

The Ridgeline



NEWSLETTER OF THE BLUE RIDGE WILDLIFE CENTER

ISSUE 63 | FALL 2024

Thinking Outside The Box (Turtle)

This fall we admitted record-breaking numbers of turtles—see how we care for these special patients!



Without You, We Wouldn't Exist

As the Executive Director of Blue Ridge Wildlife Center I am continually in awe of the generosity and commitment of our community. Every day, I am reminded of how crucial your support is to the work we do. **As a non-profit that provides free medical care to wildlife, we are entirely reliant on donations.** By law, we cannot charge for wildlife care, and we do not receive state or federal funding. Simply put, without your contributions, we would not exist.

I want to take a moment to highlight what this means for us. Each year, we admit approximately **4,000** animals in need of critical care. Your donations ensure that we can meet this demand, provide medical care and long-term rehabilitation, and, when possible, release them back into the wild.

But our work doesn't stop there. The generosity of our supporters also enables us to look ahead to the future. We're expanding our professional training program to equip future wildlife conservationists with the skills they need to continue this important work. We're also exploring new ways to enhance our educational impact through virtual and interactive programs. **These initiatives wouldn't be possible without your ongoing support.**

As we move into the final weeks of the year, I ask for your continued partnership. Every gift, whether big or small, helps us stay true to our mission: **to provide quality care for wildlife in need and educate our community on the importance of wildlife conservation.** Your support literally allows us to exist and thrive, and for that, we are profoundly grateful.

Thank you for being a part of our story. Together, we are making a lasting impact on the lives of wildlife and the future of our natural world.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Annie Bradfield".

Annie Bradfield

Annie's Eye View

Where our Executive Director highlights her favorite photo and shares why it caught her eye!

This issue's photo from our Halloween event captures pure joy—a little girl mesmerized by Morgan, our Building and Grounds Manager, in his inflatable chipmunk costume. Moments like these remind me that inspiration and joy come in all shapes and sizes, whether it's through real animals or one hilariously oversized chipmunk! At Blue Ridge Wildlife Center, we're here not just to heal wildlife but to spark wonder and nurture connections with nature in every form.



Q&A with Bethann Beeman,

Event Co-Chair, BRWC Gala

Can you share a bit about your background and what inspired you to get involved with the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center?

I have a background in finance and event planning. Over the years, I've become increasingly impressed with the work Blue Ridge Wildlife Center does for local wildlife. Their dedication to the animals in our area and their rehabilitation efforts really inspired me to get involved.

What motivates you to support the Wildlife Center?

I'm motivated by the Center's commitment to rehabilitating wild animals and releasing them back into nature. I also appreciate the educational efforts they make to raise public awareness about wildlife conservation.

Does the Center stand out to you among the many nonprofit organizations you've worked with? If so, why?

Yes, Blue Ridge stands out to me because of its clear mission and the important work they do for wildlife. Over the years, I've been involved with many nonprofits, but Blue Ridge's focus on wildlife rehabilitation and education resonates deeply with me.

As a co-chair of the gala, what were your key responsibilities, and what did you enjoy most about the role?

Event planning is something I truly enjoy. As co-chair, I helped in several areas, but my favorite part was arranging the floral displays. It gave me a chance to unwind and get into a creative "zen" space while contributing to the event's atmosphere.

How do you feel your work on the finance and development committees contributes to the mission of the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center?

My work on the finance and development committees is essential in ensuring we have the funds needed to support the Center's key initiatives, including wildlife rehabilitation, research, and public education efforts.

In your experience working with multiple nonprofits, what are some of the biggest challenges you see in organizing successful fundraising events?

A common challenge in many nonprofits is adapting to change. It can be difficult for organizations to update their practices and embrace new ideas, especially when they've been doing things a certain way for a long time.

How do you think the gala impacts the local community and wildlife conservation efforts?

The gala is an excellent opportunity to educate the community about the Center's work. It helps people understand how we care for local wildlife and the importance of supporting wildlife conservation efforts.

