

The Ridgeline

NEWSLETTER OF THE BLUE RIDGE WILDLIFE CENTER

ISSUE 53

Rehabilitation During Avian Influenza

Meet our newest Wildlife Ambassador,
Kevin, the American Kestrel!

Dedication and Generosity



When people hear that a hospital with a small staff like ours cares for over 3,000 animals each year, they look pretty surprised. And you may be even more surprised to learn that only five out of our nine staff members actually work hands-on with the patients. So how do we do it? With a lot of help!

The only way that we are able to accomplish our mission each year, is with the help of our dedicated volunteers and animal rescue partners.

In April, we celebrated **Volunteer Appreciation Week** and **Animal Control Appreciation Week**. It's an appropriate

time of year to celebrate because April is also when the weather warms up and wildlife is more active and having babies...so you can imagine how busy we get!

On any given day, we may have over 200 patients already in care while admitting dozens more. This patient load would not be possible without our animal care volunteers constantly feeding, cleaning, entering data, and transporting patients to and from the hospital.

Hundreds of those patients come from our local Animal Control Officers. These patients are often found near busy roads, showing signs of a dangerous disease, or suffering from injuries or illness, and these officers go above and beyond to rescue the animals and keep their community safe. They also often drive long distances to get the animals into care. We are very grateful for their partnership and compassion towards our native wildlife!

On top of our patients, we have 24 wildlife ambassadors who live on-site and take a lot of work. Thankfully, we have many education volunteers who not only give tours to the community, but also keep our ambassador animals clean, enriched, and fed each day!

We also have a volunteer Board of Directors who dedicate countless hours and provide vital knowledge and support to us year-round. And volunteers who help with enclosure building and maintenance, recycling, gardening and property care, supply pick-ups, and so much more!

To all our volunteers—thank you! It is not an exaggeration to say that we could not do everything we do without your dedication and generosity.

With gratitude,

Annie Bradfield



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Blue Ridge Wildlife Center
106 Island Farm Lane | Boyce, Virginia 22620

Wildlife Hotline: 540-837-9000

E-mail: info@blueridgewildlifectr.org

Web: blueridgewildlifectr.org

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ABOUT

Blue Ridge Wildlife Center is a 501(c)3 organization caring for native wildlife by integrating veterinary medicine, rehabilitation, education, and research.

BRWC is located in Boyce, Virginia on the Burwell van-Lennep Foundation's property on Island Farm Lane.

The Center relies on private donations exclusively. Contributions are tax-deductible.

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Newsletter designed by Dara Bailey Design

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza



Since its detection in January of this year, Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) has been found across the U.S. and is quickly becoming a global concern. Due to the potentially devastating consequences of this disease, our hospital—along with many other facilities and individuals that rehabilitate birds—has had to adopt additional safety measures to protect our birds and personnel.

The Avian Influenza (AI) viruses are classified into two general categories based on their ability to cause disease in chickens: highly pathogenic AI (HPAI) and low pathogenic AI (LPAI). In domestic chickens, HPAI is extremely contagious with a mortality rate of nearly 100%. As HPAI is easily transmitted on fomites, or inanimate objects such as boots, farm equipment, and clothing, it is not uncommon for the virus to spread rapidly from farm to farm.

There are hundreds of millions of chickens in the U.S. used for food production, so given the high agricultural cost of this disease, the response to positive cases is rapid and severe. Typically, all birds on a property where positive cases have been found are required to be “depopulated,” or killed en masse. Sadly, millions of commercial farm birds have already been killed this year to help prevent the spread of disease. We have not seen AI in numbers this great since the 2014-15 outbreak in the U.S.

In wild birds, the effects of HPAI are varied. Though some species also experience high mortality rates from sudden death or severe neurologic and respiratory complications, others (particularly waterfowl) can appear clinically unaffected. The decision to mandate depopulation or not is made by the USDA regardless of whether those birds are part of a commercial farm, backyard flock, zoological park, or wildlife center. If even a single positive case is detected, the Center could lose not

only our hospitalized avian patients, but also nine ambassador birds that allow us to connect with the public through our Wildlife Walk and educational programs.

Therefore, significant changes have been

made to our biosecurity protocols as we do our best to avoid a worst-case scenario. Shoe sanitizing stations have been placed at every doorway and all avian patients are screened prior to entering the building.



