

# Wildlife Rehabilitators of North Carolina, Inc.

ISSUE 94  
Spring 2025

## President's Message . . .

It's almost Spring! Are you excited for the warmer weather, or are you dreading the upcoming baby season? Maybe both? Personally, I am both. I am proud to have served as your president and will continue to serve you as a WRNC board member. I want to make sure all our North Carolina rehabilitators know WRNC is here to help you. Do you know the benefits of being a WRNC member? Our membership costs \$15 for the year, and that \$15 gives you a \$25 discount to our annual symposium at the Vet School in Raleigh, access to our archived newsletters, ability to apply for a pre-release \$1,000 enclosure grant, and access to our mentor and apprentice documentation and paperwork. So, what are you waiting for? Remember, our fiscal year currently runs from May 1<sup>st</sup> to April 30<sup>th</sup>. Everyone should have received an email from the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) inviting each of us to attend one of two meetings in January: one in Marion, NC on the 21<sup>st</sup> and one in Lillington on the 28<sup>th</sup> to discuss wildlife captivity rules. I attended the Lillington meeting along with five or six other WRNC members. The room was packed with rehabbers eager to get the information from the licensing authorities and to raise other issues that needed to be talked about. In addition to discussing wildlife captivity rules, the topics of RVS regulations, mentoring and the possibility of rehabilitating armadillos were addressed. They announced at the end of those meetings that an email would be sent out in late



February for follow-up input from all wildlife rehab captivity license holders and apprentices. Please be on the lookout for this email if you haven't received it already. Your voice matters and this is your chance to be heard on rule changes currently being considered. Lastly, I would like to remind everyone to check in with your fellow rehabilitators on a regular basis. We need each other! We must ensure that we monitor and take care of our own mental health and reach out to connect with other rehabbers, too. This will help keep our wildlife rehabilitation network well and strong, especially with "Baby Season" right around the corner. Wishing everyone a great and successful baby season! I will now pass the baton to your new President, Rebekah Kriston, from "A Wild Life: Center for Wildlife Rescue and Release" in Lumberton, NC.

*Passing the Baton!*

## WRNC Board Members

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**Linda Veraldi**

## New

**Kelli Johnson**

**Linnea Mink**

Hall of Fame

Inductees:

**Mary & Ed Weiss**

Vet Student

Liaisons:

**Caroline Diehl**

**Emily Haupt**

**Katarina Dedes**

**Sydney MacDonald**

NSCU Symposium

Advisor:

**Greg Lewbart,**

**DVM**

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## *How You Rated the 2025 WRNC Symposium!*

*by Jean Chamberlain, Symposium Chair & WRNC Board Member & Treasurer*

Each year we conduct a survey after our annual symposium to find out what the attendees liked, what they didn't like and what we could do better next time. Here are some samples of the results for symposium 2025: Only 32% said this was their first symposium, and 68% had been to one before. 44% said they attended most sessions from the general track, 42% from the advanced track and only 4% from the beginner track. 94% said the facilities were excellent or good. Almost 90% said the sessions were good or excellent. 88% said the symposium overall was good or excellent. We got many positive comments about the speakers and sessions. Here are a few answers to the question which sessions were your favorites and why: 'Opossum Medicine,' 'Avian orthopedics,' 'Dr. Lewbart was most engaging & I learned most,' 'Radiograph Diagnosis in Mammals was best of all!,' 'The Impact of Hurricane Helene on Wildlife by Falyn Owens, not only was she a phenomenal and passionate speaker, but the information she presented was relevant to everyone.' 'Amphibian & Reptile Clinicals,' 'Dr Lewbart was an awesome speaker, fun, & informative.' 'Necropsy because I love dissecting.' 'Is it a bird was entertaining, interesting, and enlightening!' 'The avian labs were great because I never get to put my hands on a bird, and being able to become so familiar with their anatomy was very helpful.' 'Interpreting Rads will familiarize me with the body under x-ray.' 'The Micro Bat classes because the instructor was phenomenal.' 'Opossum Medicine, Fracture Management, Derm Detectives and Emaciation, because they are all very relevant to what I do in rehab.' 'I really enjoyed the raccoon rehab, squirrel rehab, and HPAI sessions!' 'Avian Physical Exam Lab, Fluid Therapy Lab, and Turtle Shell Lab because I really enjoyed the hands-on learning.' Finally, despite so many happy raffle winners, the most common criticism noted was people said, "the raffle took too long," some suggested to "present more rehab items" and to "accept more quality than quantity of items." Those are great suggestions that we will definitely be working on for next year.