Has working with the Wildlife Center influenced your perspective on philanthropy?

Not significantly. I've been involved in philanthropy for a long time, working with various nonprofits. However, my work with the Wildlife Center has deepened my appreciation for causes that directly benefit our local environment and wildlife.

What do you find most rewarding about supporting nonprofits, and how do you measure the impact of your contributions?

The most rewarding part is seeing the tangible results of my support—whether it's in the form of successful events, growth in donations, or positive impacts on the community. I measure my contributions by the outcomes we achieve together.

What are your aspirations for the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center in the coming years, particularly regarding fundraising and community engagement?

My hope is that we continue to expand our reach in the community, engaging more like-minded people who are passionate about wildlife conservation. Increasing community involvement will help strengthen our fundraising efforts and support for the Center's mission.



How can others in the community get involved and support the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center or similar causes?

Volunteering is a great place to start. I encourage people to volunteer their time with nonprofits to understand their work firsthand. Once you see how the organization operates, you can decide whether you'd like to support it financially as well.

Is there a message you would like to share about the importance of wildlife conservation and community involvement?

Volunteering your time is one of the most impactful ways you can support a cause. It's not only a way to contribute directly but also to inspire others in the community to get involved.

Can you share any upcoming projects or events that you are particularly excited about?

I'm always excited about everything happening in our community, but I'm especially looking forward to the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center's event calendar for 2025. We have some great initiatives and activities coming up that I can't wait to see unfold.



See more on this years gala on page 8.

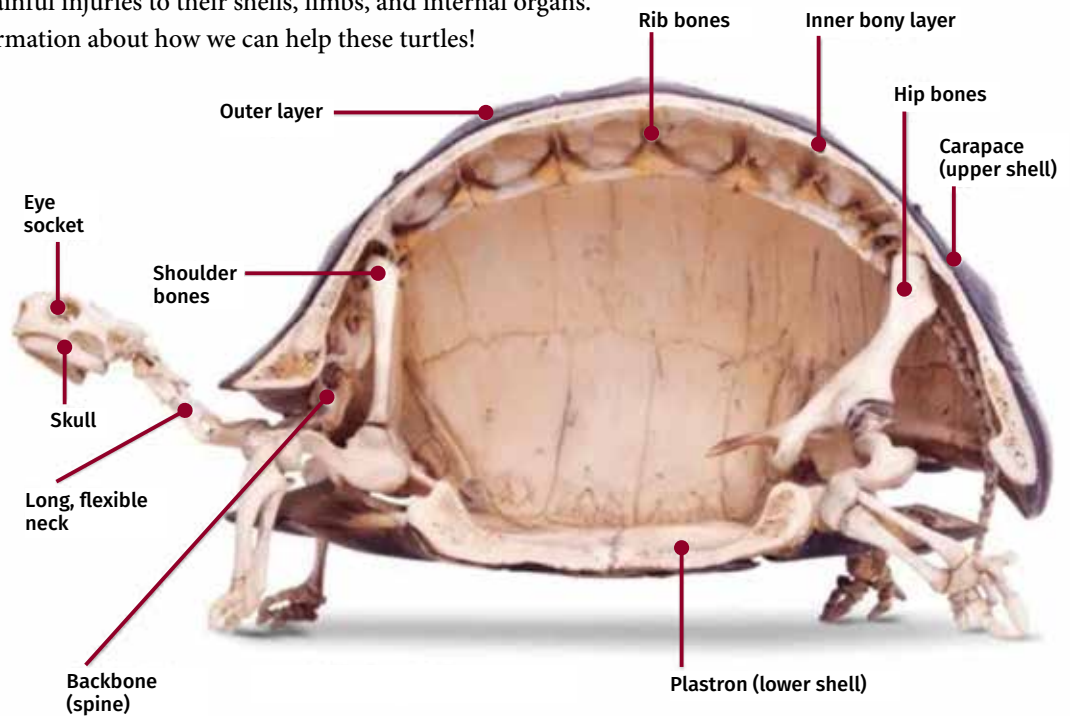
What's In Our Turtle Toolbox?

