



Rockfish Wildlife Sanctuary

5450 Wheelers Cove Rd, Shipman, VA 22971



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SUMMER
NEWSLETTER
+ OUR 2024
IMPACT REPORT

How you can help the Sanctuary today:

DONATE MONEY

Most of our funding comes from animal lovers like you! Please visit our website to donate or scan the QR code below.

PLANNED GIVING

Leave a legacy for our wild world by joining the Merlin Society at RWS. More information inside or on our website.

DONATE SUPPLIES

- Plain paper towels/tissues
- Nitrile gloves, sizes M & L
- Pet waste bags
- 13gal trash bags
- Hand sanitizer
- Sponges
- Scrub brushes
- Dawn dish soap
- Old towels and blankets in good condition
- Metal or ceramic pet bowls (no rubber)
- Pet training pads
- Gift cards to: Chewy, Amazon, Food Lion

SHOP OUR RESALE BOOTH

Visit our booth at the Greene House Shops antique mall in Ruckersville, VA. 100% of proceeds go to our lifesaving work for wildlife. Visit our website for more information!

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA CAMPAIGN

If you're a Commonwealth employee, you can search for and pick RWS as your campaign charity of choice this year!

VISIT US ON THE WEB:

<https://rockfishwildlifesanctuary.org>

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Save the date!
NOVEMBER 14, 2025

Join us for a
**SANCTUARY
SOIRÉE**

*Pollak Vineyards
Greenwood, Virginia*

*Now seeking
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details!*





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A Semi-Annual Newsletter



Spring/Summer 2025

AND SO IT BEGAN (AND BEGINS)...

Exciting renovations are underway to expand the Sanctuary, though they've naturally come with plenty of (somewhat controlled) chaos.

May 2025 marked ten years since we moved into our “forever home” in Nelson County, if you can believe it! Becca’s Haven, named in memory of Becca Chaitin, was built to sustain Rockfish Wildlife Sanctuary’s lifesaving work for years to come. With two specialized animal care nurseries, a kitchen for animal meal prep, an educational lobby area, an office, and tons of storage downstairs, our founder Nathou even remarked on move-in day: “We’ll never be able to fill all this space!”

Yet here we are a decade later, with patients busting from our seams—figuratively, of course. We typically care for 300-400 *more* animals annually than we did in our earliest days at Becca’s Haven. With an increasing patient load and growing demands on our facility, we knew we needed to make some upgrades to power Becca’s Haven through the next decade and beyond. 2025 is the “Year of Construction” at RWS, with multiple major and exciting changes in progress.

Project #1: Room renovations

Our first project was renovating our nurseries and office, starting with our floors. Years of heavy daily washing had broken down the glue holding the original VCT tiles in place, leaving us with potholes in our nurseries! After much deliberation, we decided to replace them with a hospital-grade sheet flooring capable of withstanding lots of paw foot traffic and heavy duty cleaners.

After moving all of the furniture downstairs (and icing our sore muscles), we realized that our fresh floors needed fresh paint to match! A painting party ensued, thanks to a wonderful group of volunteers who wanted to paint our nurseries in memory of their late friend and longtime RWS supporter, Jennifer Whedbee Hunt.

Once our beautiful new floors were installed in mid-March, we reorganized all three rooms to better accommodate our workflow and ever-adapting wildlife care protocols. Both nurseries now have bigger patient tracking whiteboards, stainless steel sinks and drying tables, additional shelving, and mini quarantine tents—necessary only for this season, as project # 3 will address important biosecurity requirements.

While there is still a lot of “moving in” left to do, we’ve been putting our upgraded nurseries and office to work with 475+ wildlife patients already admitted this season. Our wildlife guests all seem to enjoy the accommodations, and our humans certainly enjoy the smooth new flooring that’s free of tripping hazards!



**OUR FLOORS
BEFORE
RENOVATING**



OUR RENOVATED NURSERY!

AND SO IT BEGAN (AND BEGINS)...

Project #2: Additional storage

With more patients comes more equipment, crates, food, and building supplies. To house everything, we needed a new shed—but first, we needed a place to put it. Three truckloads of dirt, one truckload of gravel, and a whole lot of sweat later, we finally had a level pad to tuck the shed into our hillside. Perfect timing, because we needed project #2 to finish before we could start project #3!

Project #3: Brand new animal care & quarantine rooms

With skyrocketing patient numbers and the threat of emerging zoonotic diseases like raccoon roundworm and Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), it had become clear to us in the past two years that we simply needed more animal care space.

