Dear Friends,

2023 was a year of great accomplishments and achievements for the Wildlife Center of Virginia. This Annual Report takes on the difficult challenge of summarizing some of these highlights in only a few pages.

2023 will also serve as the capstone of my 42-year career as President of the Wildlife Center. As I announced in January 2024, I will be stepping down as President this spring.

During the past four decades, the Wildlife Center has helped change the landscape of wildlife veterinary medicine and has emerged as an international leader in public outreach and education. I'm proud to have been "captain" of a wonderful team of Center staff. I often quip that my job as President is to hire the best people ... and then to get out of the way and let them do their jobs. This report provides lists of our current staff members, and our current volunteer leadership. I am most grateful to them—and to the hundreds of staff and volunteers upon whose shoulders they stand—for their deep commitment and dedication to the Wildlife Center.

And I am most grateful for those individuals whose unselfish gifts have made possible all of our work, for all of these years. The Wildlife Center isn't an agency or affiliate of the federal, state, or local government. We are a non-profit organization, and we’re only able to take on this important work in wildlife medicine, training, and outreach through the support of generous individuals.

Together, we have saved lives ... and changed lives. Thank you for this wonderful opportunity, and thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Ed Clark, President
The Wildlife Center’s 40th Anniversary celebration event was held in May at Hotel 24 South in Staunton. The evening was a smashing success, attended by approximately 200 friends of the Center, along with numerous staff and board members past and present. The guests browsed an exhibit of photos and memorabilia, mingled with staff and ambassador animals, viewed a 40th anniversary video, and heard memories and testimonials from friends, colleagues, and supporters. State Senator Emmett Hanger presented an official Joint Senate Resolution commending the Wildlife Center on its accomplishments and leadership in wildlife veterinary medicine and conservation.

Junior Gala
When a young fan of the Wildlife Center learned about Homecoming, she was disappointed that it was past her bedtime. So her parents helped her throw her own Gala, for kids her own age and their families to learn about, celebrate, and help support the Center. In June, Lois (age 6) and her family, hosted a Junior Gala for 40 attendees and raised more than $2,500 for the Center. The celebration included food and drink, wildlife-themed activities, and a presentation by Outreach Supervisor Connor Gillespie featuring ambassadors Wilson (Woodland Box Turtle), Marigold (Virginia Opossum), and Elliott (Western Hog-nosed Snake). At the end of the event Development Associate Ashlee VanArsdale presented each of the kids with a gift bag of puppets, a logo sticker, and coloring materials.

Together Again – Two Special Events
2023 Patient Admissions

VETERINARY SCIENCE AND REHABILITATION

Passerines (Songbirds)

842 PATIENTS

- American Crow 53
- American Goldfinch 17
- American Robin 114
- Baltimore Oriole 1
- Barn Swallow 13
- Black-capped Chickadee 1
- Blue Jay 51
- Bobolink 1
- Brown Thrasher 10
- Brown-headed Cowbird 11
- Carolina Chickadee 8
- Carolina Wren 55
- Cedar Waxwing 8
- Chimney Swift 18
- Chipping Sparrow 4
- Common Grackle 25
- Common Raven 5
- Common Yellowthroat 3
- Dark-eyed Junco 5
- Eastern Bluebird 31
- Eastern Kingbird 1
- Eastern Meadowlark 2
- Eastern Phoebe 10
- Eastern Wood Pewee 2
- European Starling 41
- Fish Crow 2
- Fox Sparrow 2
- Golden-crowned Kinglet 1
- Gray Catbird 22
- Great Crested Flycatcher 1
- Hermit Thrush 7
- House Finch 43
- House Sparrow 41
- House Wren 1

Indigo Bunting 2
Mourning Dove 58
Northern Cardinal 72
Northern Mockingbird 30
Northern Parula 2
Northern Waterthrush 1
Pine Warbler 1
Purple Finch 2
Purple Martin 3
Red-eyed Vireo 7
Red-winged Blackbird 1
Ring-necked Dove 1
Rock Pigeon 6
Rose-breasted Grosbeak 1
Scarlet Tanager 2
Song Sparrow 8
Summer Tanager 1
Tufted Titmouse 12
Undetermined Bird 3
White-breasted Nuthatch 6
White-throated Sparrow 6
Wood Thrush 5
Worm-eating Warbler 1
Yellow-breasted Chat 1

