

The Ridgeline

NEWSLETTER OF THE BLUE RIDGE WILDLIFE CENTER

ISSUE 66 | SUMMER 2025



From baby to adult.



Raised in Rehab



Carrying the Mission Forward

Each spring, our work at Blue Ridge Wildlife Center shifts into high gear as “baby season” arrives—the busiest and most demanding time of year for our hospital.

Caring for these youngsters is a monumental effort. Baby raccoons, fox kits, and songbirds require around-the-clock feeding and constant monitoring. Specialized enclosures support them as they learn to walk, climb, fly, and hunt. Many spend months in our care before they are ready for release. The work is intensive, but the reward—watching a healthy young animal dash back into the woods or soar into the sky—is immeasurable.

Human activity is often what brings these patients to us, whether it’s a den disturbed during construction, a parent lost to trapping, or a young bird separated from its nest. Yet it is also human compassion and commitment that give them a second chance.

This is where our **Professional Training Program** is so essential. For every animal in care, there is a team of interns, externs, fellows, and volunteers learning the skills that will carry conservation forward. They are the ones bottle-feeding raccoons, preparing enrichment for fox kits, and assisting our veterinarians in surgery. In the process, they gain more than technical skills—they learn the deeper lesson of stewardship and what it means to be caretakers of our shared environment.



Our alumni now carry these lessons into veterinary practices, research institutions, wildlife agencies, and communities across the country. Their impact reaches far beyond our walls. Each baby season is not only about the animals we release, but also about the people we train to carry this mission forward.



Our summer interns and staff enjoy an after-work outing in White Post.

This spring also marked a major step forward in sustainability with the completion of our solar panel installation. With electricity costs steadily rising, the wildlife hospital expects to save hundreds of thousands of dollars over the life of the project—funds that will be redirected toward veterinary care, educational outreach, training, and research. BRWC worked closely with its installer, **Mountain View Solar**, to secure the 40% federal incentives currently available for clean energy projects. We were fortunate to receive strong support from **Rappahannock Electric Cooperative** staff, its Region II Board Chairman Chris Shipe, and State Delegate Delores Oates in securing all the necessary approvals before the end of our fiscal year to ensure eligibility for these incentives. Mountain View Solar completed the project with minimal disruption to our daily operations, while carefully designing the system to meet the hospital's unique needs and accommodate future expansion.

As we celebrate our 25th anniversary, I am especially mindful of the legacy we are building together. It is about ensuring that future generations inherit not only a thriving natural world, but also the knowledge, passion, and innovation to protect it.



Thank you for being part of this legacy!

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Annie Bradfield".

Annie Bradfield





Patient Corner

Cover Story: A Lucky Skunk

We see thousands of wild animals every year, many of which have their own unique stories and problems to overcome, but one patient stole the hearts of our volunteers, interns, and staff alike—"pink" skunk, sometimes referred to by the identifying color painted on his ears to track his medical care and progress.

Starting his rehab journey at just 100g, this baby came in all alone— orphaned after his mother was trapped and removed before his eyes were even opened. Unfortunately, this was a frequent reason for admission for our skunk babies this year.

Not only did this skunk survive the removal of his mother, but he had to survive a call to the health department as well after the finder pulled this baby out of his den with bare hands, potentially causing a rabies exposure. Thankfully, after the health department talked with us and the finder in more detail, they determined that the risk was low and this baby was officially cleared to be rehabilitated.

Unfortunately, shortly after this clearance, he started showing signs of congestion and some potential neurologic abnormalities, giving us concern for distemper, a common disease we see in skunks in our area. Fortunately, this small setback was not distemper and this baby powered through, eating like a champ, growing, and showing all issues resolving within a few days.

But then there was another issue: he was alone. He was half the size of our next youngest skunks. This was a major concern as babies raised without conspecifics (others of the same species) can easily become habituated.