To meet the growing need for RWS's services, we are converting our walkout basement into three animal care rooms, focusing on the species few other rehabbers in the state work with: raccoons and waterfowl. All of the supplies formerly stored in our basement have moved to our new shed, and we are all set to go! Work will be underway by the time you're reading this.

Wildlife rehabilitation isn't all about seeing cool critters, bottle-feeding orphaned mammals, and corralling baby birds.

Sometimes—okay, a *lot* of the time—we're digging, lugging, reorganizing, hosing down, suiting up, building things, breaking things, and reading the fine print on floor material hardness.

We are so grateful for our network of supporters who understand that these less glamorous updates are ultimately what make every single wildlife rescue and release possible. **Our work is only possible thanks to you. Thank you for being on our team!**



BABY RACCOONS AND YOUNG WATERFOWL LIKE THESE CURRENT PATIENTS WILL SOON HAVE NEW BIOSECURE ROOMS AT RWS!

SPRING AT THE SANCTUARY



We were thrilled to see that a pair of **Eastern Phoebes** decided to build their nest right above our front door! While we are caring for orphaned birds in our nursery, these two devoted parents have raised a clutch of 5 that have already successfully fledged. They're now incubating brood #2!



This spring, a local yearling **American Black Bear** decided we needed a few more repair projects. He ripped open a few patient enclosures and our shed, gorging himself on *eight* bags of specialized feed. We've battened down the hatches since, but we were impressed by his determination...and his appetite.



For the third year in a row, this beautiful little **Eastern Copperhead** snake has overwintered in our rock wall, emerging when spring's warmth beckons. We always enjoy spotting him, and he enjoys basking in the sun and keeping local prey populations under control. Thanks, Copperhead friend!

MEMORABLE PATIENTS (SO FAR)

Though a chilly winter led to a slower start to baby season, spring and summer have brought their usual hundreds of injured and orphaned animals. Each animal we care for is special, but there are always some patients that stick out to our team.



ONE MAN'S TRASH...

is another man's marsupial surprise! A rescuer was shocked to find an adult opossum in their trash can one morning this spring. The opossum had unfortunately crawled inside and passed away, but her babies were bright and active. Their kind rescuer was willing to dig through the trash and gather all of the babies up, and patients #25-140-146 arrived at RWS shortly thereafter. They were *just* below the age where they'd be ready to be on their own from mom. After one week of intensive care and extra attention (and meals) inside our nursery, the seven opossum joeys were ready to graduate to an outdoor enclosure. There, the squad improved their climbing and foraging skills thanks to daily enrichment, like foraging trays and fresh tree clippings. We are happy to share that after a pretty rough start to life, the opossums were successfully released in late May—far, far away from any trash cans.



ONE BIG, HOGGY FAMILY

Groundhog patient 25-196 arrived after being found as a lone orphan. Unfortunately, his mother had been hit and killed by a car, and her baby had traveled past the main road to the rescuer's gravel driveway where he was found the next day. Though we didn't have any groundhog patients at his exact same size, we decided to put him in with a group of slightly larger, older juvenile groundhogs and monitor them. Thankfully, the group took to 25-196 right away...a little too well, actually! The bigger groundhogs began defending him every time we tried to take him out of his nursery enclosure for bottle-feedings. His "adopted siblings" continued to stand in front of him and make warning barks at us whenever we were near. Eventually, this little groundhog caught up in size, and the group moved outdoors to one of our pre-release enclosures where they could dig and tunnel to their hearts' content. 25-196 was successfully released in early June, his protective siblings by his side.



AHOY, MATEY!

Our first orphaned songbird patients of the season came in a teeny package: Carolina Wrens! Though our first birds each year tend to be either wrens or House Finches, patients 25-089 through 25-091 arrived after an unusually nautical ordeal. Being cavity nesters, Carolina Wrens typically construct nests in tree cavities or nesting boxes. However, these adaptable critters also may nest in wheel wells, bike helmets, shoes, and...boats, apparently! Yep, these babies came in because their mom had built their nest inside a boat. When the boat's owners started using their vessel in early spring, they found the babies. They brought the nestlings to our friends at the Wildlife Center of Virginia, who then transferred them to RWS for longterm care. They were a minuscule 8 grams each on intake. Now, they are fully-feathered, fully-flighted, and fully released back to the wild!

