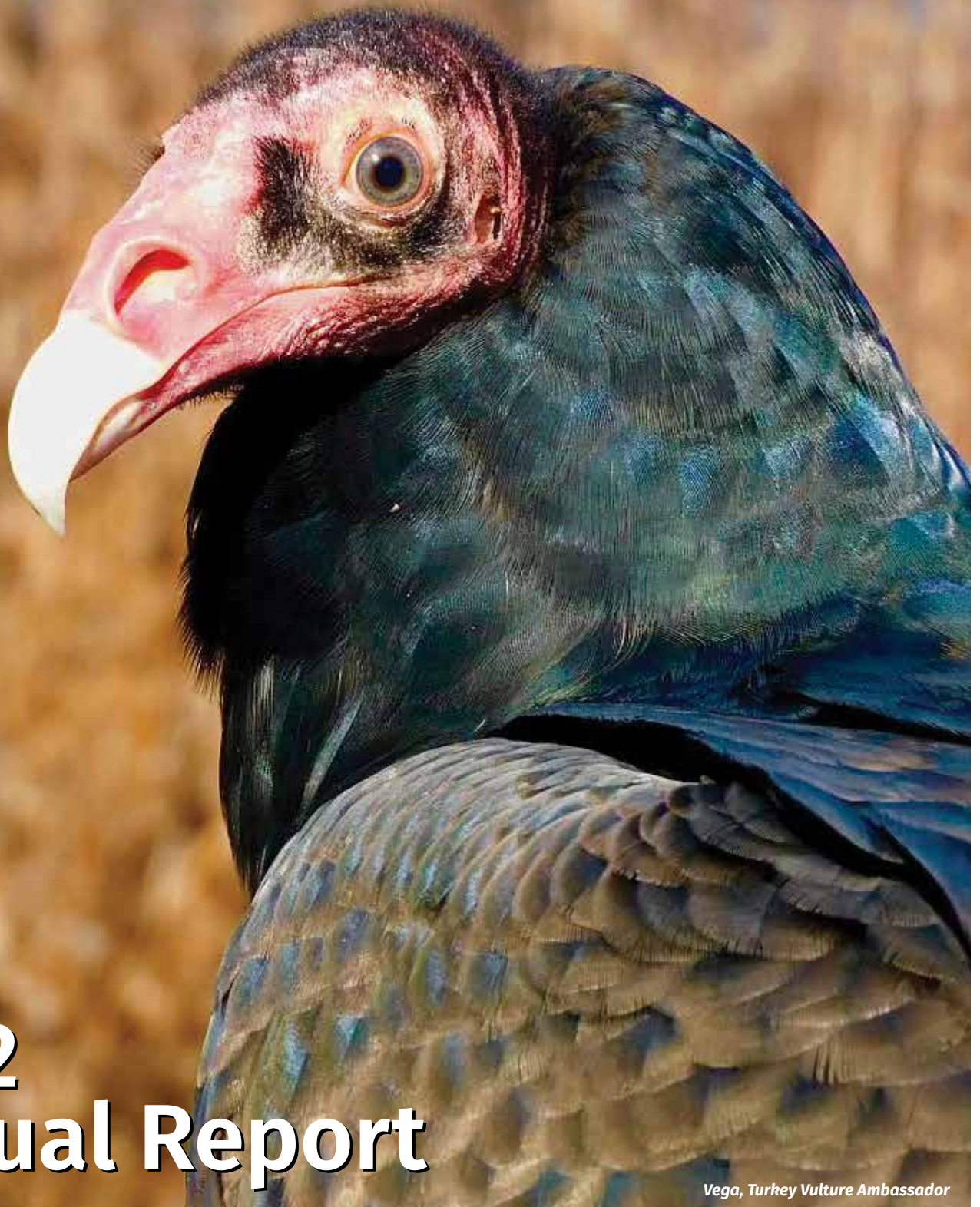


# The Ridgeline

NEWSLETTER OF THE BLUE RIDGE WILDLIFE CENTER

ISSUE 56 | WINTER 2023



**2022  
Annual Report**

*Vega, Turkey Vulture Ambassador*

## Protecting Human and Animal Health



2022 was a perfect example of why we do the work that we do. Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) was first found in Virginia in January of last year and ravaged many commercial poultry farms—a big reason why eggs are so expensive right now—and affected populations of wild birds across the county. HPAI, like COVID, is a zoonotic disease, meaning it can spread between animals and humans.

Our mission at Blue Ridge Wildlife Center is completely centered around the concept of **One Health**, that the health of our environment, wildlife, and humans are all connected. Often, threats to the health and safety of our local communities are first discovered through the patients that come into our hospital. For example, last year we admitted several raccoons that displayed rabid symptoms and were all found within a couple miles of each other. We used that data to alert local health departments and law enforcement agencies so they could make informed decisions on how to protect the community.