Trauma is the leading cause for admission in turtles that arrive at the Center. Most turtles are hit by vehicles, particularly on rainy days, as they wander around in search of food, mates, or a place to hunker down for the winter. Others are hit by lawnmowers or attacked by pet dogs. Regardless of the cause, the majority of these patients arrive in horrible condition, suffering from extremely painful injuries to their shells, limbs, and internal organs. Read each caption for more information about how we can help these turtles!

SKELETON AT A GLANCE

It is a common misconception that turtles "live in their shells" like hermit crabs—turtles **ARE** their shells! The top shell, or carapace, is composed of their backbone and ribs. The bottom shell, or plastron, is equivalent to our breastbone. One difference is that they, like all non-mammals, do not have a diaphragm separating their heart and lungs from the rest of their organs. Instead, these organs all exist in a single compartment, called the coelom.

Photo courtesy of Chattahoochee Nature Center (www.chattnaturecenter.org).



PREPARING SHELL FRACTURES FOR SURGICAL REPAIR

The shell is composed of bone, covered in colorful keratin that creates the beautiful patterns we see. Fractured shells are every bit as painful as any other animal's broken bone. What's worse is that by the time the turtle makes it into our care, open wounds with exposed bone marrow are often packed full of dirt, grass, or even maggots. Before every repair, we must first clean off as much of the debris as possible to reduce the risk of infection. This must be done extremely carefully, especially if there is a risk of puncture into the lungs or damage to the spinal cord.



FEEDING TUBES

Any patient with open fractures or other severe injuries is treated with antibiotics, opioids, and anti-inflammatory medications. Some are so sick and dehydrated from older wounds that we place feeding tubes to provide fluid or nutritional support until they're well enough to eat on their own.



MISSING SHELL PIECES

Reptiles heal very slowly, with broken bones often taking 3-4 months to stabilize fully. These patients can be with us for even longer if they are missing entire sections of the bony shell. The bone never grows back, but new scar tissue forms over the defect and hardens slowly over many months until it is essentially as protective as bone.



STABILIZING FRACTURES WITH TAPE

Shell fractures range from minimally displaced (fractured but still well-aligned) to markedly displaced (usually many pieces all collapsed or broken apart). This turtle's shell fracture was badly displaced on intake, but the pieces were all intact, the injury was fresh, and pieces came together easily with little tension pulling the fragments apart. In these cases we can often use strips of aluminum tape (used for repairing ductwork) to hold them together.



BUILDING BRIDGES AND BRACES

Box turtles with plastron fractures can be tricky, as the front half is hinged to allow them to use powerful muscles and box up. Unfortunately, this tendency makes it VERY difficult to keep fractures stable because the mobile pieces are pulled so tightly that simple fixation tends to loosen or break entirely. To address this, we can use epoxy putty or metal plates to create strong bridges. For particularly complex cases, we will even use thermoplastic (plastic that becomes moldable when heated) to build custom braces and prevent them from being able to box up entirely as seen above. When turtles come in with plastron fractures that have already started to heal on



their own, it is often impossible to get those bony fragments to heal together. However, they can heal as individual segments and retain nearly-perfect function, as seen in the turtle above.



CREATING A PULLEY SYSTEM

Shell fractures that are under greater tension may require stronger stabilization. We use bra hooks and wire or thick suture to create a pulley system and bring the edges together with increased force.



AMPUTATIONS

Limbs that have been severely traumatized cannot be saved, especially if the surrounding muscle, nerves, and skin are too damaged. In these cases, the leg is amputated. How high the amputation occurs depends on where the injury happened. Turtles can do very well with three legs. However, if more than one limb requires major amputation, the prognosis becomes significantly worse.