As no rehabilitators had others of similar size, we decided that we would make our slightly larger skunks work. We started "day-camping" him with these

skunks, placing him in a smaller enclosure inside theirs. This allowed them to meet him in a safe way. On his first supervised unprotected venture, a few of the older skunks noticed him and they were not impressed with their new roommate. They began stomping and squealing at him and setting the whole group on alert. We promptly removed him, but were committed to getting him integrated. We split their enclosure in half, and placed "pink" with one of the more tolerant older skunks. The two snuggled together and had no issue. One by one we added each additional skunk from the group into this growing family, and finally, despite a few stomps, they all assimilated and accepted "pink" into their gang.

These skunks were successfully released together on a conservation easement near the Shenandoah River here in Clarke County, with "pink" right smack in the middle as they slowly ventured off.



After over six weeks in care, this patient was released with the rest of his group!



Baby Raccoons

This year we raised over two dozen baby raccoons, and our interns and volunteers really stepped up to the plate to help give them the best care possible. From eyes-closed, week-old babies to juveniles being prepared for release, our interns and volunteers assisted with these babies at every stage of life, watching them open their eyes, learn to walk and climb, eat on

their own, and interact with the copious amounts of enrichment offered, including a watermelon “tree” pictured below!

These babies take a LOT of time and effort—about five months in care! Despite the time, it’s always an honor to watch these intelligent and curious critters grow up into the competent, mischievous adults they were destined to be!



American Kestrel Nestling



This nestling American kestrel was brought to us after being discovered alone with two deceased siblings. On exam it was clear this youngster hadn’t been cared for recently, as the baby was quite thin, dehydrated, and quiet on intake.

Thankfully, our friends at Loudoun Valley Raptor Center were able to take this baby after our team did a thorough exam and monitored for a few days to ensure no further issues needed treatment. They were able to successfully foster this baby into another active nest box with the help of the Piedmont Environmental Council (who actively monitors kestrel nest boxes and knew where there would be additional nestlings of the same age) and Blandy Experimental Farm (where the nest boxes were located). It truly takes a village to give wildlife the best chance at a wild life, and this baby was successfully able to be integrated into an active family where they’d be raised by their own species!



Red Fox Kits



This year we raised four red fox kits at the center. Red Foxes take about six months to be self-sufficient so they are with us for a long stay!

In the wild, they spend their “teenage months” with their parents, practicing their hunting skills and being fed as needed while they learn. Even once they start getting more proficient, their parents



provide support if they don’t do well initially. Unfortunately, we cannot replicate this important learning timeframe in care, but we can provide support via a “soft release”—providing food for them while they get the opportunity to develop and perfect these hunting skills.

In order to do this, we had to purchase a brand-new soft release enclosure, as our



last one had been through so much wear and tear that it was no longer usable. This enclosure is modular and easy to assemble, disassemble, and re-assemble in various locations.

These foxes have now been released and we have been monitoring them on game camera footage for the past few weeks.

Pre-hatch Snapping Turtles



These pre-hatchling snapping turtles were found after they were disturbed in their nest, possibly by a predator who left a few behind, and finders scooped up these remaining individuals.

These eggs were opened prematurely, with very large yolk sacs remaining. It’s normal for turtles to hatch with a small portion of their yolk sac still attached, as it provides nutrition for the hatchlings until they begin eating on their own. However, with this much yolk remaining, the hatchlings could not move normally, leaving them vulnerable to other dangers.

Thankfully, with appropriate heat and humidity support in care, these hatchlings were able to develop fully and continue to reabsorb their yolk at an appropriate rate! There is no parental care provided to young turtles—they hatch and figure life out on their own—so they were able to be returned to a water source close to their nest site as soon as they were appropriately mobile.

We wish these youngsters a happy, wild life after a very rough welcome to the world!

Yearling American Beaver

This yearling American beaver came to us in early May after she was found lethargic and wandering on a property with no nearby water. Thankfully the finders recognized that her behavior was abnormal, and with the help of local rehabilitators and Loudoun County Animal Services, they were able to contain and transport this beaver to us for evaluation.

On exam, we found this beaver was skinny and suffering from two fractured ribs, pneumonia, and a collapsed lung, potentially from a dam collapse or other traumatic event. We immediately began treating with antibiotics and pain medications, and started syringe feeding to help provide nutritional support.