Though AI can be zoonotic, there have not yet been any human cases associated with the 2022 HPAI outbreak. That said, individuals working with poultry or any birds should exercise caution to protect themselves and their birds.

They are quarantined in taxonomically-specific rooms for set time frames before moving into traditional hospital caging or outdoor enclosures. Staff members wear personal protective equipment (gowns, gloves, masks, shoe covers) when handling at-risk species, and interaction between different groups of birds is limited to prevent cross-contamination.

For the time being, we have asked volunteers with birds at home to discontinue assisting the Center. Our wildlife walk and ambassador birds are closed to

public viewing until further notice. We have also temporarily stopped rehabilitating all waterfowl given the extremely high prevalence at which these species carry HPAI without appearing sick. It is simply too great a risk to our hundreds of avian patients and resident birds. Despite this, we are always available to field calls with questions about all species, and can offer alternative resources or humane euthanasia as needed.

Migration facilitates the spread of HPAI from traveling wild birds to domestic

poultry. Even if the two are not in direct contact, oral and fecal secretions from wild birds into the shared environment can spread AI to domestic birds. If you have backyard poultry of your own, please do your part to help protect all birds from HPAI (see graphic).

HPAI has been challenging, both physically and emotionally, for our staff and others in the field. We appreciate your support during this time and hope that this virus slows soon.

Protecting Backyard Flocks

From Avian Influenza



Cover chicken coops and runs to prevent comingling with waterfowl.



Wear dedicated clothing and shoes.



Wash hands before and after working with birds.



Keep all birds in coop to prevent contamination with waterfowl droppings.



Change food and water daily.



Remove birdhouses, feeders, and baths used by wild birds.



Clean and disinfect equipment in contact with birds or droppings.



After visiting places where poultry owners congregate, clean your boots before caring for your own birds.



What is Avian Influenza (AI)?

- AI is a virus carried by migratory waterfowl (ducks and geese).
- Domestic poultry (chickens, turkeys, fowl) are susceptible and will become very sick.
- The virus is believed to originate in Eurasia and spread into Canada and the Atlantic Flyway through wild geese and ducks.
- Migratory bird flyways cross the United States. Delaware is in the Atlantic Flyway.

KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS!

- ✓ Lack of energy and appetite
- ✓ Decreased egg production or softened/misshapen eggs
- ✓ Swelling of the head, eyelids, and comb
- ✓ Purple discoloration of the wattles, combs, and legs
- ✓ Stumbling, falling down, diarrhea
- ✓ Sudden death

HOW IS THE DISEASE TRANSMITTED IN BIRDS?

- Foot traffic
- Secretions from birds' mouths, nostrils, eyes, excrement
- Contact with infected droppings
- Movement of infected birds
- Contaminated clothing and equipment



If you have sick or dying birds in your backyard flock, contact:



DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

For more information, please visit:
<https://de.gov/poultry>



Bald Eagle—Hook, Line, and Pododermatitis

This Bald Eagle was rescued from the Stafford County area after being found entangled in fishing line with a hook embedded in his chest, preventing him from flying. After the bird was transported to us, we did a thorough exam and found that the hook was only caught superficially with minimal injury. The bigger issue, however, was the swollen, infected lesion on the bottom of the bird's right foot. When the bird closed its talons, the hallux talon (the hind toe) would puncture into the middle of the bottom of the foot!

This bird had been suffering from other issues (including lead poisoning, which we see in over 80% of our adult eagles) that had led to these injuries. Our staff got to work removing the hook, fishing line and cleaning up the foot wound. A padded "shoe" was made to help protect the foot from the bird's own talons, as well as relieve some of the discomfort from standing and perching. With treatment for the lead poisoning as well as antibiotics, pain medications and weekly foot bandage changes, this bird ended up making a full recovery and was successfully released back near its found location!

Rehab + Corner

Critical Rescue Cases



When the bird closed its talons, the hind toe would puncture into the lesion.



After weeks of treatment, the lesion had resolved completely.



Erik Brito Photography

After recovery, this Bald Eagle was successfully released back to the wild.

Barbed Wire Red-shouldered Hawk

While many of our patients this time of year are injured or orphaned babies, we continue to admit injured and ill adults that require critical medical attention.