SPLINTING AND PINNING LEG FRACTURES

Sometimes, leg fractures can be splinted or pinned. This turtle had a needle placed through both halves of his fractured tibia to stabilize it. A custom hobble was created to prevent the turtle from pulling the leg in and boxing up, which would have caused bending and displacement of the pin. The hobble also allowed us to keep the leg in extension so that we could perform regular bandage changes (initially required every 1-2 days). After two months, the bone had healed enough to remove the pin. The turtle received regular physical therapy including a makeshift cart that could help support his body weight while he began to walk again and gain strength. This turtle was with us for 6 months before release.



Eastern painted turtle.



Spotted turtle.

WATERTIGHT REPAIRS

Box turtles aren't the only species that need repair! Aquatic (or semi-aquatic) turtles such as this wood turtle, spotted turtle, and Eastern painted turtle add the challenge of getting these patients back into water as soon as possible. Their fractures must be watertight or risk non-sterile fluid leaking into their body cavity which would lead to severe internal infection.



Wood turtle.

Helping Snakes Through Research

Snakes are incredibly important to human health—not just directly, through controlling populations of pest species, but indirectly preventing the spread of zoonotic disease (Timber Rattlesnakes have been shown to lower the prevalence of Lyme disease) and even cancer treatments (peptides from Copperhead venom have shown success in treating breast cancer).

We help our local snakes by treating those that come to us with injuries or disease, but our impact is exponentially greater when we also help through research. Fortunately, we have partnered with George Mason University on a study that will hopefully help snakes with Snake Fungal Disease (SFD).

SFD is a contagious fungal infection caused by *Ophidiomyces Ophidicola* and it is the most common fungal disease we see in snakes in our area. In some regions, especially in conjunction with habitat loss, this disease can be a serious threat to specific snake species. The most common clinical sign we see with SFD is facial swelling with crusted nodules over the face and body externally. The disease can spread internally, often through the nasal cavity or through the eyes to cause internal fungal infections, especially pneumonia.

Like many diseases, this organism is spread from direct contact or a contami-



Eastern ratsnake undergoing nebulization with antifungal medications to treat snake fungal disease.

nated environment as an opportunistic pathogen, highlighting the importance of biosecurity. This is one of many reasons why you should clean boots and equipment when engaging in outdoor activities in different areas. It is also one of many reasons why it is not legal to relocate snakes (or any wild animals in Virginia)—relocation can expose naïve populations and cause massive population losses.

At Blue Ridge Wildlife Center, snakes are treated with nebulized antifungal medications for months to fight the organism in the lungs and on the skin.

This infection is often fatal in many

snake species with some studies suggesting that less than 40% will survive. Though most treatment options, including our protocol, are still experimental, we do attempt treatment at the Center and more than half of our treated SFD patients have survived to release.

Research is needed to determine the actual prevalence of this disease and the morbidity and mortality rates. Research is also needed to determine the effectiveness of treatment. We are collaborating with George Mason University to do exactly this!

In this ongoing study, we are looking at this fungal organism as well as the microbiome of our snake patients' skin and how that may impact susceptibility to infection. We swab the skin weekly before, during, and after treatment to help identify these infections, understand the changing microbiomes, and assess the response to treatment. The hope is that the results of this study will give us more insight into this disease and how we can best approach prevention and treatment.

Fungal infections can wreak havoc on populations, but better understanding the disease and response to treatment will hopefully help us mitigate SFD in the future and help us save susceptible populations.



Eastern ratsnake with common signs of Snake Fungal Disease.



Gala Recap: A Night of Community, Celebration, and Impact

On September 28th, Blue Ridge Wildlife Center hosted our 2024 Gala and Benefit Auction, **Wildlife Wonders—Silver and Goldfinch**, at the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley in Winchester, Virginia. It was an unforgettable evening filled with inspiration and purpose. Together, we celebrated the power of community and the profound impact it has on our mission to protect and care for local wildlife. The night was a true testament to what we can achieve when our supporters rally around our cause.