Vega, our cover model, was chosen for this issue because of the immense benefit that her species has on public health. Vultures clean up carcasses left in the environment and their powerful stomach acid destroys zoonotic pathogens like rabies, botulism, and anthrax. In doing so, vultures not only save billions of dollars in human health costs each year but are crucial for maintaining a healthy ecosystem for all!

So, while each individual patient that comes through our doors may seem insignificant, their life and journey are used to educate the public, train the next generation on wildlife medicine, rehabilitation, and education, conduct public health research, and ultimately make our community a better place for everyone.

As you'll discover in this issue of The Ridgeline, we don't do this alone. It takes people like YOU who believe in our mission and donate your time, energy, and funds in support. Thank you for believing in us and for everything you do for our native wildlife!

With gratitude,

Annie Bradfield

### ABOUT BRWC

Blue Ridge Wildlife Center is a 501(c)3 organization caring for native wildlife by integrating veterinary medicine, rehabilitation, education, and research.

BRWC is located in Boyce, Virginia on the Burwell van-Lennep Foundation's property on Island Farm Lane.

The Center relies on private donations exclusively. Contributions are tax-deductible.



### The Ridgeline

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### FOLLOW US



Newsletter designed by Dara Bailey Design.



# One Health Research

**One Health**, or working in a framework that integrates human, animal, and environmental health, is at the heart of what we do in our wildlife hospital. We were involved in **11** research projects at the Center in 2022, many of which are ongoing.

## Cryptosporidiosis

In 2022, "*Cryptosporidium parvum* outbreak associated with Raccoon at a Wildlife Facility—Virginia, May-June 2019" was published in *Zoonoses and Public Health*.

*C. parvum* is common across many species. Our outbreak was the first reported in raccoons that spread to humans. Since then, we have heard from two other rehabilitation facilities that have diagnosed cryptosporidiosis in staff and/or volunteers after exposure to positive raccoons. Documenting and publishing cases like this is so important as it gives those of us in this field differentials to consider and a chance to update our protocols before we suffer a similar fate.



Scan QR code  
for access to  
the full article.

We are not just here to treat sick and injured wildlife. Though the individual animals may benefit from care, wild populations, our local community, and humans as a species benefit immensely from the data we gather from these patients.

## Heartland, Bourbon, and Powassan Viruses

We work closely with the entomology department at Virginia Tech on a variety of disease prevalence studies to learn more about various ticks in our area, the hosts they prefer, and the prevalence of the diseases they carry. One of the current studies is determining the prevalence of Heartland, Bourbon, and Powassan viruses in our wild mammals. So far, we have found exposure to one or more of these viruses in **477** individuals of **38** species in **39** Virginia counties! White-tailed Deer, Northern Raccoons, and Red Foxes are three of the species showing relatively high rates of exposure.



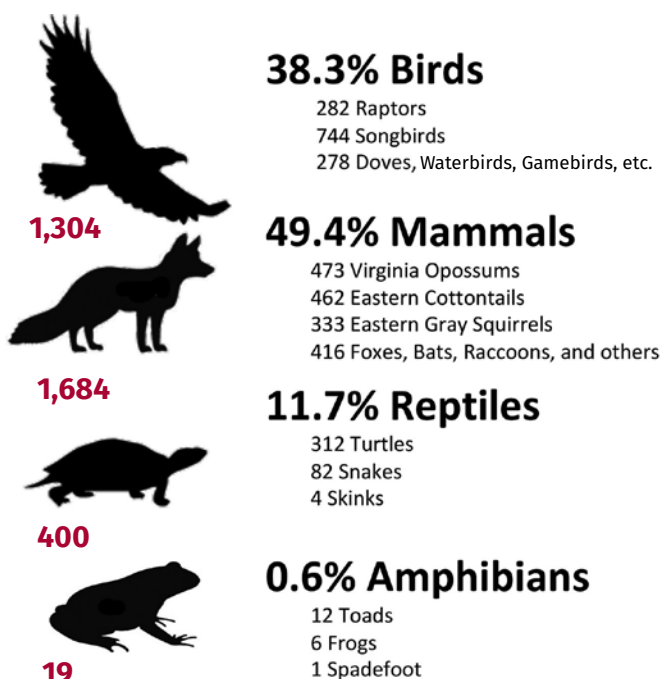
Black-legged ticks (left) are the vector for Powassan Virus while Heartland and Bourbon viruses are primarily transmitted by the Lone Star Tick (right). These are two of the most common species of tick found on our patients.



# Hospital Stats

We treated **3,406** patients in 2022! This included **160** species, **9** of which we saw for the first time at our facility! Patients that did not require euthanasia in the first 24 hours due to non-native status or severe injury had a survival rate of **72%**.