One stand-out case was this adult Red-shouldered Hawk that was found stuck on a barbed-wire fence. Our staff was getting ready to leave for the day when the finder pulled up to our building in search of help. The hawk was still caught on the fence, so we got all of our rescue supplies together and headed out! When we arrived, it took two staff members to restrain the bird and cut the fence (with permission), as the bird could not be safely detangled without doing so. After removing the bird, we headed back to our facility where we were able to clean the wound, get the bird on the proper medications, and stabilize them for surgery the next day.

The wound itself was too large to be closed, and left tendons and bones exposed. Dr. Hsieh was able to take a skin graft from the bird's chest to close the wound on the wing. Thankfully, the graft healed well, and after weeks of monitoring and reconditioning, this bird was eventually released back to its home territory! Want to see the video of the rescue, rehab, and release? Check out our TikTok for the whole story!



May 1 — Our Favorite Day of the Year!

Every year, rehabilitators throughout Virginia look forward to one of our favorite days—May 1. This is the first day we are legally allowed to release any reptiles and amphibians that may have been overwintering with us or have come in and recovered in the early days of spring. This year, we were able to release 17 turtles, four snakes, and two amphibians, covering nine different species in total. All of these individuals were released back home where they were found, as is legally required. Remember, reptiles and amphibians generally have very small home ranges, so if you find one crossing a road, simply help it across to the other side, and if they need medical help, make sure to make a note of their exact found location!



BRWC Welcomes New Staff Members



Dr. Emily Hsieh examines a new raccoon patient.

Sarah Midolo, Rehabilitation Associate

Meet our Rehabilitation Associate, Sarah Midolo! After completing a nine-month wildlife rehabilitation apprenticeship with us, and then working as a Bird and Mammal Keeper at the Virginia Living Museum, we were able to hire Sarah as a full-time Rehabilitation Associate.

Sarah's passion for wildlife, conservation, patient enrichment, and inspiring others to care for wildlife makes her an amazing asset to our team.



In this photo, Sarah is working with our educational ambassador opossum, Nigel.

Emily Hsieh, DVM

We are thrilled to introduce you to our newest staff member, Dr. Emily Hsieh! She joined our team as an Associate Veterinarian in January and is an amazing addition to our staff as well as our veterinary team, which includes our Director of Veterinary Services, Dr. Riley, and our Licensed Veterinary Technician, Cara Masullo.

Dr. Hsieh has spent the past few years

working with exotic companion animals and treating wildlife as a volunteer at her local wildlife center in her home state of California.

Our patient load has more than doubled since we opened our hospital facility. With our current caseload, dozens of students to teach, and many research projects to complete, a second veterinarian has become essential. We're so lucky to have her!

Volunteer Spotlight: Jenny Schultz

What got you interested in volunteering with us at the BRWC?

I've always loved wildlife and been interested in protecting them from anthropogenic threats. During the work week, my focus is on the conservation of sea turtles under the Endangered Species Act, which is very fulfilling in a theoretical sense; however, on a day-to-day basis, I'm just working at a computer. At BRWC, I get to handle wildlife and see how our daily efforts help individual animals recover and return to their natural habitat.



What's your favorite part about volunteering with BRWC?

Feeding baby birds and mammals. There is nothing more satisfying than watching them settle in for a nap after they've been fed and cleaned.

Do you have any memorable moment that sticks out to you when you think about your time volunteering with us?

A couple of weeks ago, I released a young bunny. There were hawks flying overhead, and I wanted to find a good, safe spot for release. As I was looking for a spot, an adult bunny hopped into our path. It felt like a sign: the baby bunny was going to be okay. That's the thing about BRWC ... I really enjoy seeing the wildlife up-close while they are in our care, but I like it even more when they are released to the wild where they belong. It's like the saying, ships are safest in the harbor, but that's not what they were built for.

Do you have a favorite animal or type of animal that you get to see or work with here at BRWC?

I love baby squirrels and opossums, but my new favorite is baby flying squirrels. Seeing them just warms my heart!