Within just a week, we started seeing improvements in this beaver's demeanor, going from depressed to quiet and then alert, and happily watched her begin to eat on her own!

After a few more weeks, this beaver showed they were medically stable and ready for long-term care. As a yearling, this beaver would need another year in



care before being old enough and ready to be released. We do not have caging appropriate for this sort of long-term care given the small number of beavers we admit each year.

Thankfully, the Southwest Virginia



Photo courtesy of Southwest Virginia Wildlife Center.

Wildlife Center has the facilities to care for beavers long-term, and had the space to take this juvenile. We're so thankful that we have so many amazing resources for our wildlife throughout the state!

Dragonfly Care



A Good Samaritan witnessed this common green darner collide with a vehicle, and was able to contain her and bring her to our hospital for care.

While we were not able to find any traumatic injuries on physical exam, she was quiet and not willing to fly. We believe this individual had depleted her energy supply after being rendered incapacitated by the car, as these insects must eat regularly to survive and can eat their weight in insects daily!

Like other native dragonflies, green darners are highly skilled aerial predators and feed primarily on flying insects. Though she was not in a position to catch flying insects at the time of admission, this patient was eating mealworms and beetles voraciously in care. After just a short time of monitoring and recovering with LOTS of nutritional support, this unique patient was successfully released!

Are you Interested in Volunteering?

Have you always wanted to work with wildlife, but don't have the time or resources to dedicate to becoming a home rehabilitator? Volunteers help us in many different areas around the Center—Rehabilitation, Construction, Transport, and so much more!

Volunteers only need to commit to a minimum of five hours a week, and we're accepting new volunteers for most days throughout the week!



Check out our application online and e-mail it to us.



Glue Trapped Patients

Glue traps are inhumane and indiscriminate, but to make matters worse, they never solve the problem long term. These traps are typically intended for insects and mice, but this year alone we have admitted dozens of non-target glue trap victims including snakes, songbirds, raptors, and a raccoon. Please do not remove these animals prior to admission and never intentionally put oil on wildlife! If you find a trapped animal, call a rehabilitator so that we can provide advice on how to contain the animal while leaving them on the trap and get that animal into care promptly. The survival rate for these patients is significantly higher when patients come in on the trap and are removed under sedation by trained staff.

Prevent this issue by never using glue traps and by contacting your representatives to voice your support for legislation that bans their sale, such as The Glue Trap Prohibition Act.



Eastern Bluebirds.



Central Ratsnake.



American Kestrel.

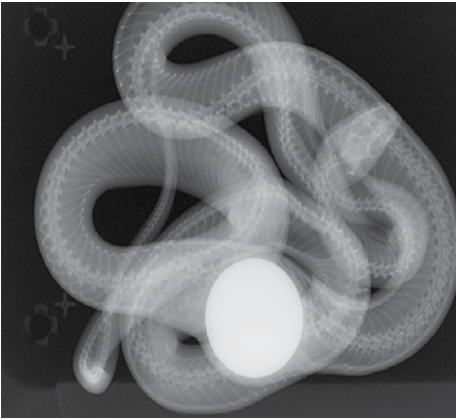


American Robins.



These two Carolina Wrens were caught on traps intended for insects, specifically spotted lantern flies.

Snake Foreign Body Surgeries



We've admitted many Central Ratsnakes this summer that required foreign body removal surgery after ingesting artificial eggs found in chicken coops. Fake eggs are sometimes used to show hens where in the coop to lay or to teach hens not to peck at and break their eggs. Unfortunately, if you fail to secure your chicken coop, snakes can easily get inside and will eat anything that looks like an egg. If that egg is fake, it can be fatal to the snake as these eggs cannot be digested.

If you have chickens, please secure your coop. Half-inch wire mesh works well to keep larger snakes out, but it must go around the entire cage and it must be checked regularly for any necessary maintenance. As an additional safeguard, fake eggs themselves should be secured to the floor of the coop or to two or more other eggs so that a hungry snake is not able to ingest them. If you find a snake that has ingested a fake egg, please get that snake into care as quickly as possible.



