



Rockfish Wildlife Sanctuary

5450 Wheelers Cove Road, Shipman, VA 22971 • 434.263.4954 • rockfishwildlifesanctuary.org

A Semi-Annual Newsletter

Fall/Winter 2024

"CELEBRATE GOOD TIMES, COME ON!"

The Rockfish Wildlife Sanctuary's 20th Anniversary Gala at Potter's Craft Cider was a wonderful evening full of laughter, food, and friendship!

From a one-woman operation treating a handful of native animals each year to a thriving, standalone facility caring for hundreds of patients annually, the Rockfish Wildlife Sanctuary has come a long way in the past two decades.

Since our founding, over 10,000 injured and orphaned animals have found refuge in our care. But we're more than just a sanctuary for wildlife. Humans find hope here, too! Hundreds of volunteers have helped us flourish, from transporting animals to providing hands-on care to building our 50+ outdoor enclosures. We've also trained dozens of student interns, empowering the next generation of wildlife conservationists.



This milestone 20th year has brought us a record number of patients, with 994 animals admitted so far - already surpassing last year's total of 944. We expect to break 1,000 admissions before the year ends! Despite these rising numbers, our team remains committed to providing the best care possible to each animal.

One thing that hasn't changed in 20 years? We still receive no state or federal funding for our lifesaving work. We are deeply grateful to our community for generously supporting us and the animals we care for.

And speaking of community...oh, what a night we had! Our 20th anniversary celebrations culminated with our 20 Wild Years Gala on September 13th. We filled the tent with 200 passionate

animal lovers from across Central Virginia, all rallying to celebrate the Sanctuary's role in our wild world.

We feasted on a delicious vegan meal from Botanical Fare, enjoyed the beautiful setting at Potter's Craft Cider, teared up at heartfelt speeches from staff and partners, and capped it all off with a roaring live auction that left us in stitches. Auction



Rehab Program Manager, Elka, displays Linford to the crowd!

highlights included a homestay in France, a guided Owl Prowl, original custom portraits of RWS ambassador birds by Amy Shawley Paquette, and the naming rights for our newest education ambassador, a charming box turtle. The winner chose "Linford," inspired by our hilarious auctioneer, Linford Berry from Mountain Valley Auction Group. Welcome to RWS, Linford! ➡

Rockfish Wildlife Sanctuary rehabilitates injured and orphaned native wildlife in Central Virginia and educates our community about the needs and inherent value of the natural environment.

"CELEBRATE GOOD TIMES, COME ON!" (Cont.)

Thanks to the generosity of our gala guests, we surpassed our fundraising goal! We're thrilled to now have the funds to redo the Sanctuary's wildlife nursery floors, which have been quite literally crumbling for over a year. Who knew picking out new flooring could be so exciting!?

Our supporters even helped us make strides toward converting our basement into three much-needed wildlife care rooms. This project, which we estimate will cost over \$35,000, is essential as we continue breaking admission records. If you'd like to support our growth, please consider giving to the Sanctuary this season. Thank you for carrying us forward into the next 20 years and beyond for the animals who need us most.



Our founder, Nathou Attinger, receives a well-deserved standing ovation.

A heartfelt thank you to our wonderful gala sponsors for making this historic evening truly unforgettable!

Julie Matheson & Jacob Schmitt • Ellen & Jason Jones • Anonymous *in honor of Nathou Attinger* • The Wildlife Center of Virginia & Board • Anonymous



AROUND THE SANCTUARY



Left: Our new wine cooler, used for bat hibernation. This allows us to finely control temperature and humidity for our overwintering bats.
Center: The Chimney Swift enclosure is finished! This special enclosure gives fledglings the chance to perfect their flying and build stamina.
Right: Our skunk and groundhog enclosures are getting buried wire floors, about 18" deep, to allow room for the young animals to dig.

CONTINUING EDUCATION: Consider our "SPONSOR AN ANIMAL" program for our education ambassadors! Our education ambassador team has grown. Gift a sponsorship for one (or three!) of them this holiday season.

ALL ABOUT THE ANIMALS



A Little Gumbo?