Our honorees—Andy Ferrari and the Trex Company, George Ohrstrom, and Terry Bradfield—were recognized for their unique contributions and steadfast commitment to our work. These honorees exemplify the compassion and generosity that make our conservation efforts possible. Their dedication serves as an inspiration to all of us, underscoring the significance of community partnerships.

Thanks to our generous sponsors, dedicated patrons, thoughtful donors, and the enthusiastic participation of auction bidders, the evening exceeded our revenue goals while staying within budget, ensuring that every dollar raised can be reinvested in our mission. Special thanks go to the auction participants, whose spirited bid-



BRWC Executive Director, Annie Bradfield, (far left) and BRWC Board Chair, Dr. Russ McKelway, (far right) with honorees (left to right) Lindsey Toth (Trex), Andy Ferrari, Terry Bradfield, George Ohrstrom.

ding brought energy and excitement to the room, underscoring just how much our work resonates with you all.

As we reflect on the success of this evening, we are filled with gratitude for every person who believes in our mission and steps forward to help us make a difference. Your support strengthens our impact

and allows us to continue protecting and conserving native wildlife. Thank you for being a part of our community and for sharing in this incredible evening with us.



WILDLIFE WONDERS



Silver and Goldfinch



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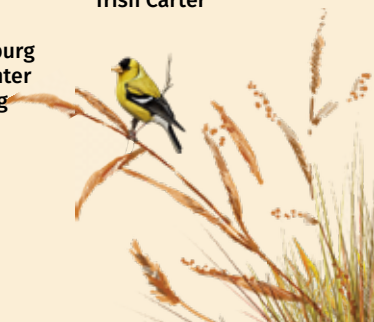
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Rehab Corner

Windows - A Clear Threat To Birds

Every year, it's estimated that over one billion birds are killed by window collisions, both by glass on high-rise buildings in cities and urban spaces, but also by those on residential homes and businesses.

Window strikes are a serious emergency medical situation, often causing concussions, internal bleeding, difficulty breathing, eye injuries, and broken bones if the collision doesn't kill the bird outright. Window strikes often leave birds "stunned" on the ground, leaving them susceptible to predation or other issues.

Each year we see an increasing number of window strikes, hopefully due more to the increasing awareness of how important it is to get these birds immediate care and heightened monitoring of window strikes around homes and urban areas. We see these numbers increase dramatically during spring and fall migration, as more birds are on the move, and primarily at night, when lights reflecting off of glass can disorient birds.

This fall migration we saw a variety of bird species that we don't often see during other portions of the year, such as Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Bay-breasted Warblers, Cape May Warblers, a Blue-headed Vireo, a Blackpoll Warbler, multiple thrushes, and even a Broad-winged Hawk!



Cape May Warbler.



Rose-breasted Grosbeak.



Bay-breasted Warbler.



Blue-headed Vireo.

Make Your Windows Bird-Safe

Help migrating birds and birds year-round by making your windows bird-safe! Birds hit windows because they reflect the sky and trees on the **OUTSIDE** of the windows, **NOT** the inside. You must break up the outside reflection by placing stickers, decals, tape, or other mediums (glass paint, screening, etc.) on the outside of the windows, with no more than 2" between decals/designs so birds don't attempt to fly "between" them. Stopping birds from hitting windows is the best way to give these birds the best chance to survive, and prevent them from needing care to begin with!

If you happen to find a bird that has struck a window, contain that bird **IMMEDIATELY** and get them to a rehabilitator as soon as possible! Do **NOT** attempt to release the bird, even if they seem to "recover" after a short period of time —many injuries get worse hours/days after the strike, and require treatment to manage these issues and give them the best chance at surviving!



Broad-winged Hawk.

It's Turtles All The Way Down!

It has been a WILD ride for turtle intakes this fall season. In just a 30-day period between September and early October, 71 of the 346 animals brought in to us for care were Woodland Box Turtles. That's 21% of our intakes in that time. If taken into account all reptile species during that time, that number jumps to 28%—over 1/4 of all the patients we admitted over those 30 days.