Osprey 9
Red-shouldered Hawk 56
Red-tailed Hawk 84
Sharp-shinned Hawk 4
Turkey Vulture 36

Other Birds

247 PATIENTS

Brown Pelican 2
Canada Goose 44
Common Loon 2
Common Nighthawk 1
Cooper’s Hawk 30
Domestic Fowl 4
Double-crested Cormorant 3
Downy Woodpecker 11
Great Blue Heron 15
Green Heron 2
Hairy Woodpecker 1
Herring Gull 1
Killdeer 2
Mallard 17
Northern Bobwhite 3
Northern Flicker 16
Pileated Woodpecker 12
Razorbill 1
Red-bellied Woodpecker 16
Ring-billed Gull 3
Ruby-throated Hummingbird 34
Ruffed Grouse 2
Snow Goose 2
Wild Turkey 7
Wood Duck 4
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 8
Yellow-billed Cuckoo 3
Yellow-crowned Night Heron 1

Raptors and Vultures

460 PATIENTS

American Kestrel 13
Bald Eagle 66
Barn Owl 9
Barred Owl 53
Black Vulture 18
Broad-winged Hawk 9
Eastern Screech-Owl 63
Golden Eagle 2
Great Horned Owl 36
Merlin 2

Mammals

2102 PATIENTS

- Allegheny Woodrat 9
- American Beaver 2
- American Black Bear 6
- American Mink 2
- Big Brown Bat 89
- Black Rat 1
- Bobcat 1
- Coyote 2
- Eastern Chipmunk 30
- Eastern Cottontail 568
- Eastern Fox Squirrel 3
- Eastern Gray Squirrel 325
- Eastern Red Bat 18
- Evening Bat 6
- Hispid Cotton Rat 9
- House Mouse 16
- Little Brown Bat 3
- Meadow Vole 4
- Northern River Otter 1
- Northern Short-tailed Shrew 3
- Norway Rat 55
- Raccoon 119
- Red Fox 38
- Seminole Bat 1
- Silver-haired Bat 1
- Southern Flying Squirrel 23
- Striped Skunk 56
- Tri-colored Bat 2
- Undetermined Mammal 3
- Virginia Opossum 508

Other Birds

247 PATIENTS

Brown Pelican 2
Canada Goose 44
Common Loon 2
Common Nighthawk 1
Cooper’s Hawk 30
Domestic Fowl 4
Double-crested Cormorant 3
Downy Woodpecker 11
Great Blue Heron 15
Green Heron 2
Hairy Woodpecker 1
Herring Gull 1
Killdeer 2
Mallard 17
Northern Bobwhite 3
Northern Flicker 16
Pileated Woodpecker 12
Razorbill 1
Red-bellied Woodpecker 16
Ring-billed Gull 3
Ruby-throated Hummingbird 34
Ruffed Grouse 2
Snow Goose 2
Wild Turkey 7
Wood Duck 4
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 8
Yellow-billed Cuckoo 3
Yellow-crowned Night Heron 1

Reptiles and Amphibians

390 PATIENTS

- Common Five-lined Skink 3
- Dekay’s Brownsnake 1
- Eastern American Toad 9
- Eastern Copperhead 1
- Eastern Fence Lizard 2
- Eastern Cartersnake 8
- Eastern Milksnake 2
- Eastern Musk Turtle 4
- Eastern Painted Turtle 29
- Eastern Ratsnake 28
- Eastern River Cooter 2
- Eastern Spadefoot 1
- Fowler’s Toad 1
- Green Frog 2
- Northern Black Racer 5
- Northern Ring-necked Snake 3
- Northern Watersnake 1
- Pickerel Frog 1
- Red-eared Slider 1
- Snapping Turtle 19
- Southeastern Mud Turtle 1
- Timber Rattlesnake 1
- Woodland Box Turtle 242
- Yellow-bellied Slider 23
Another Record Caseload

In 2023 the Wildlife Center admitted 4,041 patients, shattering the previous record of 3,804 set in 2021.

PATIENTS ADMITTED 1983-2023

Key Statistics from 2023:
- Most-admitted species: Eastern Cottontail (568), followed by Virginia Opossum (508)
- Busiest day for patient admissions: June 27 (39). Nine of our ten busiest days were in the spring.
- Patients were admitted to the Center on 357 of the 365 days in 2023.