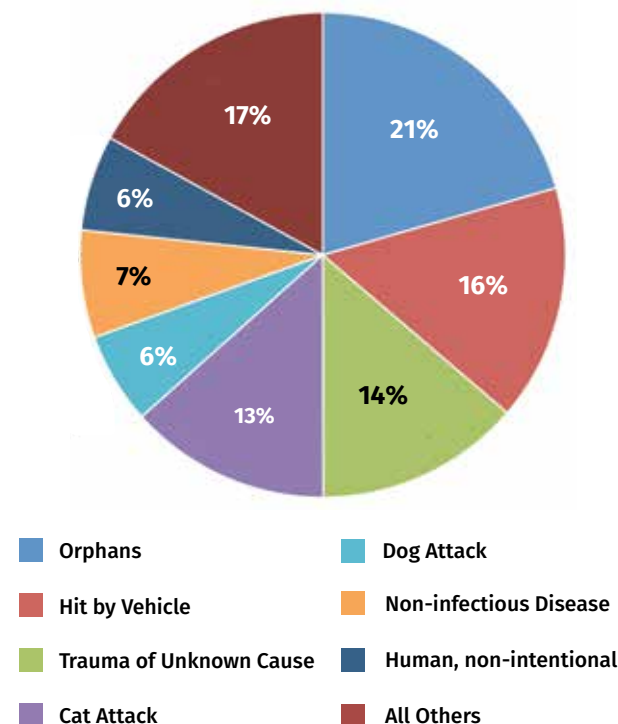
## PATIENT BREAKDOWN



## PATIENTS BY COUNTY

Loudoun	782	Henrico	6	Dinwiddie	1
Frederick	582	Putnam	5	Fredericksburg	1
Clarke	355	Hampshire	4	Grant	1
Fauquier	298	Morgan	4	Greene	1
Prince William	247	Goochland	3	Hanover	1
Warren	234	Richmond	3	King William	1
Shenandoah	187	Alexandria	2	Louisa	1
Fairfax	151	Clinton	2	Mineral	1
Stafford	148	Hardy	2	Montgomery	1
Jefferson	78	Madison	2	New Kent	1
Culpeper	68	Ann Arundel	1	Norfolk	1
Page	56	Caroline	1	Suffolk	1
Berkeley	50	Charlotte	1	Westmoreland	1
Rappahannock	39			Williamsburg	1
Spotsylvania	28			York	1
Orange	9				
Augusta	8				
Rockingham	8				
Washington	8				
Chesterfield	7				
King George	7				
Arlington	6				

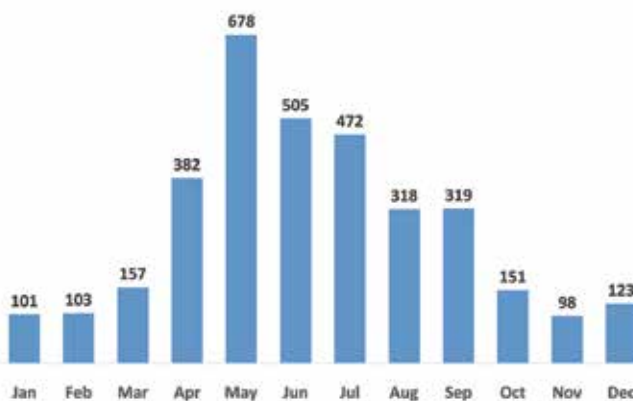
## CAUSES FOR ADMISSION



**Trauma of Unknown Cause** indicates that there is trauma, but the event that caused trauma was not witnessed. The vast majority of these cases are likely to be hit by vehicle or cat-attacked cases. **Human, non-intentional** is the cause we list if the issue was caused by humans who were not intentionally trying to harm the animal. This includes things like lawnmower injuries, garden netting injuries, and glue trap victims.

**Non-infectious disease** includes things such as emaciation, aspiration pneumonia (a common finding when a baby has been fed by the finder prior to admission), aural abscesses in turtles, congenital diseases, cancerous processes, etc.

## 2022 MONTHLY PATIENT INTAKES





# Highlights

Of the **160** unique species we admitted, **9** were seen for the first time in 2022!



This Eastern Hognose Snake was treated for injuries related to a vehicle collision.



This Magnolia Warbler collided with a window during migration.



This Yellow-throated Vireo came to the Center after a window strike.

We hired **3** new full-time staff members, our Associate Veterinarian, **Dr. Emily Hsieh**, Rehabilitation Associate, **Sarah Midolo**, and Front Desk Coordinator, **Alysa Everly**!



Dr. Emily Hsieh (left).



Alysa Everly.



Sarah Midolo.

## Free-roaming Cats Report

Fourteen members of a Virginia General Assembly workgroup, appointed in 2021 to study problems associated with free-roaming cats, have just released a comprehensive report. This report details the impact of cats on wildlife and public health as well as recommendations for reducing free-roaming cat populations in our state.

We are honored to have been working with this group from 2021-2023, along with other experts in wildlife conservation, veterinary medicine, public health and safety, agriculture, animal welfare, and animal law.