## *Big THANK YOU's for Our 2025 Raffle Donors!*



Our immensely popular and most fabulous symposium raffle would not be possible without caring and generous donors! We are incredibly grateful for their generous contributions to WRNC. Their support makes a real difference, allowing us to provide for our wildlife rehabilitators in a fun and meaningful way. We couldn't do this important work without compassionate donors like them. The symposium attendees truly enjoyed our raffle and with so many items to bid on, just about everyone won something or many things! Great Big Thank You's to the kindness of [Chewy's](#), [Fiber Dream Santas](#), [Fox Valley Animal Nutrition, Inc.](#), [Friends of the WNC Nature Center](#), [NASCAR Hall of Fame](#), [National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association](#), [North Carolina Aquariums](#), [Possumwood Acres](#), [The Humane Society of the United States](#), [Greensboro Ice House](#), [Sky Zone](#), [Trolley Pub](#), [Belk](#), [Mike's Falconry](#), Alice Sanders, Linda Bergman-Althouse and all

the other individual contributors from our Vendor Pool, WRNC Board of Directors and WRNC General Membership who donated anonymously. Our raffle donors inspire us every day!

photos by John Althouse

# 2025 WRNC Symposium Photo Gallery

by John Althouse, Photographer

The 2025 WRNC Symposium photo album can be found at this link: <https://bit.ly/3ETUZX6>



## *“Passing the Torch!”*

*by Rebekah Kriston, Cofounder of ‘A Wild Life’ & WRNC Board Member*

When your mom is a wildlife rehabilitator sometimes you get drafted to help with the animals, but Lilly Kriston doesn't mind. Lilly's mom, Rebekah Kriston, is cofounder of a non-profit wildlife rehabilitation organization called "A Wild Life" in Lumberton, NC. The organization takes in a wide variety of species each year which allows Lilly to see, hear, and learn about each one. While there are some jobs Lilly is not allowed to do for safety reasons, she is learning species specific food preparation for the organization's birds of prey, squirrels, possums, and cottontails. She is already an expert in food prep for turtles, tortoises, and other reptiles. She takes delight in preparing nesting boxes for the babies and crates for the injured adult animals. As needed, and when the situation is safe for Lilly, she will hold a small hawk or owl so it can be fed more easily. She enjoys telling others about the animals that she sees come through the rehabilitation process as she finds each one unique and interesting. In August of 2024, Lilly completed a weeklong turtle camp at the North Carolina Aquarium on Roanoke Island where she learned more about turtle diets, husbandry, sea turtle species, and the rehabilitation of sea turtles. Lilly is in fourth grade at Elizabethtown Christian Academy and a member of the National Beta Club. In February 2025, she won first place in fourth grade science at the North Carolina State Beta Club Convention. She enjoys playing volleyball, singing, traveling, and watching *Cats* (the musical). Her mom is grateful for her love and interest in animals of all kinds and her desire to care for them. Lilly is well on her way to becoming a great wildlife rehabilitator in the near future!



photo by Rebekah Kriston

## *“Nests for the Needy”* by Karen Krebs, Crafter & Knitting Enthusiast



Hi, I'm Karen Krebs, and I was introduced to the Animal Rescue Craft Guild several years ago when devastating wildfires were ravaging Australia. There was a call for crochet and knitting enthusiasts to make nests for various orphaned animals with a slew of patterns for different species. I took up my needles and got busy. After the fires were contained, we were asked to concentrate our efforts on our own local wildlife rescues and rehabbers, which is why I am contacting you. I believe I've exhausted my local sources, so I'm offering



my knitting skills and surplus nests to anyone who needs them. I recently donated nests to "Keeper of the Wild" in Walterboro, SC, but still have more to give! I try to make the nests stackable, and they are a variety of 3, 4, 5, 6 inches wide and three inches high. Since no one has expressed a preference, this is usually how I mail them out. The sides can be folded down for greater stability. They are machine-washable, but I recommend putting a paper towel in the bottom when in use. Email me at [kkrebs@abilitysc.org](mailto:kkrebs@abilitysc.org) if you can use some crocheted nests, and if possible, tell me what you need in the way of size, quantity, and don't forget to provide your mailing address. I would love to be of help, so let me get these to you before "Baby Season" arrives.