Fledglings defended. In April, a pair of fledgling Barred Owls fell from their nest in Albemarle County. Brought to the Center, the owls were examined and found to be healthy. The property owners reported that the parents were still nearby the nest. Front Desk Coordinator Maliah Carroll took the fledglings for re-nesting, and, while placing the first owl, she felt a sharp blow to the back of her head. The mother owl had attacked her, defending the nest. After the owlets were both safely re-nested, the owners tended to the cuts on Maliah’s neck from the mother owl’s sharp talons.

The Eastern Spadefoot is both secretive and rare, spending most of its life underground. It is also a Species of Greatest Concern in Virginia. This patient came to the Center when a woman in Augusta County unearthed it in her garden. The toad had a wound on its right elbow, which required sutures and careful treatment. After three weeks of care, the toad had healed enough for release, and was returned to a park near the place it was found.

The Northern Bobwhite is a species of quail that inhabits open grasslands and agricultural areas. Once very common, populations have declined severely due to habitat loss and human encroachment. Patient #23-3913 was admitted in December with a broken bone in its leg, likely due to a vehicle strike. The veterinary staff stabilized the break with a splint to give it time to heal. By mid-January 2024, the bone had mended and the quail was successfully released back home in Tappahannock.
Staff Pulls for a Favorite
Bald Eagle patient #22-3464 was admitted in October 2022 with serious injuries due to a vehicle strike, along with lead poisoning. After many setbacks, and almost a year of intensive treatment requiring a dozen surgeries and painstaking rehabilitation, the eagle was cleared for release in October 2023 at Oak Grove Lake Park in Chesapeake.

The release was attended by two of the staff who worked so hard on the bird’s recovery:

Dr. Olivia Schiermeyer, Senior Veterinary Intern: “The release went beautifully—better than we expected. We were all so anxious about her not being able to fly. I’m so happy that I could be here because I spent so much time with her over the past year. It was beautiful watching her fly away.”

McKenzie Stewart, Rehabilitation Team Lead: “The release went great. She seemed a little uncertain at first, but once she got her bearings, she took off and then came back a few minutes later and was just soaring over everyone. She looked absolutely beautiful and we are happy to see her go after about a year in care.”

During 2023, the Center admitted a record-setting 66 Bald Eagles, eclipsing the old record of 55 set in 2017. Here are just a few of the eagle stories that captured hearts during our record-breaking year.

The increase in eagle patients over time is tied to the remarkable recovery, since the 1970s, of Bald Eagle populations in the United States.

Above: Staff favorite #22-3464 takes flight. Photos of this release by Rob Fleenor.

Dr. Olivia removes a tail guard from the patient before release.

The Year of the Eagle

BALD EAGLE ADMISSIONS 2008-2023

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70


66 43 39 38 38 42 27 25
Long-distance Traveler

In April, wildlife photographer Marina Pierce photographed a hatch-year eagle near Cape Charles, VA. The band on the bird revealed that it had been cared for at the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey in Florida and released near Tampa on March 25th, 830 miles from where Marina first noticed it on April 10th.

On April 19th Marina noticed the bird, which had been feeding on the carcass of a beached whale, was grounded and unable to fly. Upon transport to the Wildlife Center, veterinary staff found the eagle was emaciated and had measurable levels of lead in her system, undoubtedly from scavenging hunting remains. The combination of the lead and a recent diet of rotting whale had badly debilitated the bird.

Treated with a combination of chelation therapy to remove the lead, and a wholesome diet, the bird slowly regained appetite, weight, and strength. In early September, she was successfully released at Berkeley Plantation in Charles City, with Marina Pierce in attendance.

Remembering Congowings. We cannot think of eagles and 2023 without remembering our dear friend Debbie “Congowings” Skluzak, who passed away last year. Congo devoted immeasurable time and loving attention to the Center’s Critter Cams and Moderated Discussion, and to producing Garden of Eagles calendars to benefit the Center. Her husband, daughter, and grandson (Jim, Kelli, and Tilden) were able to attend the release of #3464 in October.

News of an old friend. Bald Eagle patient #11-1234 (also known by the band ID call sign – KS) was sighted in 2023 raising three chicks in the Tidewater area. KS was originally treated at the Wildlife Center in a cohort with the Norfolk Botanical Garden eagles known by many as the “Rock Stars.” She has been known to be a breeding female since 2018. Photo courtesy of Jim Yanello.

Advancing the Field of Wildlife and Conservation Medicine

Generous Donors Keep Us “State of the Art”

Medical equipment is an expensive necessity for a veterinary teaching hospital. In 2023, generous donors provided new equipment that has made a big difference for our clinical and educational practice.