This report details our science-based findings regarding the impacts of free-roaming cats as well as recommended solutions that would greatly benefit cats, wildlife, and public health. We hope that those of you interested in this topic, as well as how we as humans can do better by cats and wildlife, will take the time to read the full report.

There is no single solution to the free-roaming cat issue, though nearly everyone agrees that the population of free-roaming cats must decrease. Reducing populations must include public education, support of public shelters, and humane treatment of cats.

Our staff is one of cat lovers, wildlife lovers, and supporters of One Health—all things that make us incredibly passionate about this topic.

By working across disciplines and using a variety of approaches together, we hope to create a better future for cats, wildlife, and humans.



Scan QR code for access to the full report.

# Rehab + Corner

## Sharp-shinned Hawks

In December alone, we took in more Sharp-shinned Hawks than we had admitted in any previous year. Overall in 2022, we saw eight sharp-shinned Hawks, five of which came in during the last month of the year. The majority of these birds came to us after striking a window, a common occurrence for these birds as they hunt and pursue songbirds in backyards near homes!



## Red Fox

This Red Fox was a challenging case for our staff. She initially came to us after being trapped at a local business, where she was eating from their dumpster, entering the kitchen in search of food, and approaching customers who were hand-feeding her. Due to concern for her health as well as public safety, she was brought in for evaluation. She arrived severely emaciated, dehydrated, and suffering from sarcoptic mange and severe anemia. Radiographs showed old rib fractures indicating previous trauma, which may have left her vulnerable, ill, and desperate enough to resort to scavenging near



humans. She required intensive supportive care including a blood transfusion, IV fluid therapy, treatment for mange, and nutritional support. As she recovered, her demeanor improved drastically—she was eating well, interacting with enrichment, gaining weight, and was showing appropriate fear towards people. Our staff was hopeful for her release, but unfortunately two months after intake she was found deceased during a routine morning evaluation. Necropsy revealed sepsis and organ failure, which was not apparent from her clinical appearance.



This year we  
once again  
broke our  
previous year's  
intake record,  
taking in  
**3,406** patients!



## American Crow



This young crow has had quite the ordeal getting into rehabilitative care! According to the finder, this bird was found not flying with pox, an avian virus that causes lesions on featherless areas. They gave the bird food and unknown medications and kept the crow in a small metal bird cage—for three months. The finder finally relinquished this bird when they had to travel out of town for the holidays.

Although no pox lesions were found on intake, this bird was suffering from overall poor feather quality, multiple broken/pulled feathers, and limited range of motion in both wings. We suspect these issues were caused by a combination of poor nutrition and inappropriate housing for an extended period of time.

In order to legally rehabilitate wildlife in Virginia, you must have a permit from the state. For birds, you must also obtain a federal permit. In order to ethically rehabilitate wildlife, you must have training, knowledge, experience, a rehabilitation network, continuing education, proper enclosures, proper diets, a veterinarian, etc. This bird has been in care since late 2022 and has a guarded prognosis for release. They're currently on a proper diet to help encourage healthy feather regrowth and are in an enclosure large enough for them to stretch their wings. We have been performing regular physical therapy on this patient to see if proper range of motion can be restored to the wings and progress has been made, but it is still not adequate for release at this time.



These photos show the severe feather damage sustained over months of illegal care prior to admission at the Center.

As we've mentioned before, good intentions are often not enough. These animals deserve professional, knowledgeable, and legal care so that they may have the best chance at a wild life.

Virginia is lucky in that we have a great



network of wildlife rehabilitators throughout the state. If you find a wild animal in need, call your local rehabilitators, leave multiple voicemails, and understand that the best way for you to save an animal is to get them the professional, legal care it needs!

## Woodland Box Turtle



When this Woodland Box Turtle was admitted in October, she was missing most of her left carapace and the associated wound was suspected to be multiple weeks old. It was dirty, maggot-filled, and had a puncture into the coelomic cavity with bacteria and yeast found inside the coelom. Despite the horrific trauma and infection, this girl has consistently been bright and active since intake! Her first few weeks in care consisted of daily bandage changes, antibiotic therapy (systemic, topical, and nebulized), antifungal treatment, and lots of pain medications. By December, her infection was completely resolved

and bandages have all been permanently removed. She will stay with us over the winter as the exposed tissue continues to heal, becoming effectively as hard as the bone of the shell. While some patients spend just a few days or weeks in care, turtles often spend 8+ months. This is partially due to the overwintering regulations that prohibit release between October 1st and May 1st and partially due to the slow healing times associated with reptile fractures. We are glad this turtle is healing well, eating well, and charming our staff with her dazzling personality! We hope that she will be ready for release this coming spring/summer.



After the first two months of treatment, the infection was fully resolved and medications could be stopped as the wounded area hardened over.

