

The Ridgeline

NEWSLETTER OF THE BLUE RIDGE WILDLIFE CENTER

ISSUE 31

A Look Inside Our New **Wildlife Center**



West Nile Virus Update | Rehab Corner | Education News | Soirée Recap | Bald Eagle Release

Thank You!



Dear Friends of Wildlife —

On Saturday, September 17th, our “Where the Wild Things Are” Soirée at Oxbow Farm was a beautiful and magical evening, celebrating our native creatures, the habitats that support them, and the work of the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center.

The list of those of you that made this evening possible and successful is a long and spectacular one. Our hosts, event patrons and supporters, staff, numerous volunteers and board members all served to make the evening sing. Thank you, thank you, and thank you again!

And of course, central to the evening, were our amazing Education Ambassadors as well as a Great Horned Owl who was released to the wild. These animals represent so much of what the Center is about.

As we reminded our friends that evening, our mission is about native wildlife rescue and rehabilitation, research, and education. Aside from our move into the new building, our rescue and rehabilitation numbers remain strong and on par with prior years. Our education programs grew this year as we changed the format of the camp sessions and took full advantage of the Ronald M. Bradley Learning Center.

Baby season is now officially over and we are turning much of our attention to planning—for new educational programs, expansion of volunteer opportunities, 2017 summer camps, the upcoming baby season, landscaping, etc. We are also continuing to build anew—our outdoor enclosures and our Wildlife Walk—and preparing for any challenges we may face during the upcoming winter months!

Thank you for all you do to help our native wildlife survive and thrive.

With best regards,

Lisa Goshen



Photo by Rick Foster.

Cover photos by Tricia Booker.

THE RIDGELINE

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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.



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COVER STORY

The New Blue Ridge Wildlife Center Facility Takes Flight

Story and Photos by Tricia Booker

The Blue Ridge Wildlife Center is a vital, active and integral part of the community, and the Center spread its proverbial wings this summer with the completion of a state-of-the-art, 8,200 square foot Wildlife Hospital and Rehabilitation Center.

“Moving into this space has opened up incredible opportunities for the Center to expand and enhance its ability to fulfill its mission” says Lisa Goshen, President of the Board of Directors.

For 12 years, the Center staff worked out of an 800 sq. ft. cottage so the move was a huge step in providing additional services and resources to wildlife in need and expanding the Center’s missions of research and education.

The new facility is the only wildlife hospital in a 90-mile radius with full X-ray and surgical capabilities and species rooms that keep prey and predators separated.

A spacious food preparation area now allows staff to more easily coordinate and customize meals for the many different species in treatment and for the Center’s resident Education Ambassadors.

The Ronald M. Bradley Learning Center, a focal point of the new facility, makes possible the Center’s school, camp and civic programs. The spacious classroom, which includes educational animals and a collection of biofacts, seats up to 35 students and adults for educational programs and wildlife enrichment experiences. There have been more than 70 programs held in 2016, and we expect that number to grow with the expansion of the indoor and outdoor facilities that will offer more opportunities for learning about and viewing wildlife.

The staff plans to integrate audiovisual



FROM THE TOP: The Ronald M. Bradley Learning Center; Dr. Riley and Erin Balsler receive a new patient; An opossum is weighed in; Our new treatment room; X-ray and diagnostics area; Food preparation.



equipment into the learning center so students, researchers and visitors can watch live-stream surgical procedures, treatments, and view wildlife in the species rooms.

The additional space has also allowed the Center to expand its Summer Internship Program, which now allows up to 15 college-level students to interact with wildlife over the summer. This year, in addition to the everyday work of care and feeding of hundreds of babies, they observed surgeries, and received one-on-one instruction from resident wildlife veterinarian Dr. Jennifer Riley.

The Center expects to complete its Wildlife Walk, Raptor Hill and the Raptor Observation Deck in the spring of 2017, as long as the weather cooperates. Stay tuned for an Open House announcement!



The Blue Ridge Wildlife Center is one of only two full service wildlife hospitals in Virginia; the other is the Wildlife Center of Virginia.

West Nile Virus

By Dr. Jennifer Riley, DVM



Photo by Tricia Booker.

ABOVE: Briar Rose, the Center's Red-tailed Hawk Educational Ambassador.

This fall the Center received more than a dozen patients that were suspected of being infected with West Nile Virus (WNV). This virus is transmitted by mosquitoes and is important to all of us because of its zoonotic potential, or ability to spread between humans and other animals. When a mosquito feeds on an infected bird, it can then carry the virus to the next animal or person upon which it feeds.

Some birds are more likely than others to develop the neurologic symptoms of WNV and ultimately die of the disease. Crows and Blue Jays (Corvid family) are more susceptible to the virus and often die. Red-tailed Hawks and Great Horned Owls are the species we see most with WNV signs. Sadly, many of the cases we saw this year came in at the final stages of the disease, exhibiting emaciation, blindness, tremors, and seizures. When animals come in with tremors or seizures, their prognosis is very poor.