photos by Karen Krebs

## *“Wildlife Shelter Posts Reward to End Maiming of Pelicans”* by Trista Talton, Staff Writer, Coastal Review.org

A wild bird rescue organization in Brunswick County is offering a reward for information leading to the culprits who've been mangling brown pelicans. The \$10,000 reward, a first in Sea Biscuit Wildlife Shelter's nearly 20-year history, signifies a breaking point for shelter founder and Oak Island resident Mary Ellen Rogers. "What I want to do is make them stop," she said. No one has been able to pinpoint exactly who "them" is behind what has become a common winter occurrence of dead and severely injured brown pelicans washing ashore on North Carolina's predominately southernly beaches. Over the course of a decade, a noticeable number of dead and injured pelicans have been found on shores from Emerald Isle to Topsail Island and down to Brunswick County beaches. "We get them every year and it's very depressing," Rogers said. The uptick is usually within the same two-month timeframe of each year, January through February, when trawling is closed off other states' coasts, but remains open off North Carolina's beaches. This gives out-of-state commercial fishers two extra months of work they would not have otherwise working off their state shores. Pelicans are attracted to catch being scooped up in nets from commercial fishing boat trawlers. Rogers said you can see a "cloud" of these birds gliding overhead of a trawler earning a day's catch. The problem comes when a pelican wants in on the catch being hoisted from the sea because this is when it likely becomes caught in the net. A fisherman, or several for that matter, might use a tool to puncture a hole in the birds'



wing or grab it by the end of its wing, swing it in a circular pattern until the wing breaks, then toss it overboard. The latter is indicative of an overwhelming majority of injuries dozens of brown pelicans suffered last year, when 60 washed up dead on the shores of the island Rogers calls home. All but two of the 15 pelicans she sheltered last year had the same injuries to their left wings, just above the elbow. Rogers describes the visibly graphic injuries as torsion fractures, which occur when a bone is broken by a twisting motion that leaves it looking like a corkscrew. A Florida-based wildlife pathologist confirmed one of the critically injured pelicans that washed ashore in Oak Island last year suffered such a fracture, Rogers said. Though an adult pelican can have a wingspan of more than 6 feet, they typically weigh no more than 8 pounds because their bones are hollow, which means, when broken, the bone cannot be pinned. In other words, there's no fix to this type of injury in a pelican. So, injured birds that wash ashore alive have to be euthanized. "We have to do something," Rogers said. "I can't just keep complaining about it every year. I just want the injuries to stop." She told Coastal Review Monday in a telephone interview that only one dead pelican has been found on Oak Island's beach since Jan. 1. But she suspects she'll be getting more reports of dead and injured pelicans as February temperatures steadily hold at those warmer from the previous month. Rogers hopes the pot of money filled by private donors

will entice someone to come forward with evidence needed to nab those responsible for the injuries. The reward is

## *“Wildlife Shelter Posts Reward to End Maiming of Pelicans”* by Trista Talton, Staff Writer, Coastal Review.org

advertised on posters Rogers tacked up at Oak Island marinas on Oak Island and in Holden Beach fish stores, places where out-of-state commercial fishers might stop to gas up and pick up odds and ends. The signs were posted in mid-December, shortly after Rogers organized a meeting with local law enforcement, wildlife officials and representatives with the U.S. Coast Guard to discuss the ongoing problem. Pelicans are a migratory species that fly south in winter and return in late February to nesting areas in North Carolina, including on small islands in the Cape Fear River, and Pamlico and Bogue sounds. They can also be found in the state throughout the year. Pelicans are protected under the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, which prohibits people from injuring, killing, possessing, or harassing these birds without a permit, Miranda Turner, a wildlife health biologist with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission’s Game and Furbearer Program, said in an email. “Penalties for breaking the (act) can vary widely depending on whether the person knew that what they were doing was illegal, how many birds were taken, and more,” she wrote. Those include misdemeanor charges, fines up to several thousand dollars, and prison. The reward Sea Biscuit Wildlife Shelter has posted will remain in effect through March 1. Anyone with information leading to the arrest and conviction of those intentionally harming pelicans in the waters off Brunswick County may report so by visiting NC Wild TIP (Turn In Poachers). Witnesses may dial 911 as a secondary reporting measure. **(reprinted with permission)** **photos by Sea Biscuit Wildlife Shelter Staff**

**Mary Ellen Rogers** has been a WRNC member for many years and currently holds a WRNC Board of Directors position where she has served for a number of years on varied committees to assist wildlife rehabilitators across the state of North Carolina. In 2007, she opened the Sea Biscuit Wildlife Shelter, a non-profit wild bird rehabilitation organization, and has treated 8000+ birds over the years. Her efforts and initiative have been instrumental in saving and returning numerous wild birds to their natural habitats, and thousands of people have been educated by her regarding the needs of these amazing animals that she is so passionate about.