# Training the Next Generation

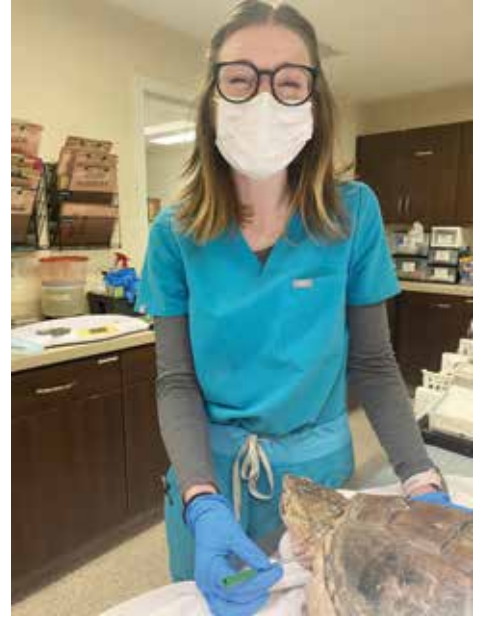
In 2022, we took on **12** rehabilitation interns, **2** education interns, and **8** veterinary and vet technician externs! They worked over **8,000** hours during their time with us, most of which were during our busy baby season, from April to August.

**Interns** are often students or individuals looking to gain more in-depth knowledge and experience over a shorter time-frame. The education department took on two full-time summer interns this year, Briane Alzamora and Audrie Wieber. Both interns were immersed in all aspects of the department, learning animal husbandry, enrichment and training, as well as natural history and animal handling to help deliver education programs.

Volunteers are often with us for 4-10 hours once a week for an extended period of time, whereas interns are with us from just a few weeks to just a few months, working 2-4 days each week, 8-10 hours each day. Two of our interns, Kayla and Kristin, have stayed on with us as volunteers after their internships were complete.



Dr. Lynn came to us to learn more about wildlife medicine. He is already a veterinarian, but we have graduated vets complete externships too when time allows!



Kenna Frierson completed her second veterinary externship with us in 2022! She will be graduating this upcoming spring!



Veterinary student Jill Wallace of the University of Pennsylvania College of Veterinary Medicine assists Dr. Emily with a laceration repair on a Virginia Opossum.





Staff, students, and volunteers often work together to get a variety of tasks done, such as picking out bee larvae to feed to our nestling songbirds!



Haleigh and Elizabeth are veterinary students at Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine and Western College of Veterinary Medicine. They completed their externships with us at the same time!



Grace Kline, from Iowa State's College of Veterinary Medicine, shows proper snapping turtle restraint.



Julia Utting, from Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine, performs a skin graft on an Eastern ratsnake.



Rehabilitation Intern Saylor Hart tube feeds one of our infant cottontail patients.



Audrie Wieber, Education Intern, with campers.



Brianne Alzamora, Education Intern with Jasper, the Red Fox.

**More information about internships, externships, and volunteering can be found on our website under the "Get Involved" tab!**



# Volunteers

In 2022, we had **47** volunteers working with us, some brand new and some who have been with us **5+** years! Volunteers contributed to over **7,000** hours, both in the hospital but also in our education department and with special projects.

As a nonprofit organization, volunteers are the backbone of much of the day-to-day work that happens at the Center. They feed baby birds every 15-30 minutes, clean enclosures to ready them for the next patient, fold endless piles of towels and blankets, and even help with releases when patients are ready.



Volunteer, Caitlin Cooke.



Volunteer, Katie LaVellele.



Volunteer, Kristi Titus.



Volunteer, Dr. Iara Lacher.



Education Volunteer, Loretta Michaels.





In partnership with the nonprofit, Sustainability Matters, we created a woodland garden in the Wildlife Walk. Volunteers from both organizations spent the day removing invasives, planting native plants, and learning about how the garden will benefit native wildlife!

**BRWC** was grateful to be included in this year's **United Way Day of Caring**. Separate crews from Continental Services and Trex donated their whole day to tackling some big projects at the Center. Unusable enclosures were demolished, non-func-

tional items were taken to the trash, our outdoor storage area reorganized, and the Wildlife Walk area was cleared of invasive plants and re-mulched. Projects that may have taken weeks to months for the staff here to accomplish were finished in hours!



## 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—Docenting, Rehabilitation, Construction, Administrative, 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 into us—we can't wait to hear from you!

[blueridgewildlifectr.org](http://blueridgewildlifectr.org)





# Education at BRWC



BRWC provides a variety of education programs to encourage the public to learn about and help our wild neighbors. In 2022 we held **81** programs with almost **4,000** attendees!

## Wildlife Discovery Camp

Campers had a blast during our 13th annual Wildlife Discovery Camp! We had **99** campers join us over the summer and along with walks in the woods and wading in the pond, campers learned about Virginia reptiles and amphibians, forest succession and trees, DNA and genetics, and MORE!