Reptiles normally only account for about 12-13% of our annual intakes. Turtle intakes tend to slow a bit in late September/early October, but instead we saw these intakes **INCREASE**. Overall, we've taken in over 100 more turtles so far this year compared to all of last year.

Despite it being past the release cut-off for reptiles in Virginia, the unseasonably warm temperatures are finding more and more reptiles out later and later, putting them at continued risk for vehicle strikes, lawn mower injuries, domestic animal attacks, and illness.

Our native box turtles can live long lives, averaging 50-60 years old, but can get to 100 or more. A lot can change in a turtle's lifetime. Many will find their natural territory slowly fragmented by highways and new construction, putting them at greater risk of being injured. Less than 1% of baby



Woodland Box Turtle overwintering at the Center.

box turtles make it to breeding age, so every breeding adult turtle matters when it comes to repairing them and getting them back out into the wild to continue contributing to their species.

Over the last 100 years, it's estimated that box turtle populations have declined by 32% in Virginia alone, with noticeable declines in other areas of their range as well.

How can you help box turtles?

- Keep your eye out during the warm and wet months for "rocks" in roadways, and if uninjured, help them across in the direction they're headed.
- Never move a turtle to a "better" location, as this can spread lethal diseases and cause entire populations to get sick.
- Turtles will attempt to return to their home territory, often resulting in even MORE roadway crossings or other dangerous encounters.
- Lift riding mowers and other machinery to 8" or higher when mowing to help spare turtles and other wildlife from injuries.
- **NEVER** take a wild box turtle out of the wild to become a pet—not only is it illegal in Virginia to do so, but it removes much-needed biodiversity from an already struggling population.

If you find an injured turtle (or any wild animal), make note of the **EXACT** found location, and get that turtle to your nearest wildlife rehabilitator **ASAP!** The sooner injuries can be treated, the more likely it is that those treatments will be successful at giving our long-lived reptile friends a second chance at a wild life!



Our turtle caging availability is very near capacity—every cage on this wall is full, yet this is just one of three rooms used to house turtles.

Glue-trap Barred Owl



While we normally see small animals, such as snakes, mice, bats, and songbirds stuck to glue traps, this Barred Owl was yet another victim to the cruelty of glue traps after they were trying to take advantage of what they assumed was a free meal - an also-trapped Norway Rat.

On intake, this bird was dehydrated and thin. With careful restraint, we were able to remove the glue board, but many of the feathers on the left wing and tail were damaged from the adhesive. Thankfully with sedation and many baths to remove the rest of the adhesive, the majority of this bird's feathers were able to be saved.

Owls rely on perfect feather structure to be successful hunters in the wild. The leading edges of their flight feathers have comb-like structures, breaking up turbulence and providing them with "silent flight" that allows them to quietly swoop in on their prey. If these feather structures are compromised, so is their ability to hunt successfully.

Please, do **NOT** use glue traps and reach out to your representative in support of legislation that bans these traps (Glue Trap Prohibition Act of 2024)! Not only are they inhumane and cause incredible suffering to both intended and unintended animals, but these traps do **NOT** solve your "pest" issue. There are many humane exclusion techniques and changes that can be made to encourage wildlife away or out of areas without lethal means.

If you have an issue with wildlife, call the Center or your closest rehabilitator and we can humanely help you with your unique situation.



Barred owl with damaged feathers on wing and tail.

Endangered Patient Alert: Tricolored Bat

This may look like your average bat, but this little guy is a state endangered Tricolored Bat!

Thankfully this bat just needed a quick examination and flight test after being seen not flying on the ground. While sometimes this can be an indication of injury or something wrong, this bat was alert and capable of perfect flight, and was sent back out on his way to hopefully continue contributing to his population! In Virginia, the population of Tricolored bats has declined by over 90% due to White Nose Syndrome, an illness caused by the invasive White Nose fungus that has been wreaking havoc through wintering bat hibernaculum in caves throughout the country. This fungus grows on bats while they hibernate, eventually waking them up in the winter where there is no food, leading to starvation. Rehabili-



tating and saving these bats is crucial, as every individual matters. We're glad that, with your support, we were available to make sure this bat was doing well and was able to be safely released home!