### **About Author Trista Talton**

Trista Talton joined Coastal Review as staff writer Feb. 1, 2022, but she has covered coastal issues for us since our publication’s inception. She is a native North Carolinian and graduate of Appalachian State University. Her career as a journalist spans more than 20 years, most of which has been reporting on issues in southeastern North Carolina. Her reporting experience includes more than 10 years of covering the military, including an embed with Marines in Kuwait leading up to the start of the war in Iraq in 2003, time in New Orleans with North Carolina National Guardsmen in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and offshore patrols of New York and New Jersey aboard a Coast Guard cutter following the Sept. 11 attacks. She lives with her husband and two sons in Jacksonville.



photos by John Althouse

# “Wildlife Rehab Training Opportunities!”

Compiled by Linda Bergman-Althouse

IN PERSON and virtual Wildlife Rehab Classes are always being offered. Continue to check with the sources listed below for upcoming training opportunities throughout the year. Some of the methods of training will still be virtual, on-demand & webinars, but all information and knowledge gained is of value – no matter how it is presented!

- **WRNC’s TRAINING TEAM** offers a variety of programs to answer facility needs such as “New Volunteer Orientation; Welcome to Wildlife Rehabilitation,” and specialty requests for new or refresher training on rehab topics from “Capture & Restraint” to “Zoonoses.” Email [jchamberlain@windstream.net](mailto:jchamberlain@windstream.net) for training criteria and to plan your training day or weekend!
- **IWRC** offers a variety of “in person” and “online” classes from ‘Basic Wildlife Rehabilitation’ to ‘Zoonoses.’ Check them out at <https://thewrc.org/courses> For more detailed information, you can call 866.871.1869.
- **ANOTHER WAY TO GO:** The **Wildlife Resources Commission**, Raleigh, North Carolina offers a wildlife rehabilitation apprenticeship program to rehabilitate **baby squirrels, opossums, and bunnies** through a mentor (that you find and initiate). Apply at <https://www.ncwildlife.org/hunting/hunting-trapping-licenses/other-licenses-permits/wildlife-rehabilitation-license>



photos by John Althouse

**ATTN: DON’T FORGET** to pay your “**ANNUAL WRNC MEMBERSHIP DUES**” of \$15.00. Remember, a change was made in 2019, so our membership runs concurrently with the fiscal year, which is May 1st through April 30<sup>th</sup> of the next year. We used to pay our dues at symposium time, so now we forget and don’t realize WE’VE EXPIRED until we need some information from the membership archives on our website and the YELLOW BAR POPS UP and says, “Your account has expired. Please renew your account to gain access to this content.” GO HERE: <https://ncwildliferehab.org> and click on MEMBERS to renew your account!

# WRNC Grant Funds to Help Achieve Your Mission

by Linda Veraldi & Linda Bergman-Althouse, WRNC Board Members

**ENCLOSURE GRANTS:** Calling all Rehabbers! Who needs a durable and escape resistant wildlife enclosure that introduces or reintroduces your wild ones to the great outdoors? WRNC awards two \$1,000 enclosure grants every year to those who apply and meet the criteria. In the past few years, we have only awarded one cage grant per year, as we have not received applications. That is just crazy! Please start to think about it NOW and plan to submit an application for this useful grant. Think about what a quality enclosure you can build for \$1,000! The selection of up to TWO (2) GRANT RECIPIENTS for \$1,000 each will be made by the WRNC Board of Directors prior to the annual Symposium held in January, and the recipients will be notified immediately following the Board's decision. WRNC recommends that the cages be built to meet the IWRC/NWRA



“Minimum Standards Guidelines.” The DEADLINE is **NOVEMBER 1<sup>st</sup>** annually and although it seems far away, if you don't act soon, you may forget! Please go to the WRNC website ([Grants – Wildlife Rehabilitators of North Carolina](https://www.wrnc.org/grants)) for an application and all the information. We want the wildlife in our state to have great enclosures during their rehabilitation! This is an example of an enclosure that was built using WRNC Grant money. It is top-notch!

photo by Toni O'Neil

**CHIMNEY SWIFT TOWER GRANTS:** WRNC offers up to THREE (3) \$500 GRANTS annually to assist you or your group in the



undertaking of constructing a Chimney Swift Tower at your residence or in your community as an effort to provide alternative habitat for our environmental partner, the Chimney Swift. For those of you who may be interested in this valuable conservation project, please check out the WRNC CHIMNEY SWIFT TOWER GRANT program at this link to see if you are eligible: <https://ncwildliferehab.org/chimney-swift-tower-grant/> AND don't forget the DEADLINE to submit your application is by **1 NOVEMBER** annually. Chimney Swifts, migratory birds that help decrease our dangerously high insect pest population, are in decline due to loss of habitat. Fortunately, Chimney Swifts are well adapted to man-made structures, so it is possible to create nesting habitat specifically for Swifts. As a member of an environmentally active group, an individual environment enthusiast, a WRNC member or nonmember, this is an opportunity to build and maintain a chimney swift tower in your area to entice Chimney Swifts, acrobatic insectivores who vacuum the sky of annoying insects at dawn and dusk, to return to your community each year. We awarded three WRNC Chimney Swift Tower Grants for 2025: Sarah Cody (Burnsville), Craig (Chuck) Dewitt (Leicester), and Jessica