So Much to Learn at BRWC



Wildlife Discovery Camp

Looking for summer activities for the kids? Registration for **Wildlife Discovery Camp** is open for ages 7-10 and 11-14. Camp is run Monday through Friday, from 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. for four weeks in June, July, and August. Topics to be announced. Each day features lessons and activities, crafts, games, and meet-and-greets with our Wildlife Ambassadors! More information and registration instructions can be found on our website under the “Education” tab.



New Wildlife Ambassador



We are excited to introduce a new Wildlife Ambassador: Kevin, our American Kestrel! Kevin was admitted to the Center in 2021 after being surrendered to law enforcement. Well-meaning finders visiting from abroad had discovered the young falcon on the sidewalk in Brooklyn, NY. Unaware of laws and proper renesting protocols, they took him into their care during their travels. As soon as they realized that they would not be able to take him home, they left him with the local police department, who immediately reached out to us for placement. Despite being physically healthy, since he had been habituated, returning him to the wild was impossible. He is now enjoying an outdoor enclosure on the Wildlife Walk and will educate the public about falcons.

WildFest 2022!

Save the date for our 3rd annual WildFest event. It will be held on Saturday, September 10th, from 11am-4pm at the Clarke County Ruritan Fairgrounds in Berryville, VA. Come learn about the work of BRWC and other environmental organizations, as well as participate in nature activities and games! Special appearances from our Wildlife Ambassadors throughout the day.



Wildlife Walk Update



Our public space, the **Wildlife Walk**, has gotten some wonderful updates this year! New signage for each enclosure gives details about each species and Ambassador. These signs are the first in a planned series to educate the public on our native wildlife, native plants, and biodiversity. New garden beds are in the works as well, to better showcase the beauty and benefits of planting natives. Although the Wildlife Walk is temporarily closed to protect our permanent resident birds from Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, we hope that you will plan to stop by as soon as it is open to the public again!

Education Volunteer Highlight:

Linda Reed

Since the grand opening of the Wildlife Walk in 2021, the Center has been growing its education-dedicated volunteer base with Docents, Program Volunteers, and Ambassador Husbandry Volunteers. We would love to take this moment to introduce you to one of these wonderful volunteers—Linda Reed, who has been a Docent for the past year. She has also been instrumental in helping staff to develop training protocols and documents.

Linda has been volunteering with BRWC for one year. In 2018, she and her husband, David, retired to Winchester, VA, moving from Ellicott City, MD. For over 30 years, Linda held positions as a professional corporate trainer, a director of management development and an organizational development consultant. She has held education and management roles in business, government, and academic environments, and has conducted hundreds of corpo-

rate workshops domestically and internationally, including creative problem solving, change management, process improvement, team-building, and presentation skills. Linda brings an enthusiastic, unique, and compelling style to presentations.

Linda is also a former concert pianist, with a B.A. degree from St. Ambrose University and an M.A. degree from the University of Iowa. She is also a volunteer for the Foundation of the State Arboretum at Blandy Experimental Farm, the Garden Club of Virginia, and the Preservation of Historic Winchester.

Linda is certified as a Climate Leader by Al Gore. Her commitment to wildlife and the environment runs deep. She has sparked many audiences to action and is happy to bring her expertise to BRWC. In addition to volunteering in retirement, Linda is learning to paint birds, trees and landscapes.



Did You Know?

BRWC does not receive state or federal funding.

We are dependent on donations to care for the thousands of patients we treat each year. Please help us help them by making a donation today!

Visit our online Gift Shop!

Show your support for BRWC with a variety of merchandise for all ages. All proceeds support our mission of caring for injured, sick, or orphaned native wildlife and teaching the public how to be good stewards of the land around us. blueridgewildlifectr.org



Rufio's Birthday Celebration



We were very excited to celebrate a special occasion in March—Rufio, our Eastern Gray Squirrel's 7th birthday! We celebrated with a squirrel-themed craft, a "cache" hunt, and cupcakes for all, including a special one made with squirrel-friendly ingredients! One of the party-goers even brought him a beautiful gift. Rufio came to the center in 2015 after the tree containing his nest was cut down. He is non-releasable due to a non-functional eye and missing incisors. Eastern Gray Squirrels can live to be 20 years old in captivity, and we hope to celebrate many more birthdays with this wonderful Ambassador!

Baby Season Is Under Way!