Minimally affected birds often respond well to supportive care and can be released. Patients that are moderately affected can survive, but often have long-term disabilities as a result of the virus-induced encephalitis (inflammation in the brain). Briar Rose, our resident Red-tailed Hawk (pictured left), is one example of a patient that improved after a suspected WNV diagnosis, but she never fully recovered her vision. Now she is an ambassador for her species to teach people about the effects of WNV.

If you find a dead bird, we encourage you to report it to your local health department or state wildlife agency (Department of Game and Inland Fisheries in Virginia). Remember never to handle a dead bird with your bare hands.

As always, if you have concerns over a live bird showing neurologic signs or any type of injury or illness, please contact the Center for advice on how to capture and transport the bird to the Center.



A Bonanza of Bird Boxes



Looking for a unique and special holiday gift? Stop by the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center and pick up a custom bird house built by Ike Eisenhauer of Slightly Askew Woodworking. Ike is one of the Center's volunteers, and his woodworking talents not only create gorgeous pieces of art, but also make wonderful homes for our feathered friends.

Each bird house is a one-of-a-kind creation. While there is no set price for a bird house, your generous donation helps the Center care for the multitude of song birds we see every year! The Center is open 9-5 daily.



Photos by Tricia Booker.

Memorable Cases of 2016

By Jessica Andersen

Rehab Corner



RED-TAILED HAWK

A Red-tailed Hawk can reach a speed of 40 m.p.h. but this one, unfortunately, was injured when it flew into the windshield of a tractor trailer on the highway. The driver of the truck was slightly injured by the resulting broken glass but was kind enough to call the Conservation Police Officer, who brought the hawk to us.



Photos by Mike Hyman



COMMON NIGHTHAWK

An uncommon patient, this Common Nighthawk was brought to us by the Loudoun County Animal Services with damage to one of its eyes. Nighthawks hunt their prey of insects “on the wing” flying in the early morning and evening hours. As caregivers, we must feed them every 20-30 minutes throughout the day. This patient received daily eye medication and was cleared for release—a very “common” outcome for our patients. *Photo by Jennifer Burghoffer*



EASTERN SCREECH OWL

Owls are night hunters and often find their prey along roads where they then may collide with vehicles. This Eastern Screech Owl was admitted with head trauma, which caused blindness in one eye, as well as an open fracture of the tibiotarsus (bone in the leg). After surgery for the fracture, supportive medical care, cage rest, and later flight conditioning, the owl’s fracture healed, it regained its eyesight, and it was able to be released back to the area in which it was found.

Photo by Jessica Andersen



COPPERHEAD

One of the three species of venomous snakes in Virginia, this Copperhead was hunting rodents and was caught in a glue trap meant for its prey. A brave, concerned soul brought the snake to the Center for its careful removal from the trap. After a thorough examination, it was deemed healthy for release. A glue trap is indiscriminate in its catch (as most traps are) and results in an animal’s slow, torturous death through dehydration and starvation. Please consider kill traps, live traps with release on property, or exclusion to address a rodent issue. *Photo by Dr. Jennifer Riley*



COMMON SNAPPING TURTLE

A snapping turtle may remind you of a large armored dinosaur that lived thousands of years ago. They are not fast movers but they can stretch their heads almost two thirds of the way around their body to bite in a flash. This snapper was admitted with a fracture of its carapace or upper shell, scrapes

along its back end, and an open wound that extended into its body cavity. Dr. Riley performed two surgeries on this snapper (one included inserting a feeding tube). It is treated with daily medical soaks and bandage changes, weekly debridements, and regular feedings via the tube. This routine will continue for at least three months for the shell to heal fully, so this snapper will remain at the Center for the winter.

Photo by Jessica Andersen



ODD PATIENTS

Some of the less frequently seen species that were patients this year include baby American Minks and River Otters and a Muskrat.

Photos by Jennifer Burghoffer



Education Year in Review

By Jennifer Burghoffer



The Center staff has thus far given more than 70 presentations in 2016 to schools, Rotary and garden clubs, birthday parties and summer camp programs. For the fifth consecutive year, the Center’s staff and wildlife ambassadors were hosted at the National Humane Education Society’s “Cool To Care” Summer Camp and FONZ’s Nature Camp, run

by the Smithsonian Center for Conservation Biology. The staff also gave presentations in schools throughout Frederick, Clarke, Loudoun and Warren counties during the academic year and for summer programs.

Overall, our programs reached more than 3,300 children and adults who learned about the Center, the work we do and the animals in our care, as well as the general issues wildlife face on a day-to-day basis.

The staff is growing the Center’s educational programming to include more groups and learning opportunities, especially since the new Ronald M. Bradley Learning Center is now available for scheduled programs.