Cline (Concord). Get your application in by November 1<sup>st</sup>, so your swifts will have alternate roosting and breeding accommodations for 2026!

photo by Tom Tribble



# “Charming & Fascinating Chipmunks”

by Linnea Mink, WRNC Board Member

Spring is known by many wildlife rehabilitators as the beginning of the busy season, or rather, the “baby season.” Typically, as soon as our calendars are turned to the month of February, we begin eagerly anticipating calls about orphaned or



injured baby mammals in need. As I prepare for the upcoming baby season, I find myself reflecting upon the babies I encountered last year, and one special species and sibling group comes to mind. One of the most abundant rehabilitation species for many rehabilitators is the Eastern Grey Squirrel, the most common squirrel in North America, and in North Carolina. While this species is sufficiently charming and exciting in itself, sometimes we see less common species within the squirrel family (Sciuridae) in rehab, such as the Eastern Chipmunk. Last year I had the pleasure of assisting in the rehabilitation of four neonate chipmunks, who still had their eyes closed upon intake. Well-meaning finders found and attempted to raise these babies on their own, although each baby was in healthy

condition and potentially had their mother around. Only female chipmunks are active in raising their young, and like other squirrels, have litters in the spring and late summer. Luckily, the finders came to the conclusion that these babies required

professional help, so they brought them to a licensed rehabilitation center. These babies’ stories highlight the importance of public education on when exactly human intervention is required, as no rehabilitation setting is as adept in setting up wild babies for success as their own parents. Luckily for these chipmunks, each of the siblings thrived until they were independent enough for release. Watching them progress and return to their natural life nurtures a distinct feeling of success all rehabilitators understand, and it’s an inspiring testament to the perseverance of our wild neighbors. These tough babies were able to return to the wild, and instinct kicked in, allowing them to evade humans and travel across the terrain collecting food. This novel experience fostered a deep appreciation for the Eastern Chipmunk and the memory of these patients reminds me of how much I love baby season! Understanding the natural history of wildlife we encounter is important in providing quality care, but it is also an exciting part of rehabilitation! We never run out of new information to learn as we encounter different species. While chipmunks are close relatives of grey squirrels, their habitat requirements and behaviors differ. While Eastern Grey Squirrels dwell in trees, building nests called dreys, Eastern Chipmunks aren’t as arboreal, dwelling in individually crafted complex burrows, which has earned them the common nickname, “ground squirrel.” The burrows’ complexity and practicality fascinate me, as they contain multiple “rooms” with specific functions such as hoards in which to store their caches, and a nest space lined with cozy dry leaves. These blueprints also include masterfully planned tunnels for entrances, exits, and even drainage to prevent flooding. Much like other members of Sciuridae, chipmunks store food in caches to limit stress in times of scarcity, which especially aids in survival in the winter months. This behavior also enriches the survival of plant life by scattering seeds and spores of their food sources. Unlike tree squirrels, chipmunks have unique cheek pouches that help them transport the food they collect to their caches. This behavior was so fun to witness in the growing group of siblings! Their instincts kicked in shortly after their eyes opened, and they began exploring their enclosures and stuffing



# “Charming & Fascinating Chipmunks” (cont.)

by Linnea Mink, WRNC Board Member

their pouches with berries and seeds. They will also use their cheek pouches to transport dirt when building their complex underground homes. Their burrowing habits help maintain soil health by aiding in aeration, but it also makes them highly susceptible to the effects of soil degradation and contamination. Because of their terrestrial habits, chipmunks are frequently affected by cat attacks, flooding, and soil degradation, which may contribute to the cases we see in rehabilitation. Luckily, these babies were healthy, perseverant rehabilitation patients, and got to live out their lives in the wild. The Eastern Chipmunk is a less common member of Sciuridae that we rehabbers typically encounter, and their unique habits and natural history are an exciting part of rehabilitating them. As rehabbers, baby season can be overwhelming, but it is stories such as this one that make me absolutely thrilled for another upcoming baby season!

photos by Linnea Mink



**LINNEA MINK** is a newly elected WRNC Board Member who has stepped up to become the new Editor-in-Chief for our quarterly newsletter. Please send your newsletter contributions to [Linneam01@gmail.com](mailto:Linneam01@gmail.com). THANK YOU!