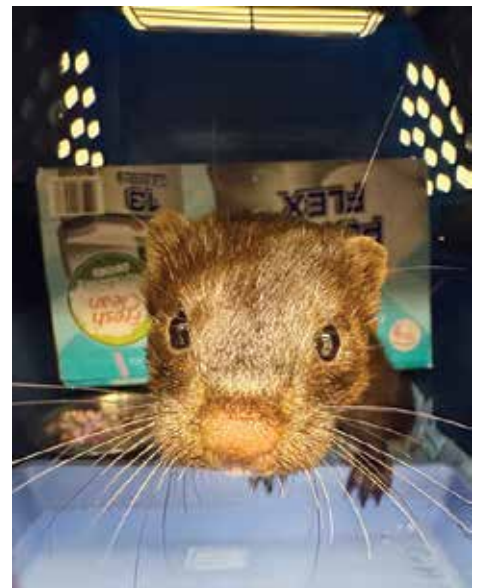
American Mink

This adult American Mink was brought to us after they were found down and barely responsive near a roadway, likely after being hit by a car. Thankfully the finder was able to safely contain this animal and transport to us for treatment.

Only a brief exam could be performed on intake given the mink's critical condition and severe respiratory distress. Our vet team provided pain medications, fluids, and a comfy enclosure with supplemental oxygen overnight to stabilize this patient.

Thankfully, the next morning, this individual had improved greatly and we were able to anesthetize and do a full exam including radiographs. Fortunately there were no broken bones, but this patient had blood in the lungs, making breathing difficult.

With pain medications and oxygen support, this mink continued to improve, slowly getting more alert and more feisty and eating on their own. Eventually, the



patient was upgraded to a larger enclosure outside of oxygen. Our staff was delighted to see this elusive weasel improve, and just a few short days later, this mink was released back at the found location!

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.

Summer Rehab Interns

Every summer, we accept interns to help us with the care of the high volume of animals we take in each season, as well as to teach them about wildlife rehabilitation, animal care, natural history, and so much more! Thank you to this summer's interns for all their hard work—we wish you the best in your future endeavors!



Our LVT Chris gives a lecture to some of our summer rehab interns.



Interns Brandon and Josclynn help our LVT, Chris, give fluids to a red fox with mange.



Intern Zach helps our Associate Veterinarian Dr. Emily with a Red-tailed Hawk.



Our rehab intern Karina bottle feeds one of our many infant raccoon patients.



Marisa, a rehab intern, handling one of our Virginia opossum patients.



Anna, a second-year intern, gives a northern watersnake an injectable medication while Morgan, a summer intern, restrains.



Rehab intern Susie helps hold a woodland box turtle during a wound flush.



Callie and Marisa, two rehab interns, help prepare diets for outdoor patients.



Aubrey, a rehab intern, restrains a Great Horned Owl for treatment.



Rehab intern Abbey restrains a Common Raven patient in our outdoor flight enclosure.



Rehab intern Ana holding one of our infant raccoon patients before feeding.



Mallory, one of our summer interns, helps restrain a central ratsnake for garden mesh removal.

BRWC Wildlife Rehabilitation Summer Internship Program

Summer internships are available to students and others interested in wildlife rehabilitation. Interns will develop skills in wildlife identification, disease and toxin recognition, species-specific handling techniques, biosecurity, and animal husbandry. Interns may also have the opportunity to assist a wildlife veterinarian. The internship is especially valuable during the summer months when the center receives 60% of its annual patients.

Duration: 12 weeks (May-August). Applications for 2026 will open January 2026 and close March 1, 2026. Visit blueridgewildlifctr.org for more details.

Summer Vet Student Externs

We trained six amazing veterinary students this summer! There is very little training in wildlife and conservation medicine in most veterinary schools, so having opportunities at teaching hospitals like ours are essential for training the next generation of wildlife professionals. We expect great things from these future doctors!



Juselyn—who was a rehabilitation intern with us in 2017—examines a great blue heron patient with one of our rehabilitation interns.