Digital Radiology System
Veterinary Intern. Dr. Natalie Brown says: “This is our most significant diagnostic tool. We use it every day on multiple patients. It is so much easier and higher resolution than the old system.”

Phovia Lamp System
Dr. Karra Pierce says: “This advanced light therapy technique aids in wound healing. For wild animals whose behaviors can make healing a challenge, speeding healing absolutely improves outcomes.”

Teaching Microscope
Jess Ransier, Licensed Veterinary Technician Supervisor says: “This microscope has been invaluable as a teaching tool. We can look together in real time at a live image, rather than sharing an eyepiece. And it captures images or video for teaching and presentations.”

Thank you to our supporters for making tech advancements like these possible so we can better help our patients recover from their injuries!

Veterinary Stats at a Glance

In 2023, we provided training for:

- 26 Veterinary Externs
- 3 Veterinary Technician Externs
- 19 Rehabilitation Externs

Throughout 2023, the Wildlife Center actively gathered data for:

- 12 scientific studies

Subjects included: parasitic infection surveillance in eagles and other raptors; Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Bald Eagles; tick-borne disease surveillance; mange in black bears; rabies, SARS-CoV2, and other infection surveillance in a broad range of mammal species.

In 2023, veterinary staff delivered:

- 45 lectures, presentations, and papers

Subjects included: analysis of the human impacts on wildlife; lead toxicosis in raptors; anesthesia practices for various species; zoonotic parasites; wound management; performing physical examinations of wildlife; enrichment for wild animals undergoing rehabilitation.
We added three new ambassadors to the team in 2023. Say hello to Clover, Ozzy, and Ophelia.

**Clover** (American Kestrel) came to the Center in 2022, but she did not receive her permits to officially step into her ambassador role until 2023. As a nestling, she was taken from the nest by bird banders and used for falconry, and later released. As a result of her upbringing, she imprinted on humans, which made her unfit to survive in the wild and prone to spending time around humans for food or companionship. Once at the Center, she was easy to train and fully comfortable with the goings-on of the people around her. Those qualities, and her attentive attitude, make her a great hit with audiences.

**Ozzy** (Eastern Screech-owl) is another ambassador who officially joined the team in 2023. He arrived in April of 2021 as a fledgling with a severe case of lead toxicosis. The lead left him with neurologic damage and a pronounced head tilt. Thanks to the skilled work of the veterinary staff, and to a prolonged regime of slow and steady training and acclimation by Senior Vice President Amanda Nicholson, Ozzy recovered enough and became comfortable enough around humans to officially be named an ambassador. Since then, he has been seen by small groups of visitors to the Center and by the Gala audience during our streamed “Meet the New Kids” program.

**Ophelia** (Virginia Opossum) is our most recently added ambassador. She arrived in the summer of 2023 from a wildlife rehabilitator who had cared for her and her siblings after their mother was killed in a vehicle collision. Ophelia showed signs of being habituated to humans, making her unsuitable to be released with her pouch-mates. Outreach staff worked with Ophelia to acclimate her to life at the Center. By October, she was on our ambassador permits and was given her name by a winning bidder in the Annual Benefit Auction. Ophelia is not ready for programs yet, but is getting close. Stay tuned.
**Farewell Marigold**

The lifespan of the Virginia Opossum is approximately three years. This short span means that it can feel like we are only just getting to know our opossum colleagues before it is time to say goodbye. But when it comes to these often sweet-tempered marsupials, that’s plenty of time to form deep bonds and make a lot of friends. Marigold certainly did both.

Marigold arrived at the Center in 2020 after being injured by a car. The injury left her with impaired vision, and she was unable to be returned to the wild. During her time as an ambassador, she made more than 75 in-person appearances at schools, libraries, and public events, and charmed thousands of people through online programs.

Her photogenic appeal and easygoing nature made her one of our most popular and beloved ambassadors. Toward the end of her life, Marigold developed several masses which required surgery. Recovery from those surgeries would have been very hard on Marigold at her advanced age, so the decision was made toward the end of December to humanely euthanize her.

**Neighborhood Opossum**

The residents of Lake Monticello, a large neighborhood in Fluvanna County, had a touching relationship with Marigold. In 2022, the Lake Monticello Wildlife Committee adopted her through Caring for Critters, and for more than a year shared news and updates about her through the local newspaper. Connor, who worked closely with Marigold, noticed her appearances in the Fluvanna news and reached out to thank the Committee for their interest and support. In May, Connor arranged a program with Marigold at the Lake Monticello clubhouse so the neighborhood could finally meet her.