## WildFest

BRWC was happy to run another successful WildFest event this fall at the Clarke County Ruritan Fairgrounds. We were again joined by other environmental organizations who helped us in teaching the community about the natural world around us! We also featured appearances by our Ambassadors, games, crafts, and fun activities for the whole family.



## Wildlife Lecture Series

We were very excited to have offered a new Wildlife Lecture Series at our Center in the Ronald M. Bradley Learning Center this past Fall! In addition to our staff, we had visiting experts in a variety of related fields, including lectures on planting native plants, firefly conservation, and management of free-roaming cats. We plan to make many of these lectures available online early in the year!



Dr. Jen's presentation, "Lead Poisoning in Wildlife."



Dr. Emily presenting "From Intake to Release", describing the experience of our patients in the hospital.



Grant Sizemore of the American Bird Conservancy presenting on the impacts free-roaming cats have on birds.



Leslie Sturges of the Bat Conservancy of Virginia teaches us about the threats bats in our area are facing and how we can help.

# Wildlife Ambassadors

## Ensuring Optimal Care



After discovering an arrhythmia on a routine wellness check, Mocha was examined by the cardiology specialists at CVCA Cardiac Care for Pets so that we could better evaluate her heart and create a plan to keep it healthy in the future!

In 2022, our veterinary team noticed an abnormality in Mocha's heartbeat on her annual wellness exam. Our team wanted further diagnostics to determine any potential causes and develop a treatment plan for Mocha to keep this health issue in check and possibly to help prevent progression of disease.

Thank you to Dr. Welter and the rest of the Cardiology specialists at CVCA Cardiac Care for Pets for performing these advanced diagnostics on our ambassador! At this exam, we discovered that the ar-

rhythmia was NOT due to primary heart disease, but possibly due to a parasitic infection of the lung, for which Mocha has now been treated. We couldn't do what we do without the support of our community. Thank you again for helping us give Mocha the best care possible while she lives the rest of her life out with us as an ambassador for her species!

## Meet our Newest Members

In 2022 we said goodbye to some of our most special ambassadors: **Snow**, the Arctic Fox, **Jefferson**, the Bald Eagle, **Rufio**, the Eastern Gray Squirrel, **Nigel**, the Virginia Opossum, and **Patches**, the Eastern Screech Owl. We also had some new members join our education family!



Gizmo, the Virginia Opossum.



Bear, the Striped Skunk.



Jasper, the Red Fox.

## In Memory of



Jefferson



Nigel



Snow



Rufio



Patches



# Visit the Wildlife Walk

**Remember** to come visit BRWC and see the Ambassadors on the Wildlife Walk and in the Bradley Learning Center! This self-guided experience lets visitors view our Ambassadors, as well as learn about their natural history and rescue stories. The Walk and the Learning Center are open daily.

Interested in a more up-close encounter? Join us Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and

Sundays for our new Wildlife Look-and-Learn events. Topics vary across days and each week, so there is always something different to see. Tickets are \$5 per person (ages 5 and up) and are available online or purchased in person. Visit our website's Upcoming Events tab to view our calendar and get more information on each event.



Education docent, Laura Nelson.



Volunteer, Heather Shank-Givens, presenting with Vega, the Turkey Vulture ambassador.



# Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza

**Highly** Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) was one of the biggest challenges of 2022 for wildlife hospitals across the United States. The H5N1 variant, first found in Canada in late 2021, was most closely related to the H5N1 variant seen in Europe in the spring of 2021. It is believed that it came across the Atlantic and spread down the flyway, with cases in Virginia first noted in January 2022. We have had to put many safety measures in place at the hospital, including stricter intake criteria and the creation of multiple quarantine rooms for raptors and other high-risk species. As avian influenza is a zoonotic disease (can spread to humans), extra precautions were put in place for staff and volunteers working with birds including the use of gowns, gloves, masks, and more when working with these species. Luckily,

we have had no confirmed positive cases in birds rehabilitated at the Center to date. However, this virus continues to be a serious health threat with positive cases found in wild birds and domestic poultry throughout the state and globally. We are currently involved in an HPAI surveillance study through Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine and will continue to stay on the lookout for cases. Though waterfowl are common carriers of this virus, often showing no clinical signs of disease, scavengers, including vultures and eagles, are often the hardest hit. This virus can be spread through consumption of HPAI-positive animals and the vultures and eagles that find them do not understand the disease cycle—they simply feel lucky to have found a free meal!

Scavengers are so important to our



This map shows the location of positive wild bird, domestic bird, and wild mammal cases of HPAI through November 27, 2022.



Protocols for handling high-risk species, such as waterfowl and raptors, changed immensely for our staff and volunteers with the discovery of this most recent outbreak. High-risk birds are examined in a triage tent, outside of our hospital, and personal protective equipment must be used to help limit contamination and disease spread.