BRWC Veterinary Extern Program

Offered to licensed veterinarians, veterinary technicians, and qualified veterinary and vet tech students, this externship provides intensive training in wildlife and conservation medicine. Externs will gain competencies in anatomy, wildlife diseases, triage, anesthesia, surgery, and more.

Externships are available year-round for students in their clinical year or graduate veterinarians, with summer options for 1st-year students.

Duration: 2+ week rotations.

Now accepting applications.

Visit blueridgewildlifctr.org for more details.



Nora prepares a central ratsnake for the surgical removal of a ceramic egg foreign body.



Maya assists Dr. Emily with a fishing lure removal from a raccoon patient.



Maya and Makayla assist Dr. Jen with an abdominal ultrasound of a pregnant squirrel patient.

BRWC Fellows

This year we welcomed our first-ever year-long fellows! Our veterinary fellow, **Dr. Sydney Lewis**, volunteered with us in the past and joined us in July after completing a year-long wildlife medicine internship at the Tufts Wildlife Clinic in Massachusetts. Rehabilitation fellow **Sydnie Matda** joined us this winter after completing an internship with our friends at Rockfish Wildlife Sanctuary in Shipman, VA and a year-long position at the Glen Raptor Center in Ohio. Education fellow **Rena Klapp** started as a rehabilitation and education volunteer at the center and interned with our front desk in 2024 before accepting the education fellowship.



Dr. Sydney examines a red-shouldered hawk patient restrained by our rehabilitation fellow, Sydnie.



Sydnie working with one of our red-tailed hawk patients.



Rena works with Beetle, our fish crow ambassador.



Dr. Sydney and our licensed veterinary technician, Chris, work together to bathe a sedated red fox patient with sarcoptic mange.

BRWC Fellowships

Wildlife Rehabilitation Fellow

The Wildlife Rehabilitation Fellow role is ideal for experienced rehabilitators who have completed at least one internship and are ready to take on more responsibility. This fellow will focus on patient care and assist in training and supervising our rehabilitation volunteers and summer interns.

Duration: January - December

Pay: \$800/bi-weekly (before taxes)

Housing: As part of this role, you are required to stay in the provided housing and act as a house manager.

Benefits: Paid time off and 100% of health insurance premium covered (if you enroll in our group plan).

Wildlife Education Fellow

This position focuses on daily husbandry tasks of our wildlife ambassador animals (feeding, enclosure maintenance, health monitoring, and enrichment) and will assist with positive reinforcement training to support handling for educational programs.

Duration: January - December

Pay: \$800/bi-weekly (before taxes)

Housing: As part of this role, you are required to stay in the provided housing and act as a house manager.

Benefits: Paid time off and 100% of health insurance premium covered (if you enroll in our group plan).

Veterinary Intern

The Veterinary Intern position is designed for DVM graduates placed by their universities to complete an annual rotation at a hospital. This role provides a comprehensive experience in wildlife medicine. **Duration:** July - June
Application opens in November.

One Health Updates

We use a One Health approach in all of the research we do at the Center to ensure optimal health outcomes from humans, wildlife, domestic animals, and the environment.

This past spring we co-authored a paper describing the role of eastern cottontails in the life cycles of multiple tick borne diseases—Lyme disease, Anaplasmosis, and Powassan virus—in our area.

The results describe the prevalence of these diseases and highlight the eastern cottontail's role in hosting infected ticks. Studies like this are essential to understanding the prevalence of these diseases

in our area and determining how they spread. This increases awareness amongst veterinary and medical professionals meaning that they now know about these diseases and can run the most appropriate diagnostics sooner, resulting in you and/or your pet getting a prompt diagnosis and treatment.

You can find the full article, "Eastern cottontails (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) as hosts for ticks infected with *Borrelia burgdorferi*, *Anaplasma phagocytophilum*, and Powassan virus in Virginia, USA", in the *Journal of Medical Entomology's* (published May 2025).



This Eastern cottontail was treated for a traumatic injury, but also contributed samples for research prior to release. Data collected at our facility is used in research that guides decisions for medical and veterinary professionals.



This cottontail was successfully released after two weeks in care!

