



# Rockfish Wildlife Sanctuary

5450 Wheelers Cove Road, Shipman, VA 22971 • 434.263.4954



## HOW YOU CAN HELP TODAY:

### Cash Donations

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

### Planned Giving

Leave a legacy for our wild world and join the Merlin Society. More information inside!

### Material Donations

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

### RWS Resale Shop

Proceeds from our resale booth in Greene House Shops benefit the Sanctuary! The shop also accepts donations, like jewelry, art, glass, silver, china, or small furniture. The Shops are located at 14843 Spotswood Trail, Ruckersville, VA 22968, at the corner of Rt. 29 and Rt. 33, Questions? Call (434) 263-4954.



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A Semi-Annual Newsletter

Spring 2024

## NATHOU: A LEGACY OF LOVE

And now, a well-earned retirement! We talk with Nathou about history and transitions.

Our fearless founder, Nathou Attinger, has dedicated her life and her home to helping animals in need. After decades of providing selfless, compassionate care for wildlife, Nathou is retiring from the Sanctuary - though, she'll still tend to our native garden! Nathou has grown the Sanctuary from a one-woman operation at her home to a standalone facility on 20 acres, designed and built just for our lifesaving work. We now care for nearly 1,000 animals each year! Our executive director, Sarah Cooperman, interviewed Nathou to celebrate her one-of-a-kind legacy for all living creatures in Virginia.

**S:** So Nathou, what inspired you to start the Sanctuary?

**N:** Merlin inspired me! Merlin was the first crow that I ever rescued. He couldn't fly and was being kept as a pet by someone. *(This was the 90s, folks - don't try this today!)* He was magnificent and intelligent. I adored him. You know, the #1 thing that was most important to me was that all animals should be free and never kept in a cage. Merlin taught me that sometimes you gotta do it when it's for the good of the animal. He taught me the fine line between freedom and being in an enclosure until you're good enough to be free again.

**S:** What were some of the challenges you faced in the early years?

**N:** Working full time [running her landscaping business] and having a Sanctuary. Slowly, we had enough money to hire one person. For the first few years, though, I spent pretty much all of the money I made from my landscaping job on the animals. Actually, we used all my retirement savings to make this Sanctuary go! I'd do it again in a minute.

**S:** For the first decade or so, the Sanctuary operated out of your house! What was that like?

**N:** Well, we never used to lock the front door. People would just walk in with their animals. One time, about 2 AM, this guy came in with a wounded hawk and yells, "NATHOU! NATHOU! WAKE UP!" And there he was, in my house with a hurt hawk in his arms. Those were the kind of experiences we had. It was crazy, but it was fun.



**S:** Ha! How did you know it was time to move the Sanctuary out of your home?

**N:** When Bev [Nathou's wife] said so. \*laughs\* So, that's what happened. Poor Bev. \*laughs\* Also, we just had so many animals, and it gets really old having volunteers and staff in your own house from 7AM-7PM every day. That being said, Bev did so much for RWS. She was amazing. She did all the financial stuff, she paid people, did all the government paperwork. She really loves animals too! At one point, we had all the patients and also eight dogs. Can you imagine raising those animals with all those dogs?

**S:** I can sure see why it was time to expand! What's been your favorite species to work with throughout the years?

**N:** Skunks! They're perfect animals. They're the only ones I've ever seen really play, like kittens play. They're beautiful and smart, and I just love them.

**S:** The people gotta know: have you been sprayed?!

**N:** Somehow, I haven't ever been sprayed! *(That's some Nathou magic, right there!)*

continued...

Rockfish Wildlife Sanctuary rescues, rehabilitates, and releases orphaned and injured wildlife in Central Virginia & educates our community about the needs and value of the natural environment.

## Nathou: A legacy of love cont.:

**S:** You must have many memorable rescue stories, but do you have a favorite?

**N:** One of my favorites was when this guy called with baby pileated woodpeckers. They were doing the electrical lines, and they'd cut the branch down and found the babies inside. The rescuer was such a lovemuffin! It was freezing cold, so he wrapped them in his hardhat and shirt, turned on his truck, and kept the babies warm until I came. I was so impressed, especially since he didn't look like someone who'd do that. He looked like one tough dude! It's amazing how many good people there are out there. This is what the Sanctuary has taught me.

Another memorable rescue was when a little boy and his mother came to the Sanctuary from Charlottesville, back when it was at my house. They had a black widow spider in a jar. The little boy had brought it to me to be rehabbed. He said, "My mom said just to give it to her, but I knew she'd kill it." Instead, she saw how intent her son was on saving it and agreed to drive him all the way to Nelson County for it to be "rehabilitated." We released it together in my garden.

**S:** What about a favorite release story?

**N:** I do remember when we soft-released some other pileated woodpecker patients at my house. *(A soft release is when you continue to provide supplemental food or shelter for 1-2 weeks as the patient eases back to the wild.)* When they wanted to eat, they'd come to the front porch and start hammering away at the door. \*laughs\* That still did not prevent me from soft-releasing woodpeckers there in the future!

**S:** In hindsight, what surprised you the most about getting the Sanctuary established?

**N:** I realized that if I had planned this, I never would have done it. It truly had to be something you do day to day and then you outgrow it, so you build another building. If I had planned it, it would have been so huge that it would have been impossible to establish. And it's distracting to plan! Don't plan, just do.

**S:** What are you hoping to see in the Sanctuary's future?

**N:** I would love to see the Sanctuary have enough money to hire a full-time educator and build a separate education center. That's important to me.