Cancer Diagnosis in a Eastern Ratsnake Patient



This Eastern Ratsnake came to us as a transfer from another rehabber after spending about a month in their care. He had initially been hit by a lawn mower and sustained some scrapes along the body as well as a lesion near the right eye that wasn't healing like the other injuries. This snake also had a mild but persistent head tilt.

After just two weeks in care, the lesion near the right eye had grown from slightly raised to a rounded mass with a nearly one-centimeter diameter. Given the rapid growth, our veterinary team took a biopsy of this mass for testing and unfortunately, this was identified as a soft tissue sarcoma, a type of cancer.

Given the invasive nature of this type

of cancer, as well as the location where it was already causing problems, further excision of the mass would not be curative and the decision was made to euthanize.

Although we're sad this patient couldn't be treated and released, we're glad that an accurate diagnosis could be made and are honored that we were able to prevent future suffering. We realize many people are often disappointed by such outcomes, but this was a much happier ending for the snake than he would have had in the wild, and we're grateful for the finders and the amazing network of Virginia rehabilitators who work hard to give our wildlife a second chance!

Hooked Snapping Turtle Gets Surgery

This adult snapping turtle came to us from Stafford, VA with fishing line hanging from the mouth. X-rays confirmed that he had swallowed two hooks—one that was attached to the visible line and another further in the stomach.

Fortunately, this patient was medically stable and we were able to do surgery quickly to remove those hooks.

Hooks don't disintegrate in the stomach. If the turtle is lucky, the hook will embed in the stomach wall and form an abscess around it, which can wall off infection well in some cases. In many other cases, the hook will puncture through the gastrointestinal tract, contaminating the coelom (body cavity) or damaging nearby organs. The lower hook seen on the radiographs here had only a layer of stomach lining between the hook and the patient's heart.

If you accidentally hook a turtle while fishing, do not release that individual. Cut the line with plenty to spare (ideally leaving 2 feet or more of line hanging from the mouth) and contain the turtle in a box or bin and get them to your nearest turtle rehabilitator.

If your line gets caught in a river or lake, or if you are outdoors and see abandoned hooks, lures, or line, please make

every effort to retrieve it and dispose of it properly to prevent injuries to turtles, birds, and other wildlife.

This turtle is recovering well, but as it's after October 1st (the last day of the year we can legally release reptiles in Virginia), this patient will spend the winter with us at the Center. We hope for a full recovery with release next spring!



New Education Ambassadors

This year, we have been fortunate enough to welcome **three** new ambassadors to our Education Team.

Muffin, the Virginia Opossum



Muffin is an adult female Virginia opossum brought to BRWC in late spring of this year after being illegally kept as a pet. It is unclear how young she was initially when she was kept; however, we know she is about a year old. She is very personable and easy-going, and due to her age, habituation to humans, and docile temperament, she made for an excellent ambassador candidate. Even though Muffin is mild-mannered, she is able to engage with her natural instincts through species-appropriate enrichment activities. Every day that Muffin is with BRWC we are able to see more of her unique traits coming through. Like many opossums, she loves to sleep, but she can also be very playful and enjoys engaging in chase.

Aster, the Virginia Opossum



Aster is a young female Virginia opossum born in March 2024. She was unfortunately also kept illegally by a civilian. Aster was carried into their house by their dog as a small juvenile, and while kept inappropriately for an extended period of time, she became completely habituated to people. It is during that critical period of the first few months that juvenile opossums learn their natural behaviors from their moms. Due to her habituation and lack of survival skills, Aster became an ambassador. Aster has added some spunk to our ambassador team! She is very active to the extent that she has her own cat wheel. She is always bustling with activity day or night.

