



Rockfish Wildlife Sanctuary

5450 Wheelers Cove Road · Shipman, Virginia 22971 · 434.263.4954 · rockfishwildlifesanctuary.org

Save the Date

for RWS's 20th Anniversary
Celebration: Sept. 13, 2024!



How you can help today:

Cash Donations

Most of our funding comes from animal lovers like you! Please visit our website to donate.

RWS Commonwealth of Virginia Campaign

Don't forget the RWS Commonwealth of Virginia Campaign number: 3200!

Material Donations

- Paper towels and plain tissues
- Nitrile gloves
- 13gal. trash bags
- Newspapers
- Old towels, blankets
- Pet training pads
- Gas cards for transporters
- Gift cards to Food Lion for fresh veggies and fruits
- Gift cards to Blue Ridge Farmers Co-op

RWS Resale Shop

Proceeds at our resale store in The Greene HouseShops-located at 14843 Spotswood Trail, Ruckersville, VA 22968 - at the corner of Rt. 29 and Rt. 33, benefit the Sanctuary. The store also accepts donations, especially jewelry, art, glass, silver, china, or small furniture.

To find out more, call 434.263.4954.



rockfishwildlifesanctuary.org



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Instagram @rockfishwildlifesanctuary



TikTok @rockfishwildlife

These people keep us going!

Wildlife Rehabilitators

Nathou Attinger
Dez Brooks
Sarah Cooperman
Kiera Corbett
Chandler Dennis
Matt Heinrich
Elka Hutcheson
Grace Neubauer
Jeff Wilbur

Board Members

Nathou Attinger
Liz Courain
Anju Grover
Jayme Fraser
Mary Haines-Johnson
Dean Lhospital
Nancy Nuell
John O'Connor
Charlotte Rea
Karen Walker
Patty Wallens

Animal Care Volunteers

Debra Abbott
Robyn Bennett
Everly June Cope
Jaymie Dixon
Maryann Dupes
Cynthia Elkey
Lilly Farmer
Marcie Gibbons
Jackie Harold
Matt Heinrich
Steve Holler
Andrea Merchak
Kent Olson
Debbie Smith
George Wittig
Marnie Wittig
Dave Volin

Patient Transport Volunteers:

Brittany Barnett
Robyn Bennett
Tony Cambio
Peyton Coyner
Lauren Dalton
Cynthia Elkey
AJ Greely
Susan Hastings
Dianne Hillman
Don Mitchem
Lex Meredith
Shannon Padgett
Gary Powell
Charlotte Rea
Stephanie Sweet
Dave Volin
Michael Yorg

2022 Summer Interns

Chandler Dennis
Erika Kraabel
Sydney Matda

Outreach

Sarah Cooperman
Bernie Dracopoli
Lilly Farmer
Nancy Newman

Carpentry

Ed Spellman
Carl Stellwag
Pete Syme
Buzz VanSantvoord

Legal Advisor
Meghan Cloud

Thank you!



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A Semi-Annual Newsletter

Fall 2023

"HAVE YOU EVER TASTED RACCOON?"

11-year-old Marianna Brierley asked this to Rosie, our Black Vulture education ambassador at RWS, in an email interview for her very own Wildlife Research Center newsletter this summer.

After she was gifted an RWS education animal sponsorship by her great aunt Diane, Marianna began an email correspondence with RWS - first asking for advice from our staff about a squirrel in her yard and then initiating a charming conversation with our Black Vulture ambassador, Rosie. (He dictates his emails to our executive director, Sarah, who types for him.) Marianna has already started her own Wildlife Research Center in her backyard in Georgia, and she interviewed Rosie for her vulture-themed newsletter. We recently received a hand-illustrated copy and loved seeing how Marianna's interview with Rosie helped her share the importance of these misunderstood raptors. We thought it only fair for Rosie to interview Marianna for this newsletter!

Rosie: Why do you love vultures?

Marianna: Well, they are very sweet, and I looove all birds. Not just cute birds. And obviously, [vultures] do so much good! They clean up dead stuff, so we should be happy to see vultures eating a dead animal. I love to see them soaring in the sky. My favorite kind of vulture is the lappet-faced vulture. They're really attractive in the way they have these folds of skin that are white and blue and pink. Then I like black and turkey vultures, and California and Andean condor. I always wanted to advocate for animals who people didn't really like - like certain bugs, crows, aggressive dog breeds, and of course, vultures! They [vultures] are so nice and cuddly and very attentive! They are worthy of love, smartness, and people should know - they clean up

Rosie: Why do you think people should care about "ugly" animals like vultures?

Marianna: I know, some animals can be quite icky, and even scary, like spiders, bats, and vultures, but a lot of times people make up superstitions. Bats generally do not try to bite humans - they eat mosquitoes and so on, and vultures - they're not ugly, they're beautiful! Furless animals or featherless birds, such as mole rats, and sphynx cats, and vultures are ugly and people just don't like them! But, even if an animal isn't very good-looking, it doesn't mean it's bad!! Vultures help clean up dead stuff that can kill us!! So really, put aside the fact they're ugly!! Rosie is so relatable. We both get nervous in the car and don't like our toenails being cut.

Rosie: How has RWS inspired you?

