondering if there was anyone in the area who could help this beautiful animal. A couple of phone calls later, he was put in touch with the BRWC. He brought the hawk to us where it received treatment for wounds and oil on its feath-

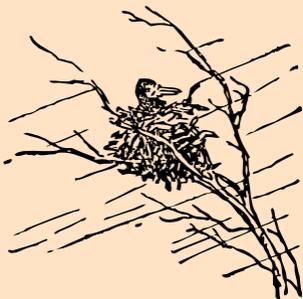
ers. Six weeks later this juvenile hawk was released in beautiful habitat at the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute in front of a crowd of 350 people, demonstrating what can be done to help these animals after they encounter an unfortunate circumstance. Most of the animals we rescue have become injured, orphaned, or sickened as a consequence of the development that has occurred within their habitat. Many can be helped and released again, just as this hawk was.

## Recovered Bald Eagle Finds Her Mate



A bald eagle with a broken wing was rehabilitated and released back where she was found on a farm along the James River in Virginia. It was a joy watching her fly away, but the best part was to see her fly to a nearby tree line, where she was joined by another eagle we presume was her mate. Eagles mate for life, but if one dies, the other will usually choose another mate. In this case, her mate appeared to have been waiting for her.

## Hurricane Andrea Disturbs Nests



When Hurricane Andrea passed through Virginia June 10, the wind and large amount of rain disturbed the nests of many animals. June is peak baby season and this storm blew down nests of robins, cardinals, finches, phoebes, and mockingbirds. We admitted two nests of cottontails that were submerged in flooded yards, and two litters of baby skunks also from flooded dens. A total of 46 animals were admitted needing help after the storm.

## The BRWC Welcomes Franny Crawford

The Blue Ridge Wildlife Center is pleased to announce the appointment of Frances W. "Franny" Crawford to the position of Director of Development. Franny comes to us after many years in the development field, first serving as founding director of development for Powhatan School in Boyce, Virginia, and then as founding director of development for the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley in Winchester, Virginia where she served for 14 years. In light of Franny's significant experience and abilities, we are delighted that she will be assisting the BRWC during this critical time of growth and expansion.

## Summer Interns Assist with Wildlife Care

We have a new class of student interns at the Center this summer, learning about Virginia's native wildlife while they assist us with the care and feeding of the large number of patients that come through our doors. We are happy to welcome Heather Mason from Paul Smith's College, Miles Hanson from Washington State University, Chelsea Geyer from State University of New York, Brianna McGrath from Virginia Commonwealth University, Sarah Stethers from the State University of New York, Taryn Bromser from William and Mary, Nicole Warren from the University of Massachusetts, Jessica Majors from Virginia Tech, Amy Lewis from Shenandoah University, and Catherine Beach from Virginia Tech.

These interns are learning about Virginia's native wildlife and the most

## Competition for Nests

During the early 1900's, Eastern Bluebirds had almost disappeared from this area due to a lack of nesting sites. Their recovery is primarily due to all the wonderful people who have put up Bluebird nest boxes, but there are other birds that also use these boxes. The English (or House) Sparrow is a very aggressive non-native species that nests in Bluebird boxes, and rather than wait for an empty box, they will enter and kill whoever is in there at the time. Every summer we receive injured Bluebirds and Tree Swallow nestlings that were

maimed by English Sparrows. The English Sparrow is an invasive species not related to our native sparrows. They were introduced from Europe in the 1800's and have thrived in this country mostly because of their ability to adapt to living in close proximity to people, especially in urban areas, nesting in crevices in buildings. If you are having trouble with English Sparrows invading your Bluebird boxes, here are a few tips that may help.



## Tips for Bluebird Nest Boxes:

- Place your nest boxes at least 300 feet away from human activity and buildings; English Sparrows tend not to be present in these areas.
- If your Bluebirds migrate and your Sparrows do not, close up your boxes over the winter and only open them when the first Bluebirds return. Sparrows nest earlier than Bluebirds and hopefully will have already nested somewhere else.
- If you put bird seed out during the spring and summer, use only sunflower seeds with husks which the sparrows don't like. Avoid millet, milo, or cracked corn that the Sparrows prefer.
- Use a Sparrow Spooker which is a stand of fluttering Mylar strips brushing the top of the box. It keeps sparrows away, but not bluebirds.
- Check your boxes and if you find a Sparrow nest it is advisable not to destroy it because the Sparrows will rebuild, often in multiple boxes. Instead, try to sterilize the eggs by refrigerating them one at a time overnight or dip them in corn oil, mark them, and put them back in the nest. The parents will continue to incubate and hopefully leave the neighboring nesting birds alone.
- It has been advised to place two boxes 5-15 feet apart and suggested the Sparrows will choose one and leave the other for the Bluebirds. That has not been our experience, but still may be worth a try.



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common causes of injuries and disease, and what can be done to prevent these threats to wildlife. In addition, they are learning how to care for these unusual animals when they are in captivity. We are very thankful to the wonderful families who are hosting our students from out of state.

One of last year's interns, Zoe Carroll, wrote an essay about her experience at the BRWC, Her essay won first place in the 2013 Collegiate Writing Contest of the Virginia Outdoors Writing Association.

Read Zoe's essay at [www.blueridgewildlife.org/Articles/Zoe.pdf](http://www.blueridgewildlife.org/Articles/Zoe.pdf).

## Outdoor Cats Endanger Wildlife

If you have cats, please keep them inside. So far this year, we have had to care for 86 animals that were attacked by cats. Last year, we treated 173 animals attacked by cats. In addition, cats that stay inside live longer and healthier lives.



## Still Raising Money for our New Building



The illustration by Doug Pifer shows what our future wildlife hospital and education center may look like in the woods of the Burwell-van Lennep Foundation property.

We are very overcrowded in our current facility. This year, we have already rescued more than 1,400 animals, and we currently have more than 350 patients at our Center. We are collecting donations to build a larger Center where we will have room to care for all the animals we rescue, and where the public will be able to visit for programs and tours. Please help us achieve this goal.



Follow us on Facebook! 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.