Meet our newest education ambassador animal...all two inches of her! This charming Eastern Mud Turtle joined our ambassador team this fall in one of the most unusual ways. We received a call from a restaurant staffer at Wintergreen in Nellysford, who had rescued the tiny turtle from a bag of soon-to-be-cooked crawfish. Luckily, the big-hearted staffer knew this turtle required professional care and brought the turtle to us. We learned that she (and all the crawfish) were caught off the coast of Louisiana earlier in the season and shipped up to Virginia. She had been taken in and out of refrigerators repeatedly and still survived the journey north!

Though Eastern Mud Turtles are native to Virginia, this individual was not. The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources told us we had two choices: we could either humanely euthanize her or welcome her aboard the RWS ambassador team. That was an easy choice. Meet Gumbo! We look forward to incorporating Gumbo into our future educational programming. She has quickly become a staff favorite, and she continues to come out of her shell more and more each day.



A Family Affair

We had a record number of Eastern Screech Owl babies in care this year, with a total of six that were raised together over the summer and fall. Each of these owls came into care separately under different circumstances, including nest destruction, tree felling, one owlet falling 40 feet from a tree, another suffering injuries, and one even being kidnapped from its nest by humans! Though each young owl lost its original family, they were all able to find companionship with one another at RWS.

The owlets were raised together for six months until each was ready for life in the wild. Though the older owls in the bunch were ready for release slightly earlier, we kept them in care together so that the younger owlets would learn skills from their older adopted siblings. Our rehab staff is very talented, but we know that owls learn best from other owls! Owlet 24-447 in particular was our oldest and bravest owl, always the first to take on new challenges. The other owlets learned how to fly and hunt by watching 24-447 try (and fail), and we loved watching it all through the enclosure cameras we set up to monitor them. Some of our fondest memories from the summer were observing the bond develop between this "found" family and seeing them groom each other. What a hoot!



RWS Swifties

Move over, Taylor Swift! This summer, RWS debuted a brand new enclosure built just for Chimney Swifts. These cigar-shaped black birds are unique in that they spend most of their life in flight, eating exclusively in mid-air. Thus, they are challenging birds to rehabilitate as they do not typically self-feed in captivity and must be hand-fed for their entire rehabilitative journey. Swifts also need strong enough flight muscles upon release to support their long fall migration to South America!

These patients keep us on our toes. Chimney Swifts at RWS are fed every 30 minutes from 8 AM to 8 PM until release. This year, we had Chimney Swifts in care for a total of 53 days. Our staff performed over 1,272 feedings for these patients in that time! Our new enclosure allows us to take in more Chimney swifts than ever, which meant almost double the mouths to feed this season. The enclosure's octagonal shape encourages sustained flight, too, helping with muscle development. We were thrilled to release these patients in August - not just because we were exhausted, but also because we know the wild populations of Chimney Swifts are in steep decline due to habitat loss. Every individual that we return to the wild makes a difference in keeping this amazing species flying!

Thank you to everyone who rescued an animal and supported our work this year!



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How you can help today:

Cash Donations

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

RWS Commonwealth of Virginia Campaign

The *new* RWS Commonwealth of Virginia Campaign number is 200032!

Material Donations

- Paper towels and plain tissues
- Nitrile gloves
- 13gal. trash bags
- Newspapers
- Old towels, blankets
- Pet training pads
- Gas cards for transporters
- Gift cards to Food Lion for fresh veggies and fruits
- Gift cards to Amazon and Chewy

RWS Resale Shop

100% of proceeds from our resale store in The Greene House Shops benefit the Sanctuary. Our booth is on the second floor at 14843 Spotswood Trail, Ruckersville, VA, 22968, at the corner of Rt. 29 and Rt. 33. The store also accepts donations, especially of jewelry, art, glass, silver, china, or small furniture. To find out more, visit our website.



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These people keep us going!

Wildlife Rehabilitators

Sarah Cooperman
Chandler Dennis
Jillian Duckworth
Elka Hutcheson
Jeff Wilbur

Board Members

Anju Grover
Jayme Fraser
Mary Haines-Johnson
Dawn Kidd
Dean Lhospital
Adam Miller
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Dave Volin
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2024 Summer Interns

Sophie Apodaca
Ethan Coleman
Mia Gaynor

Outreach

Sarah Cooperman
Bernie Dracopoli
Nancy Newman

Carpentry

Pete Syme
Building Goodness
Foundation

Legal Advisor

Meghan Cloud

Thank you!