Marianna: Well, it really got me thinking, maybe I should be a [certified wildlife] rehabilitator (CWR) when I'm older. And, obviously Rosie is WONDERFUL!! Rosie is my only vulture friend!! And RWS has also helped me to know that there are other people in the world who love wildlife and are concerned about wildlife, like I am.

Marianna B
Head Biologist, Squirrelologist and Preventer of Extinction

We are so thrilled that Rosie and the team at RWS have helped inspire the next generation of wildlife conservationists - some of whom, like Marianna, are already taking action in their own backyards. Cheers to you, Marianna! And to answer your question - we don't think Rosie has ever tasted raccoon. His daily diet consists of dead rats. Yum!



Above: Illustrated cover of Marianna's Newsletter

Inset: Marianna with her vulture, Carcassetta.

Rockfish Wildlife Sanctuary rehabilitates injured and orphaned native wildlife in Central Virginia and educates our community about the needs and inherent value of the natural environment.

AROUND THE SANCTUARY



Left - Ambassador opossum Andy spent a few days in his own "office" this summer due to poor air quality outside from wildfire smoke.
Center - Below deck storage for animal crates is almost finished! This will free up the basement to be used for animal quarantine zones.
Right - The new "Green Bus" replaced the "Blue Bus" and is already a well loved/used member of the team. Thanks to our supporters!

THE FUN OF LIVING IN A FOREST!

While it provides a peaceful and bucolic setting for the wild patients in our care, our rural country setting in the middle of the woods presents some unique issues for rehabilitation.



Strong weather and heavy foliage can result in tree issues for our woodland enclosures. Falling branches damaged our bat cage, though fixable in time for bats! And a huge oak cracked first, giving us time to move a hutch with opossums in it - before falling directly on top of where the hutch used to be!

CONTINUING EDUCATION: Our revamped "SPONSOR AN ANIMAL" education ambassador program is live! Help us maintain our group of traveling ambassador animals for as little as \$50 dollars a year - your sponsorship provides food, shelter and medical care and supports RWS's educational programs. Visit our website for more info!

ALL ABOUT THE ANIMALS



Little bird, big personality

We had the pleasure of caring for an American Kestrel this summer! It was found alone as an orphaned fledgling in downtown Richmond.

These birds are the smallest falcons in North America. Kestrels are excellent hunters, feasting on insects, rodents, reptiles, and birds - even some up to the size of a quail! Kestrels are known for their unique ability to hover, where they fly against the wind at the same speed as the wind. This allows them to remain apparently motionless, suspended in one spot in the sky as they scan the ground below for prey.

Our staff hand-fed the kestrel throughout the day (chopped mouse, yum!) before moving her to an outdoor enclosure where she could learn to fly and self-feed at her leisure. The final step for her rehabilitation was "Mouse School," where we leave each raptor patient alone in their flight enclosure, one at a time, with a large tub containing feeder mice (never native mouse patients!) on the ground. The tub also contains plenty of food, water, nesting material, and hidey holes for the mice to escape in. If the bird successfully catches and eats at least one mouse, it is ready for release! Our kestrel patient passed with flying colors and was released on a beautiful property in Nelson County.



Silver squirrel

This striking orphaned eastern gray squirrel came to RWS after routine tree work destroyed her nest. While that's a common story for our orphaned squirrel patients, her silvery-white coloring was a first for RWS!

Most white animals you see are called leucistic, not albino. Both conditions indicate a lack of melanin, the natural pigment that gives skin, feathers, fur, and eyes their color. However, leucism affects all kinds of pigment and thus leucistic animals may have patches of fur or skin lacking pigment or an overall muted color pattern. An important distinction is that their eyes remain dark. Albinism, on the other hand, is much rarer than leucism. It's a genetic mutation that affects the pigment cells in the eyes, leading to red or pinkish eyes, and are often vision impaired.

In almost all cases, wild animals born with albinism are not evolutionarily successful - they're much easier targets for predators since they aren't able to camouflage.

Leucistic animals may be more capable of blending in depending on the severity of their pigmentation loss. Leucistic squirrels make up a third of the squirrel population living happily in Brevard, North Carolina! Excitingly, this patient has thrived at RWS, and passed all developmental milestones.



Our new neighbor!

For a few weeks this summer, RWS staff members were excited to see an 18" copperhead snake each morning. It would come out from under the Sanctuary's deck and bask in the sun, warming up before cruising in our front pollinator garden looking for breakfast. Our staff loved seeing the snake's gorgeous, camouflaged colors and elegant movements.

It is important to remember that copperheads aren't "aggressive" but can act defensively when confronted with a perceived threat. Biting is the last resort for many wild animals, including copperheads. Snakes do a whole lot of good for our environment - which is why we were so excited to see that one had moved into our garden! They control native prey populations and chow down on many pests, like invasive rats and mice. Since snakes famously don't have hands to pick off ectoparasites with, they end up eating tons of ticks hitching rides on their mouse meals. A timber rattlesnake can eat up to 4,500 ticks every year!

Furthermore, snakes play an integral role in balancing the ecosystem and serve as prey items for many animals that people enjoy seeing, like hawks, falcons, and foxes. We hope our new neighbor will be back next spring after a relaxing brumation - the reptilian version of hibernation.

Thank you to everyone who rescued an animal and supported our work this year!