Baby season has already ramped up, and we've already taken in a variety of babies—Eastern Gray Squirrels, Mourning Doves, Eastern Cottontails, Great Horned Owlets, Virginia Opossum joeys, Barred Owlets, Southern Flying Squirrels, and more! If you find a baby animal you think is in need, scan the QR codes below. They contain a flowchart of how to evaluate whether a baby animal needs help or not, and what you can do to help reunite babies with their parents if possible!



Scan here for our flowchart of what to do if you find a baby:



Squirrel



Cottontail



Bird



Q & A with Cara Masullo

BRWC's Licensed Veterinary Technician

Q: What originally sparked your interest in working with wildlife?

A: After taking an environmental science class in high school, I learned that it was possible that you COULD work with wildlife in many different capacities such as field research and wildlife rehabilitation. After learning and seeing first hand the relationship between shorebird species like the red knot and the importance of horseshoe crab eggs as a food source during migration, I discovered my love of birds and the excitement of being in the field. After doing fieldwork and working with both cats and dogs in various aspects, I found I wanted to work for those that truly had no one to speak for them (no owners, no pet parents). Having done surveys for wildlife, I wanted to be more hands on with wild animals, so wildlife rehabilitation seemed like the perfect fit. I wanted to help combat the direct effects humans have on wild animals such as car collisions, rodenticide poisoning, window strikes, domestic animal attacks on wildlife, etc.

Q: What does your typical day at the Center look like as a licensed veterinary technician?

A: As a licensed veterinary technician, I do a little bit of everything here at the Center. The first thing I do when I come in is check on any critical patients and give medications. Some days I may work with our veterinarians to do surgery or bandage changes on various patients or help our rehabilitators feed baby animals that need multiple feedings throughout the day. A typical day consists of things like helping with intake patient exams, sample collection, giving medications, changing bandages or wound dressings, taking x-rays, cleaning cages, operat-

ing anesthesia, assessing blood samples, performing physical therapy, and assessing patients for possible release back to the wild.

Q: Is there a particular accomplishment in your work so far that you're most proud of?

A: Although bringing more appreciation and use of different enrichment and habitat set up for our patients is high on the list, I'd say one moment in particular was placing a well-fitted splint on a chipping sparrow's broken leg; these are very small songbirds, and being able to maneuver such small materials on such a small appendage was definitely a proud moment for me.

Q: What advice would you have for a veterinary technician interested in wildlife medicine?

A: I would say getting some experience either in field work or just going out on your own to observe wild animals is helpful to know how these animals behave and ways to approach or handle them based on their natural history and behavior. I find if one has no experience being around wild animals, you may treat these animals as a pet, trying to pet them, show affection, and ultimately causing stress to this animal that has absolutely no desire to be around you, a human. Gaining experience first in the domestic animal world is beneficial to have a background of veterinary skills, as in wildlife rehabilitation, we do not have the same luxury of funding or money to provide everything that a small animal emergency clinic may have; knowing the possibility of care and being able to adapt when you have less to work with is beneficial and you become extremely innovative!



Cara holding former groundhog ambassador, Harley, as she wakes up from anesthesia.

Q: What is your favorite native species and why?

A: This is a very tough question, but what comes to mind first is turkey vultures or black vultures; they have such distinct personalities and behavior it is always a joy to observe them and work with them. I am all about keeping things neat and tidy, so the fact they help clean our environment of carcasses is a plus. Another perk to vultures is that their feathers smell like musty old book mixed with the ocean salt water and I just love it! I find I always tend to favor the "underdogs" or least liked and misunderstood by the general public (i.e. opossums, pet rats, pitbull type dogs).

Did You Know?



It is illegal to raise or rehab a wild animal without the appropriate license and permits. If you are located in Virginia, use this website to find a licensed wildlife rehabilitator near you: dwr.virginia.gov/wildlife/injured/rehabilitators/.

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BRWC HOTLINE: 540.837.9000 | www.blueridgewildlifectr.org | info@blueridgewildlifectr.org

Are you Interested in Volunteering?

We rely on volunteers in numerous ways to help us care for native wildlife. We are always accepting applications for volunteers in rehabilitation, education, maintenance, administration, and more! Check out our website for more information and how to apply!

blueridgewildlifectr.org/volunteer