If you would like more information



about the programs offered by the Center or would like to schedule a presentation, please visit our website: <http://www.blueridgewildlifectr.org/content/schedule-program>.

LEFT: Nature Camp participants examine biofacts. Photo by Kevin Hall

ABOVE: Heather Sparks delivering an educational program. Photo by Tricia Booker

They Grow Up So Fast

Wildlife has evolved and adapted to grow quickly so that they have the best chance of getting out into the world and begin reproducing and passing on their genes. The following table illustrates the approximate time needed for a species to become independent:

Cottontail	4-5 weeks
Songbird	6-8 weeks
Squirrel	3 months
Opossum	4 months
Raptor	6 months
Skunk	4-6 months
Raccoon	6 months
Fox	8 months
Groundhog	8 months
Black Bear	~1 year
Beaver	~2-3 years

Turtles and many other reptiles are independent from birth.

Biofacts

Story and Photos by Jennifer Burghoffer

Sometimes, despite all the efforts of veterinary and rehabilitation staff at the Center, our patients cannot overcome the illnesses or injuries for which they were admitted. This is not always the end for them, however. Often, these animals can be given a “second life” as what the staff calls a “biofact.”



The Center is permitted by Federal and State authorities to salvage pieces or parts from animals to be used for educational tools, including feathers, bones and sometimes even whole animals. Each biofact is prepared properly to ensure cleanliness and preservation. These props allow for an up-close look at many features of our native wildlife without

being in danger of scaring animals or being injured themselves.

Guests can manipulate feathers and wings to see how the patterns help with camouflage, or how the smallest parts of feathers interlock to keep the birds waterproof. They can feel the teeth of an opossum without fear for their fingers, or test the weight difference between bird and mammal bones. Staff is also currently working to grow the collection to include study skins and preserved pelts, so guests and students can see less commonly seen species, such as Belted Kingfishers and Yellow-billed Cuckoos, and know what a skunk, squirrel or even a beaver feels like.



Where the Wild Things Were!

By Franny Crawford | Photos by Rick Foster



A different twist to our yearly major fundraising event yielded huge returns as the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center's friends gathered on September 17th on a ridge overlooking the Shenandoah River and the Blue Ridge mountains for the Center's annual gala celebration.

Our hosts, Beatrice and Adie von Gontard, provided a magnificent venue and ambience for a very special evening. The Budweiser Clydesdales were there. The Center's Education Ambassadors were there. A Great Horned Owl was there, but only for a moment. Its release was the exclamation point of the Center's efforts to rehabilitate this magnificent owl and return it to the wild.

Much of the focus for our event was the completion of facilities for our Education Ambassadors. Our goal was to complete raptor caging and an observation deck for Jefferson the Bald Eagle, Lucy the Red-shouldered Hawk and Briar Rose the Red-tailed Hawk, as well as provide living quarters for Snow the Artic Fox, Beeker the Striped Skunk, Oscar the Virginia Opossum, and several other current and new Ambassadors-in-training (see architectural rendering)

Through the generosity of our hosts, the generous bidding of our donors, and the amazing auctioneering abilities of Matt Cahir, the Center was able to clear more than \$175,000.

We are so grateful for all who



CLOCKWISE FROM THE TOP: Hosts Beatrice and Adie von Gontard greet Deb Norman; Budweiser Clydesdales join the party; Danielle and Ron Bradley.

attended, all who bid, and our successful bidders. The completed Wildlife Walk, Raptor Hill and the Raptor Observation Deck will open in the Spring, as long as the weather cooperates. Stay tuned for an Open House announcement!

As the party was winding down, a full moon rose in the cloudless eastern sky causing us all to stand in awe of both the wonderful sight and the generosity of our friends.

As we departed, we bade the Great Horned Owl a successful night of hunting.



THIS COLUMN FROM THE TOP: Auctioneer Matt Cahir encouraging a bidder; Jessica Andersen with Ambassador Lucy; Wendy and Michael Smith with Dallas Croft; Heather Sparks with Snow (Artic Fox) and Patricia Robinson, Board Member.



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Bald Eagle Release – **Wild Again!**

Even a rainy, cool day couldn't diminish the shining moment when a juvenile Bald Eagle took flight back into the wild. Nearly 50 people braved the weather for the October 8th public release, held just outside of Middleburg, Virginia.

This fledgling was found on the ground, unable to fly, and taken to the Center for rehabilitation. Once healed, it was transferred to the Wildlife Center of Virginia to be raised with conspecifics, other eagles, and then returned to us for flight conditioning.

Juvenile eagles spend their early years as nomads, flying hundreds of miles a day to explore vast territories, and don their white heads and tails when they are 4-5 years of age. We wish this eagle the best of luck on its journey, and perhaps it will find the Piedmont of Virginia, where it was born, the place to call home.



TAIL END

Photo by James Mooney. Inset photo by Jaquelyn Mooney.