West Nile Virus

2025 was one of the harshest West Nile Virus years we've had to date at the Center! This mosquito-borne virus has a high mortality rate in corvids and many raptor species, but is also a significant threat to horses and humans.

This summer (our peak mosquito season), we saw 3-4 patients per day with signs of West Nile Virus— more than we have seen in any previous season at our facility. These patients were all admitted with neurological signs including balance issues, lethargy, tremors, and even seizures in some cases. We see increased case numbers in years where virus prevalence is high. If there is a high prevalence in wildlife, the risk is also higher for humans and pets in that area.

For the past few years, we have been fortunate to work with The Eastwood Lab at Virginia Tech to explore the prevalence



These two crows (American crow, left; Fish crow, right) were admitted with signs of WNV.

of this virus in our local populations. Though not yet published, “Exposures of Raptors to Flaviviruses in Virginia, USA”, was presented this summer by Dr. Eastwood herself at Wildlife Disease Association’s Global Voice conference.

Samples collected at our wildlife hospital, in addition to samples collected by our friends at Wildlife Center of Virginia were used to determine the exposure our local raptors and corvids have had to West Nile Virus and St. Louis Encephalitis Virus—two flaviviruses in our area that are important to wildlife AND human health. With nearly 400 raptors sampled, prevalence rates were found to be over 28%.

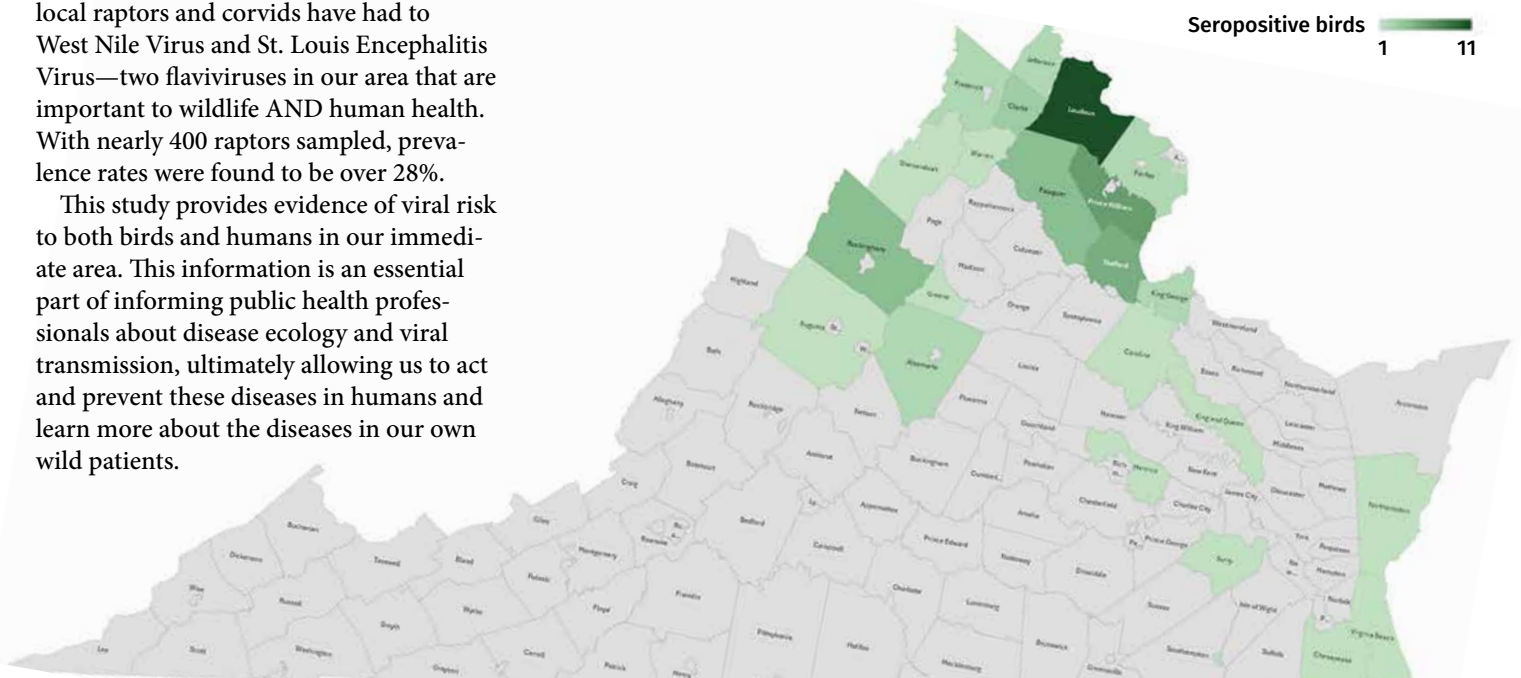
This study provides evidence of viral risk to both birds and humans in our immediate area. This information is an essential part of informing public health professionals about disease ecology and viral transmission, ultimately allowing us to act and prevent these diseases in humans and learn more about the diseases in our own wild patients.