**S:** We're excited to get to work on that! In the meantime, what are you looking forward to doing in retirement?

**N:** I don't know yet! I haven't quite found my niche yet, but I will. I'll still be gardening at the Sanctuary plenty! I also want to go to Australia and New Zealand. I want to see the animals and the plants there. I don't care as much about the humans. \*laughs\* You know what I mean!



Two Sanctuary favorites!



We know exactly what you mean! Thank you, Nathou, for your commitment to every single animal who needed the Sanctuary. We are so proud to carry on your legacy and infuse your love into each patient's care.

### In honor of Nathou, we are thrilled to announce we are establishing the Merlin Society.

The Merlin Society recognizes and honors those who have included Rockfish Wildlife Sanctuary in their estate planning. If you have already done so or are arranging to, please email Sarah Cooperman at [sarah@rockfishwildlifesanctuary.org](mailto:sarah@rockfishwildlifesanctuary.org) so we can include you in the Merlin Society's roster of committed wildlife heroes. *Your support today and your future bequest will ensure a brighter world for Virginian wildlife and beyond. Thank you!*

# RWS: A GALA CELEBRATION!



**Save the date!** On September 13th, 2024, we're hosting a gala celebration at Potter's Craft Cider in Charlottesville. It's a Black (Crow) Tie evening, which means wear what you'd like! Invitations coming this summer, or secure tickets now with a sponsorship.

We have cared for over 10,000 animals since our founding in 2004. Time flies when you're feeding baby birds every 30 minutes, sunrise to sunset! To celebrate our 20th anniversary, we're hosting our first gala fundraiser. Enjoy live music, tasty food from Botanical Fare, and a live auction to help power us into the next 20 years of saving wildlife.

If you're interested in supporting our historic milestone and securing tickets to this exciting evening, consider becoming a sponsor! Packages are available at a variety of levels for both businesses and individual patrons. For more information, please email [sarah@rockfishwildlifesanctuary.org](mailto:sarah@rockfishwildlifesanctuary.org).



# ALL ABOUT THE ANIMALS

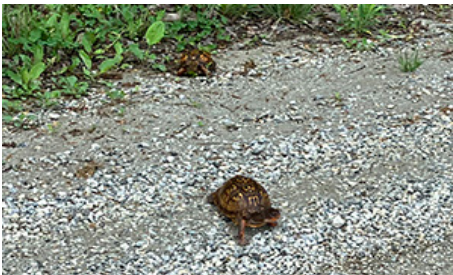
Spring patient intakes are once again soaring. For the third year in a row, we are well ahead of the previous year's admissions at this time. Luckily for our many patients, our stellar volunteers and interns are also returning to provide the highest standard of professional care for every animal. Enjoy some seasonal Sanctuary stories and tips below!



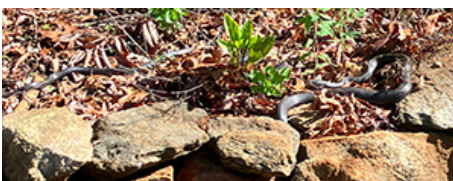
Gray Treefrog

## Season of Love

The Sanctuary is uniquely peaceful and restorative for our patients, thanks to our location in the middle of rural Nelson County. That means we've got a wonderfully healthy population of "locals," as we like to call them! Our staff has had the delight of catching some local herptiles in the act this mating season - sometimes, smack in the middle of the front garden. Get a room!



A male woodland box turtle in hot pursuit of a female box turtle, crossing the Sanctuary's driveway. Both were safely escorted to the other side by staff!



If you look closely, you can see two northern black racers spending some quality time together!



## Groundhog at the Pool

Our team was surprised this spring to receive a hotline call from a rescuer who discovered a groundhog den underneath their pool as they were filling the pool in. Unfortunately, the family dog got ahold of one of them. The remaining lone survivor of the destroyed den was thankfully brought to the Sanctuary right away by the well-intentioned homeowner. We have had a busy season for hoglets - seven orphaned groundhogs already admitted. This little one was paired up with same-species "littermates" after a quarantine period and is now thriving in our outdoor pre-release enclosure. Groundhogs are essential to healthy ecosystems, particularly below-ground. They aerate and till soil, creating healthier habitats for all wild animals - from microorganisms to insects to larger animals like red foxes. Groundhogs also help disperse native seeds and pollinate native plants. They sometimes get a bad reputation as garden nuisances, but enhancing garden protections, like burying fencing and applying basic scent and noise deterrents like a loud radio, can help keep groundhogs away from your summer goods. We've heard from a few avid gardeners that groundhogs dislike occasional heavy metal music. Rock on, groundhogs!



## Don't be a fledgenapper!

The sun is shining, the flowers are blooming, and the birds are chirping... and mating. We've admitted over 100 orphaned songbirds already so far in 2024! A considerable number of these patients are suspected *fledgenappings*: when well-meaning people pick up a healthy fledgling from the ground, assume it's orphaned, and bring it to us or try to feed it themselves. Fledglings normally spend a few days on the ground after leaving their nest, still being tended to by their parents. As long as the baby is not wet, injured, or covered in ectoparasites like fly eggs or mites, we almost always recommend trying the "poop test" first. Yep, it's just as high-tech as it sounds! Simply place a tissue underneath the baby and check back in two hours for fresh feces. Birds have incredibly speedy metabolisms and must defecate nearly every time they're fed. If you see poop, they're being cared for! If you see no parental activity and no feces after several hours, please give us a call. Never attempt feeding a baby bird on your own. Doing so can cause immense harm to the fragile little bird. Just keep it warm with an external heat source and focus on getting it into professional care at the Sanctuary as soon as you can. That's what we're here for!