Bramble, the Great-horned Owl



Bramble is a male great-horned owl. He was found after falling out of his nest from over 150 feet up during a blizzard in March, and was then kept for a few weeks by the property owners before he was eventually taken to a raptor rehabilitation center near Chicago, IL. They tried unsuccessfully to renest Bramble, as well as introduce him to other great-horned owletes, but unfortunately, the damage was done and he had become imprinted on people. Through facility cooperation, BRWC was able to have Bramble transferred to our facility after he was deemed non-releasable. He is working on his fundamental training and is on his way to becoming a great ambassador!

Thank You, Vega! (2019-2024)

This past October we said goodbye to a dear friend and amazing ambassador for her species, Vega the turkey vulture. Vega was admitted to BRWC as a patient in January 2019. She was found down on the side of the road, and upon examination Vega had a right-wing fracture, head trauma, lead poisoning, and over 14 lead pellets throughout her body. Lead poisoning is, unfortunately, very common in many of the vultures and other scavenging species we see. Over 80% of the vultures, eagles, and Virginia opossums we treat have elevated blood lead levels from consuming meat that contains fragments of lead ammunition or fish containing lead sinkers. A pellet in her brain stem prevented her from blinking and ultimately, her right eye required removal. Vega was an excellent ambassador for not only other turkey vultures but all scavenging species impacted by lead. She was deemed non-releasable due to her injuries and became an education ambassador with one of our volunteers and permitted exhibitor, Heather Shank-Givens. While Vega was not an ambassador with BRWC, she has been a wonderful addition during many of our events. She was featured at Wildfest 2023, our Vulture Awareness Day program, and was the cover of *The Ridgeline* #56. She was a gentle bird and a great ambassador for her species. Vega reached over 6,000 people during her time as an ambassador. She will be missed greatly by every life she touched.



Fall Education Events

We hosted two great educational events in October: **Wildfest** and **Trick-or-Treat** with the Ambassadors! Wildfest is our largest annual educational event, where we hold programs with our ambassadors and invite other ecological-based organizations and vendors to table. This year, we had a whopping 20 vendors, and Wildfest had over 365 guests! It was also the first Wildfest in which Aster and Muffin participated. These two new opossums were also some of the featured ambassadors for our Halloween event.



This year's Trick-or-Treat with the ambassadors was scarily fun. Several ambassadors had stations set up throughout the Wildlife Walk that included a brief educational activity and a species-themed candy. Muffin and Aster for example hosted the opossum baby obstacle course; trick-or-treaters had "baby opossums" taped to them and had to maneuver a small obstacle course without losing them—something mother opossums must do 24/7 when they have joeys in the pouch! We had about 55 trick-or-treaters and hosted approximately 125 guests in total. A special thanks to everyone who attended these events!



ABOUT BRWC

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BRWC protects and conserves native wildlife by integrating veterinary medicine, rehabilitation, public education, professional training, and research.

BRWC is a 501(c)3 organization (EIN 54-1996991) and relies on private donations exclusively. Wildlife Centers may not receive payment to treat animals, nor do they receive state or federal funding. Contributions are tax-deductible.

BRWC is located on the Burwell-van Lennep Foundation (BVLf) property in Boyce, Virginia. The mission of the BVLf includes preserving the diverse ecology of this land, protecting wildlife, and environmental education. BVLf generously provides the land to BRWC at no cost.

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Make a Difference this Giving Season

Giving Tuesday is December 3rd!

As the year draws to a close, we're reminded of the incredible impact our community has had on the lives of countless wild animals in need. With your support, we've been able to rehabilitate and release thousands of patients, strengthen our educational outreach, and grow our conservation efforts.

This Giving Tuesday, on December 3rd, we invite you to join us in making an even bigger impact. A gift of any size goes a long way in helping us meet the increased demand for our services and prepare for the year ahead.

Every donation is a step toward a brighter, more sustainable future for our local wildlife. Thank you for being a vital part of our community—we couldn't do it without you!