This work is just one way that wildlife hospitals like ours contribute to protecting you, your pets, and our shared planet everyday!



Red-tailed hawk with WNV.

West Nile Virus (WNV)



This map shows the number of birds per county that tested positive for WNV antibodies.



A Wild Summer for BRWC's Education Department

This summer marked an exciting chapter for the education team at BRWC, with a wide range of programs both on- and off-site, and the launch of a new take on summer camp: **Wildlife Camp Days**. These one-day sessions invited young learners to dive deep into themed topics through hands-on activities, animal ambassador encounters, and outdoor exploration. We kicked off with **Radical Reptiles**, where campers explored Virginia's native herptiles through interactive games, creative shelter-building challenges, and searches for wild amphibians and reptiles. Next came **Magnificent Mammals**, focused on the unique adaptations of mammals. Campers crafted fox headbands, navigated an obstacle course as opossum moms, and created enrichment toys for our mammal ambassadors. We wrapped up with **Riveting Raptors**, which included birdwatching, meeting raptor ambassadors, and a memorable slime-

based activity that taught why vultures have unfeathered heads.

This season also saw our first-ever **Adult Camp Day**, which sold out in just 48 hours. Participants chose a session on how to become a licensed wildlife rehabilitator, led by Sr. Wildlife Education Specialist, Alysa Everly, who offered an honest and inspiring look into the field. The day also included birdwatching, craft-

ing, and even the popular vulture slime activity. From campers young to grown, this summer has been filled with exploration, discovery, and meaningful connections with wildlife. We're deeply grateful to our education staff, volunteers, and community for helping make Wildlife Camp Days such a success—and we're already looking forward to next year.

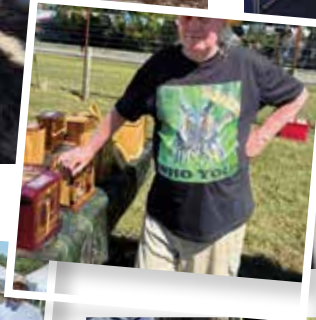




WildFest 2025

WildFest returned this year with a strong turnout and even stronger community spirit. Hosted in partnership with Seven Bends Nursery, the event welcomed guests of all ages to enjoy a day focused on wildlife, conservation, and local connection. Visitors explored educational booths from conservation organizations, browsed nature-themed art and handmade goods, and enjoyed food from a local truck while taking in the beautiful outdoor setting.

One of the day's highlights was the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center's live animal presentations, offering an up-close look at native species and the important work of wildlife rehabilitation. WildFest is our annual way of inviting the community to learn, connect, and celebrate the natural world—because building awareness and appreciation is the first step toward protecting it.





Bald Eagle released back at the found location in Leesburg, VA after two months in care due to fishing line entanglement injuries.

ABOUT BRWC

Address: 106 Island Farm Lane, Boyce, Virginia 22620
Wildlife Hotline: (540) 837-9000
E-mail: info@blueridgewildlifectr.org
Web: blueridgewildlifectr.org

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 (BVLV) property in Boyce, Virginia. The mission of the BVLV includes preserving the diverse ecology of this land, protecting wildlife, and environmental education. BVLV generously provides the land to BRWC at no cost.

THE RIDGELINE

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