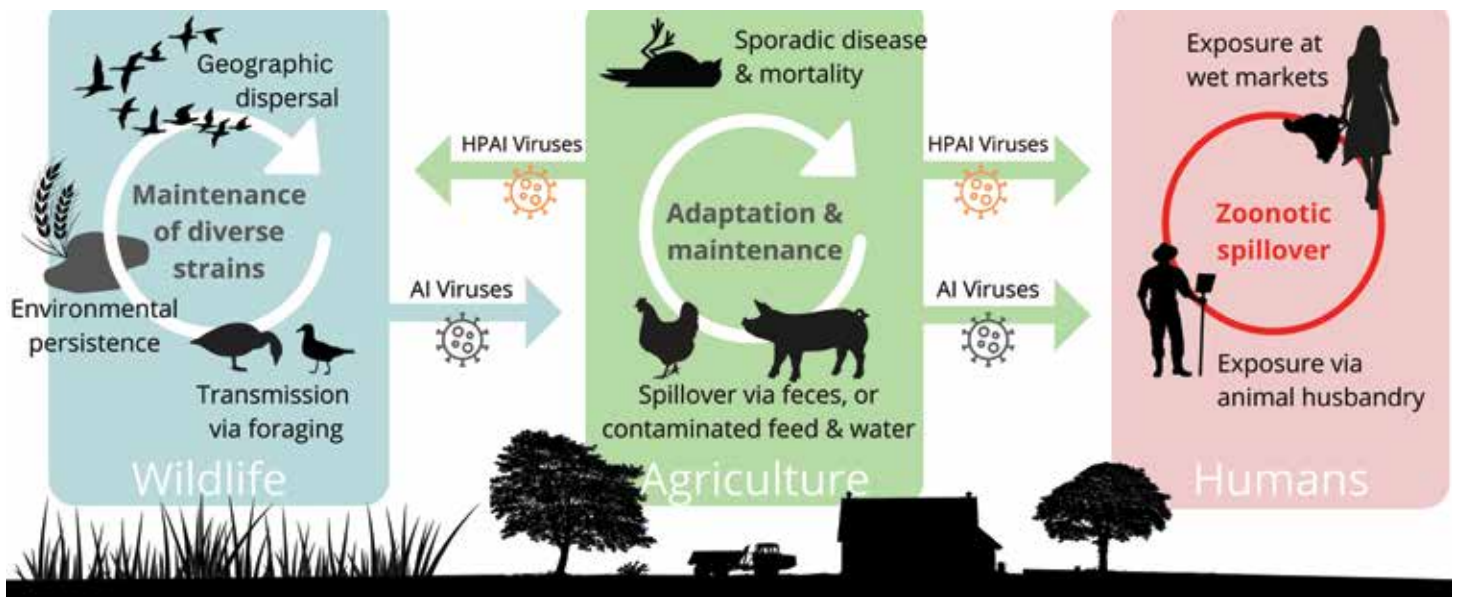


own health, in addition to environmental health. Though vultures can break down and deactivate many zoonotic pathogens, including rabies and anthrax, they are susceptible to HPAI and were unfortunate victims of an HPAI-caused mass mortality event at a Loudoun County Landfill, which is less than 40 miles from the Center. Many of the mortality events seen in birds in 2022 were discovered by members of the public who took the time to report such events.

In the upcoming year, as HPAI continues to be an active threat, we hope that you will be vigilant and report any unusual cases of wildlife death (especially instances of 5+ birds found dead at one location) to the Department of Wildlife Resources, USDA, or to us at the Center directly where we can identify how to report. Like many of the diseases we work with at the Center, HPAI is another example of an important **One Health** issue. By protecting our wild and domestic birds, we are also protecting human and environmental health. In 2023, we will continue to engage in research looking for HPAI in wild birds and mammals to help us better understand the scope of this disease.



This map shows the positives reported by each state so far in the current outbreak. It is important to remember that like other diseases in human and wild populations, only a tiny fraction of patients with the disease are actually tested.



HPAI is not a primary wild bird pathogen. Wild birds do have low pathogenicity H5 influenza viruses, but these viruses evolve in poultry to create highly pathogenic viruses and they are defined by their pathogenicity in domestic birds. Once established in domestics, they can spill over to wild birds as they have in this case, or potentially to humans. Though this current outbreak is still considered relatively low risk to humans, we are seeing it more frequently in mammals and in an ever-growing list of species, highlighting its ability to evolve. Surveillance, like that done at wildlife hospitals, is so important early on to prevent situations like this from becoming human epidemics. *Graphic adapted from <https://doi.org/10.1002/jwmg.22171>*