After the program, the Committee shared a special recognition. They had prepared an extensive display in the clubhouse, with her picture and adoption certificate prominently displayed, to make sure more people in the neighborhood know Marigold’s story.

“Marigold shined. She has an uncanny ability to connect with people.”

Connor Gillespie, Outreach Supervisor

Marigold in the news…

…but she shined because Marigold possesses an uncanny ability to connect with people. Connor Gillespie, Outreach Supervisor, describes her as having an “uncanny ability to connect with people.” This is evident in her ability to charm and educate people of all ages about opossums and their role in the ecosystem.

… and in the clubhouse
On the Road in 2023

In a sure sign of post-pandemic release, Wildlife Center staff hit the road extensively in 2023 to meet audiences and talk about the work of wildlife medicine and conservation. Two major program efforts reached audiences all across Virginia.

Author, Staff, and Ambassadors Go on Bear Book Tour

Children’s author Christy Gove, whose books have featured true stories of animals at the Wildlife Center, joined us again in October to launch her newest offering: Bailey the Bear Needs Help!: A True Story of Rescue and Rehabilitation. The book tells the story in words and pictures of a cub treated at the Wildlife Center in 2016.

Christy joined the Center for an online Gala-week program early in October, then set out with us on a tour including nine in-person programs around central Virginia and the Shenandoah Valley.

2023 Libraries Tour

Connor and his ambassador colleagues had a very busy summer, logging hundreds of miles on a special Wildlife Center Summer Libraries Tour.

Between June and August, Connor and an assortment of ambassadors visited 23 different library branches in six different localities from Manassas to Fishersville. They appeared before hundreds of children and family members who came out to learn about the work of the Wildlife Center, and to meet some of the Center’s resident opossums, snakes, and turtles.
Still NOT TAMED

The Wildlife Center’s public television series *UNTAMED: Life is Wild* was, once again, recognized for excellence. Episode 407 on “The Importance and Function of Pollinators” won a Bronze Telly Award in 2023—the 4th for the series.

Although no longer in production, UNTAMED continues to air in Virginia and on public television stations across the country. And the Center continues to produce compelling videos that “teach the world” about wildlife and the environment.

FAVORITE VIDEOS FROM 2023:

- **Black Bear Rehabilitation: Start to Finish**
  Follow the Center’s rehabilitation work with bears from rescue to release. 6 MINUTES.
  
  < To watch: [https://qrco.de/BearRehab](https://qrco.de/BearRehab)

- **Venomous Snake FAQ and Myths**
  Practical advice based on frequently asked questions about venomous and non-venomous snakes. 7 MINUTES.
  
  < To watch: [https://qrco.de/snakeFAQ](https://qrco.de/snakeFAQ)

- **Is it OK to Feed Wild Ducks?**
  Join Public Affairs Manager Alex Wehrung on a lighthearted quest to discuss the well-being of waterfowl. 8 MINUTES.
  
  < To watch: [https://qrco.de/DucksVid](https://qrco.de/DucksVid)

- **How to Re-nest a Baby Squirrel**
  Learn to read the signs to figure out if a baby squirrel really needs help. 4 MINUTES.
  
  < To watch: [https://qrco.de/squirrel-nest](https://qrco.de/squirrel-nest)

< Watch the episode! [https://qrco.de/ep407](https://qrco.de/ep407)
FINANCIALS

2023 Revenues

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2023 Expenses

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A financial statement for the most recent fiscal year is available upon request from the State Division of Consumer Affairs, P.O. Box 1163, Richmond VA 23209, 804.786.1343. Financial statements are also posted on the Center’s website.
Physical Therapy on Barred Owl patient.
Photo courtesy of Donna Wesley Spenser.
Black Bears of 2023

At year-end 2023, the Center was caring for five Black Bear cubs. The cubs had spent much of the summer in the Large Mammal Isolation enclosure, along with a large plush duck that entertained the bears and Critter Cam viewers. In August, the bears moved into a half-acre yard in the Black Bear Complex, where they will continue to grow and develop until they are ready to fend for themselves in the wild. Check out the bears (and other wild animals) on the Center’s Critter Cams at wildlifecenter.org/critter-cam.