## WRNC Notes:

- 1) **The WRNC MENTOR COMMITTEE:** *has completed several forms to assist Mentors and Apprentices on their journey. If you are a WRNC member you can access these forms here: <https://ncwildliferehab.org/mentoring/> We will be sending out the Mentor Program information to our database around the end of March. If you are interested in becoming a WRNC Certified Mentor, please send an email to [info.wrnc@gmail.com](mailto:info.wrnc@gmail.com) to make sure you are in our database. All WRNC members have access to the mentor/apprentice paperwork. You must login to WRNC and then from the home page select Members and then select Mentoring. On the WRNC home screen there are three (3) documents available to anyone: Is Wildlife Rehabilitation for You?, WRNC Mentor Requirements, and WRNC Code of Ethics.*
- 2) **WRNC ENCLOSURE GRANT DEADLINE:** *The pre-release enclosure grant application, to support your wildlife rehabilitation mission, is due by November 1st, annually and open to all WRNC members in good standing (dues paid and no wildlife infractions). Go here to apply: <https://ncwildliferehab.org/cage-grants>*
- 3) **WRNC CHIMNEY SWIFT TOWER GRANT DEADLINE:** *The United States has lost over 50% of their Chimney Swift population. We need environmental partners like Chimney Swifts, so let's build alternate habitats to encourage them to return to us for roosting, nesting, and reproducing. Go here: [ncwildliferehab.org](http://ncwildliferehab.org) & click on GRANTS to see if you are eligible to apply for a Chimney Swift Tower grant. Submission is due by November 1st, annually.*
- 4) **SOCIAL MEDIA:** *Please check yourself before posting wildlife pictures or videos online. If you are a professional wildlife rehabilitator, you should know what is appropriate and inappropriate. A video of a squirrel in your care eating deep-fried chicken nuggets or chowing down on a Little Debbie snack cake is NOT appropriate and would be deemed by professionals who do know a proper squirrel diet as criminal, if not unethical, and definitely, not in the best interests of the squirrel. Also, graphic wildlife injuries should be shared only with groups within our field, rather than sharing with the public. Social Media posts have been questioned as of late, and that is why WRNC held a class at the symposium on “Social Media for Wildlife Life Rehabilitators” this year.*

# *“The Loon Still Sings!”*

*as written for ‘Carolina Salt Magazine’ by Linda Bergman-Althouse*

On their migratory journey south during late fall and winter, beautiful Common Loons, one of the oldest, most primitive of birds known, fly singly or in groups from Canada and the Northeastern United States in search of warmer waters along the Atlantic or the Gulf Coast. When one shows up at a wildlife shelter, it’s most likely because someone found it beached or on the ground, the staff and volunteers at the shelter will also know that it’s more than likely a very bad and probably lethal situation. We always pray for a fishing gear injury, because we consider that a blessing in a Loon’s case. Untangling lines, removing hooks, and treating wounds, are injuries we can definitely do something about. It’s also not too bad if a migrating Common Loon accidentally lands, softly, on a wet highway or parking lot, mistaking it for a river or lake.



A loon may also get stranded on a small pond. In either of those situations, the Loon doesn’t have enough open water for a long take-off because they need a running start, sometimes as much as 400 yards, paddling furiously through the water to take flight. Their legs are placed far back on their bodies, which are exceptionally good for swimming but do not enable them to walk on land, only awkwardly scooting by thrusting its chest forward a few inches and dragging both legs back underneath their body. So, most people think they’ve come upon an injured bird when they see the Loon can’t stand up or move about on land. The worst diagnosis, and unfortunately the most common with Loon admits, is mercury or lead poisoning. Loons born in the Northeast are exposed to massive quantities of methylmercury, the form of mercury toxic to living things. These birds are particularly

vulnerable to environmental poisoning for many reasons. They are long-lived, up to 30 years, and they spend their lives in the water, feeding on mostly fish, but also crustaceans, frogs, and aquatic insects. Loons are divers and can dive up to 250 feet, and a typical foraging dive lasts about 40 seconds. They are large, aquatic birds, with wing spans approaching four feet, which are relatively small in comparison to their thick bodies. A Loon is heavy and dense because their bones are not hollow like most other birds. The portly waterfowl’s white belly stays submerged when swimming and then propels itself with its feet underwater to spot and catch fish. It swallows most of its prey before surfacing. The loon has sharp, rear-pointing projections on the roof of its mouth and tongue that help keep a firm hold on slippery fish. Loons spend most of their life on and in the water, only wriggling ashore to mate, incubate eggs, potty, and occasionally escape a storm. As with most birds, the males are much more colorful with a dark head and red eyes, a greenish-black throat band and