# Financials FY2022

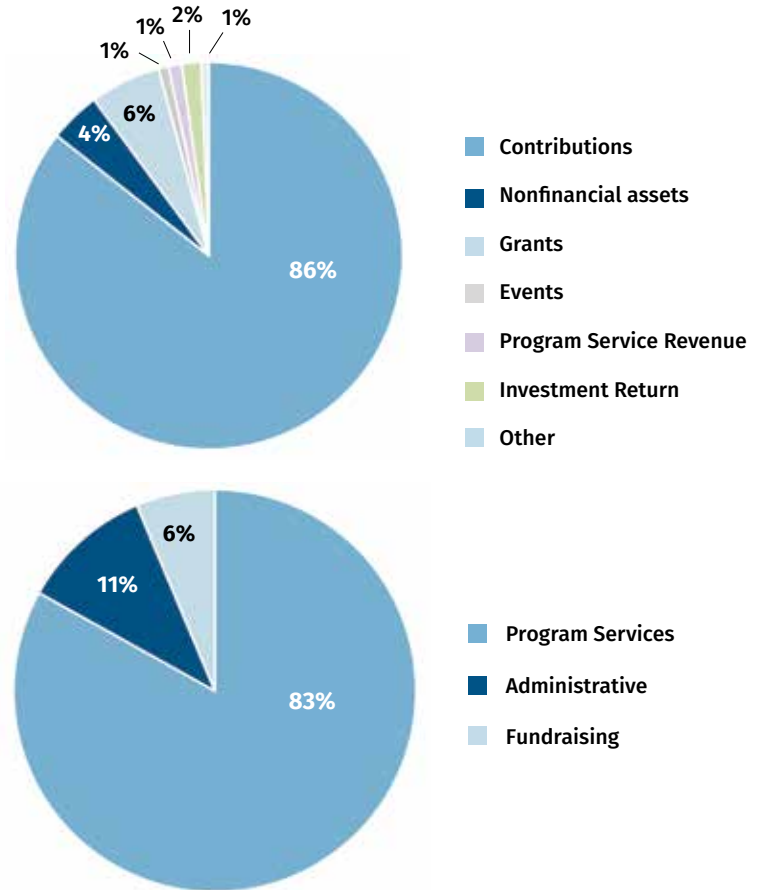
Blue Ridge Wildlife Center operates on a fiscal year.  
Financials reflect fiscal year 2022 from July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2022.

## REVENUE

Contributions	\$1,383,243
Nonfinancial assets	\$68,818.00
Grants	\$95,438
Events	\$13,475
Program Service Revenue	\$17,760
Investment Return	\$26,266
Other	\$10,080
	<b>\$1,615,080</b>

## EXPENSES

Program Services	\$633,233
Administrative	\$80,556
Fundraising	\$48,310
	<b>\$762,099</b>
<b>Revenue less expenses:</b>	<b>\$852,981</b>



## Create Your Legacy for Wildlife

Including Blue Ridge Wildlife Center in your estate plans is a unique way to sustain your values, honor the purpose of wildlife care, and advance the work of BRWC. These gifts are stewarded with the care and integrity you expect, to accomplish the goals you desire. For further information, please contact: Trish Carter, Development Director  
Trish@blueridgewildlifectr.org  
(540) 837-9000 Ext. #13





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The Luminescence Foundation, Inc.  
Dr. Russell McKelway and Dr. Laura Dabinett  
William Rigg  
The Wise Foundation  
The Bob Wiser Charitable Foundation Trust  
James K. Wright Jr.

## GREAT HORNED OWL

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The American Donkey Trust  
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James L. and Mary J. Bowman Trust  
Linda Cook  
Mark and Susan Galbraith  
James Knowles Family Fund  
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Patricia Robinson  
Jerelyn Schantz  
Thomas and Talbot Estate Properties, Inc.  
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Laurie Volk

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(\$1,000 and above)

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Richard and Sarah Bell  
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Please contact Annie Bradfield ([annie@blueridgewildlifectr.org](mailto:annie@blueridgewildlifectr.org)) with any errors or omissions.

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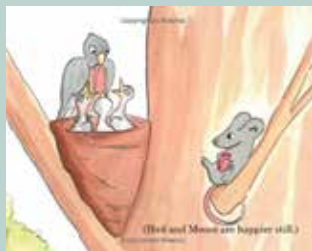
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# Cat on the Go

In 2022, our rehabilitation interns presented at our first ever Intern Research Day! Early on, each student chose a topic they were interested in and created a project around that idea to present to the staff and their fellow interns. They blew us away!

One intern, Virginia Lee Lucey, wrote and beautifully illustrated a children's book, *Cat on the Go*, to help educate youngsters on the importance of keeping cats indoors and how to provide proper

stimulation while doing so. The story follows "Cat", a pet who is transitioned to a fully-indoor lifestyle after recovering from a fracture caused by a vehicle collision while he was an indoor-outdoor pet. She was actually able to get this book published as well! Virginia was generous enough to donate all profits from the book directly to the Center! Buy this book NOW on Amazon.com (see QR code).



TAIL END

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