## *“The Loon Still Sings!” (cont.)*

*as written for ‘Carolina Salt Magazine’ by Linda Bergman-Althouse*

distinctive white spots on their backs and sides. The females are more muted gray with pale mottling but share the white belly. Loons mate for life and typically produce two eggs each year. Incubation takes about 28 days, and the parents share



nest duty. During the first week, chicks may crawl onto the back of a parent which is paddling along on the water’s surface. Chicks stay very close to their parents for the first three weeks and respond immediately to calls warning of raptorial birds (or airplanes) flying overhead by scrambling under an adult's wing. The chicks grow very rapidly and are nearly the size of the adults within four to six weeks. They also begin to demonstrate their independence by seeking their own food, diving, and exercising their wing muscles. The youngsters retain their dull grey back plumage during that time, although the belly turns white. Some people describe the Loon’s call as eerie or an unearthly tremolo cry, but to me, they sing a beautiful song that awakens the sense of wilderness. Rather than

crying or wailing, it’s more like a melancholy yodel. You always know when a loon is present at most shelters, because they sing even in captivity, unlike other animals that tend to go silent in the unnatural environment of close human presence, a building or kennel cab. Although difficult to describe, it’s impossible to forget their sound. Depending upon the reason they are being treated, their song can sound happy or sad, but that’s totally a human’s assessment based on knowing the odds, otherwise, it would always be a soothing melody to me. In cases of toxic poisoning, the best we can do is make them comfortable with frequent tub baths and extra padding to lessen chest compression when kenneled, give the Loons time to build up their strength with healthy fish feedings and monitor their weight. We also flush them with fluids to try to rid the gut of mercury buildup, which may not help much if the mercury has already metastasized to organs and body tissues. If they manage to maintain weight or, even better, put on weight, we will joyfully and eagerly release them to continue their journey. If, despite ravenously feeding on their own, they rapidly lose weight, it is apparent they are starving from malabsorption caused by chemical poisoning and sadly, will not make it. It’s a tough reality faced by all who work with Loons, but we manage to approach each treatment plan in an optimistic and positive manner. By providing the best care we can and with fingers crossed, we hopefully think this one with mercury poisoning will make it and in rare, exceedingly rare instances, one will.



public domain photos

*“No Sadder Sound Salutes You Than the Clear, Wild Laughter of the Loon.” . . . . Celia Thaxter*

# News from the WRNC VSLs!

by Trina Dedes & Sydney MacDonald, NCSU CVM Junior VSLs

Hi everyone! We are thrilled to share that we have received an overwhelming amount of positive feedback from our veterinary student volunteers and attendees at this year's WRNC Symposium. It was an incredible learning and networking opportunity, and some of our students have certainly been inspired to become more involved with wildlife medicine and rehabilitation in the future. We are so excited to be a part of WRNC and to help make next year's symposium another tremendous success! As the halfway point of second semester at the CVM quickly approaches, we are looking forward to the warmer weather and all the wildlife that we will soon start to see around campus! The Turtle Rescue Team and Carnivore Conservation Crew are in the process of transitioning to new leadership while gearing up for busy spring and summer seasons. Earlier this year, Turtle Rescue Team announced their new naming theme that will carry us into 2026, "Legends and Lore." We are excited to see what mythological and fantastical creatures will appear as the busy season ramps up. There was a total of 889 intakes in 2024 ranging from turtles and tortoises to snakes and frogs. The team fully expects this year to be just as productive and rewarding, if not more so. We thank all the community members who help to contribute to their care and well-being. The Carnivore Conservation Crew is busy preparing for the 'Whelping Season' this year. With the successful births of Cypress and Magnolia last year, we are hoping for another adorable year of red wolf puppies. 'Whelping Season' for red wolves typically runs from the beginning of April through the end of May. Last year, Cypress and Magnolia were born on Mother's Day weekend. They just had their nine-month physical exam and are growing up healthy and strong. Be sure to follow us on Instagram (@turtlerescueteam and @carnivoreconservationcrew) as well as on the NCSU CVM social media pages for the latest updates on all our wildlife-related activities.

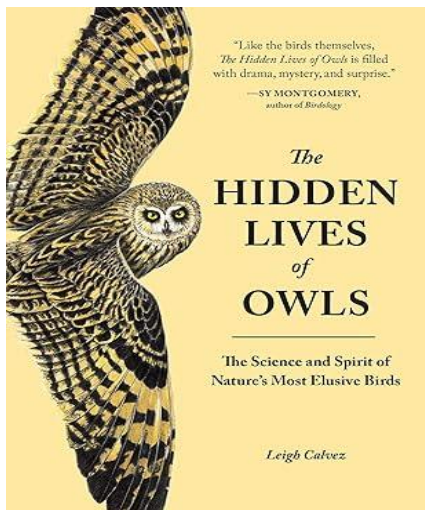


VSL Submitted photo – L to R, Emily Haupt, Sydney MacDonald, Katarina (Trina) Dedes & Caroline Diehl

## The BOOKSHELF..... compiled by Linda Bergman-Althouse

### The Hidden Lives of Owls

by Leigh Calvez



Join a naturalist on her adventures into the world of owls, owl-watching, avian science, and the deep forest—often in the dead of night. Whether you're tracking snowy or great horned owls, these birds are a bit mysterious, and that's part of what makes them so fascinating. In *The Hidden Lives of Owls*, Leigh Calvez pursues 11 different owl species—including the Barred, Flammulated, Northern Saw-Whet, Northern Pygmy, Northern Spotted, Burrowing, Snowy, and Great Gray. In an entertaining and accessible style, Calvez relays the details of her avian studies, from the thuggish behavior of barred owls—which puts the spotted owl at risk—to the highly unusual appearance of arctic snowy owls in the Lower 48, which directly reflects the state of the vole population in the Arctic. As Calvez takes readers into the lives of these strange and majestic creatures, she also explores questions about the human-animal connection, owl obsession, habitat, owl calls, social behavior, and mythology. Hoot! In this *New York Times* bestseller, Leigh Calvez explores the night forest to uncover the secret lives of owls in this illuminating book for birders, animal lovers, and readers of *H is for Hawk*. 4.5 stars

Check it out: <https://bit.ly/4i15W7j>

Reading is a STAYCATION where you can visit someone else's world or find those like-minded people with whom you can relate! If you have a book recommendation, please email [Linneam01@gmail.com](mailto:Linneam01@gmail.com) with your addition to "The BOOKSHELF."

# *WRNC Membership Renewal*

*by Ann Rogers, Membership Committee*



**DON'T FORGET** to pay your annual \$15 dues to renew your WRNC membership! Your membership just might be EXPIRED RIGHT NOW! The fiscal year runs from May 1 through April 30 of the next year. Regardless of when we receive your dues during the year, the fee will cover that period. Remember, this change was made in 2019 to avoid confusion when the dues payment was formerly included in our symposium registration. Benefits for WRNC members include:



photos by John Althouse

- Reduced symposium registration fee.
- Access to newsletter archives.
- Access to Membership Directory.
- Option to appear in the Wildlife Rehabilitator Directory.
- Directory Information made available to the public.
- Eligibility to apply for enclosure grants.

Visit our website (with a new look!), at <https://ncwildliferehab.org/membership-renewal/> to join or renew. Belonging to Wildlife Rehabilitators of North Carolina, Inc. (WRNC) helps expand your network with other rehabilitators across the state so we all can share skill sets and knowledge with each other through face-to-face contact and formal training. Also, our annual symposium provides the necessary training for new permits, as well as our annual renewal requirements. WRNC worked for years to encourage the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) to allow RVS licenses among our ranks, and we were instrumental in its ultimate adoption and implementation. With our sustained developmental growth, WRNC has become a centralized training hub for North Carolina Wildlife Rehabilitators, as well as rehabbers from surrounding and more remote states. Please visit WRNC's website today to renew your membership!

*"Never Forget the Positive Difference You Make in the World and for Our Wildlife!"*

## Quinto's Comedy Corner by Linda Bergman-Althouse

### QUINTO SAYS: YOU might be a WILDLIFE REHABILITATOR

- IF . . . you know that Woodchucks are also called Whistle Pigs!
- IF . . . you call a rabbit that's raised indoors an in-grown hare!
- IF . . . you've syringe-fed something at 3 AM more times than you can count.
- IF . . . you get excited over perfectly formed poop.
- IF . . . you celebrate when an animal tries to bite you or hisses at you, because that means it's ready for release.



**WRNC MEMBERSHIP!** If you have a one-liner that describes the unique life and double-down passion of a Wildlife Rehabilitator (**tell it like it is!**) and you would like to share with **QUINTO** for his column, please send it to [lbergmanx@gmail.com](mailto:lbergmanx@gmail.com).

## WRNC Newsletter Schedule

Do you have a wildlife-related idea you would like to share with the WRNC membership? Please submit it to our editors for consideration. How about a relevant article you found somewhere? Send us a link so we can ask for permission to reprint it. Email all articles, ideas, comments, and questions to **Linda Bergman-Althouse** at [lbergmanx@gmail.com](mailto:lbergmanx@gmail.com) **Thank you!**

The WRNC newsletter is published four times a year. The deadlines for submissions are prior to:

**March 1<sup>st</sup>      June 1<sup>st</sup>      September 1<sup>st</sup>      December 1<sup>st</sup>**

## WRNC Newsletter Editor & Copy Editors

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