

Speaker Bios

Wildlife Rehabilitators of North Carolina Symposium 2026

Halley Buckanoff

(Euthanasia)

Halley is the Wildlife Center Supervisor at the North Carolina Zoo's Wildlife Rehabilitation Center overseeing rehabilitation practices, center operations, and mentoring of volunteers, interns and students. A graduate from Lewis and Clark College in Portland, OR with a Bachelor of Science in Biology, Halley is also Certified Veterinary Technician and Certified Wildlife Rehabilitator with 20+ years of emergency, exotic, zoo and wildlife medicine and husbandry experience. She is Co-Founder, Co-President of Association of Wildlife Veterinary Technicians and Nurses. She has completed graduate level course work in animal population management and animal nutrition as well as training in Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine for Veterinary Technicians and becoming a Certified Equine Sports Massage Therapist. She's an experienced field biologist mist-netting, trapping, banding, tracking and radio-collaring birds, currently holding a USFW banding permit and conducting post-release survival studies on commonly rehabilitated and reared backyard birds. She works with birds, herps, small mammals, bears and otters, just to name a few.

Katherine Brown

(Between Feathers and Fur: The Hidden Lives of Hippoboscids Flies and other Ecotparasites of Wildlife Concern)

Katherine serves as the Field Research Manager at the Nolan Laboratory of Vector-Borne and Zoonotic Diseases, where she oversees all tick surveillance for the state of South Carolina. She earned her MPH in Epidemiology from the University of South Carolina, focusing her research on developing innovative arthropod surveillance studies and integrating animal health, human health, and vector ecology within the One Health approach. Katherine established a collaborative research network to study avian louse flies and their potential role in the sylvatic cycle of the West Nile virus. Additionally, she has contributed to outbreak investigations concerning the invasive Asian longhorned tick, La Crosse virus, Lyme disease in North Carolina, and rickettsial infections in South Carolina. She also leads CDC-funded projects through the Southeastern Center of Excellence in Vector-Borne Diseases, focusing on implementing studies that address immediate public health threats posed by vector-borne

diseases.

Jean Chamberlain

(Basic Medical Math)

Jean has been a wildlife rehabilitator for over 30 years, specializing in raptors for over 20 years. Jean presents many wildlife education programs each year for Owl's Roost in the Forsyth County area. She designed and teaches WRNC's Basic Course and chairs the committee that organizes the symposium each year. Jean is past president for WRNC, is on WRNC's Board and is its treasurer and web administrator. Jean created Raptor ID on IWRC's website and is on the Curriculum Development Committee for IWRC's courses.

Jean is also active in Forsyth Audubon, participates in several area bird counts, the Climate Watch nuthatch survey, the NC Bird Atlas survey and coordinates the Pilot Mountain Hawk Watch each September. Jean is an advocate for exposing orphaned songbirds to their song while they are in rehab. She is currently recording birdsong, studying the song of our resident songbirds and creating a website for the recordings.

Sunny Cooper

(Large Avian Bandaging Lab, Raptor Ambassador Equipment Lab)

Sunny is the Director of Raptor Rehabilitation at the Carolina Raptor Center and a board member for WRNC. She has been working with raptors for over 10 years both in an education setting and rehabilitation. She has a B.S. in Biology and a B.S. in Environmental Studies from Warren Wilson College. Sunny currently oversees the Raptor Hospital raptor rehabilitation program and the medical needs of the Carolina Raptor Center's avian ambassadors. She enjoys teaching and has presented at WRNC symposium, Raptor Research Foundation Conference and Carolina Raptor Center webinars. She has been a part of several publications including Safety and Immunogenicity of Poultry Vaccine for Protecting Critically Endangered Avian Species against Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Virus.

Ruby Davis

(Intro to RVS, Intro to Raccoon Rehabilitation, Advance Raccoon Rehabilitation, Fox Rehab, Skunk Rehab)

Ruby Davis is the Director and Owner of NC Wildlife Rehab, an environmental scientist with Wildlands Engineering, and an instructor for the NC Wildlife Symposium. She has been a licensed wildlife rehabilitator for more than fifteen years and was the first individual in North Carolina to obtain a Rabies Vector Species (RVS) license from the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC). Ms. Davis holds a Bachelor of Science in Wildlife Biology from Lees-McRae College.

In her role as an environmental scientist, Ms. Davis focuses on hydrology, botany, and fauna monitoring for wetland and stream restoration projects, with additional experience conducting threatened and endangered species surveys. Her work integrates ecological research with practical restoration efforts to promote habitat resilience and biodiversity.

As an instructor for the NC Wildlife Symposium and a board member of the Wildlife Rehabilitators of North Carolina (WRNC), Ms. Davis is committed to advancing professional standards in wildlife rehabilitation. Her areas of expertise include trauma and emergency care, wildlife husbandry, and habitat management.

Driven by a passion for science, conservation, and education, Ms. Davis brings a depth of field experience and a collaborative spirit to her professional engagements.

Suzanne (Sue) DeArment

(Safely Capturing Wildlife: A Quick Guide for the Public, Waterfowl Rescue - Why so Challenging?)

Sue retired as a PA.- Licensed Wildlife Rehabilitator in 2013 after 21 years. In 1975, she received her BA in Biology, and in 1986 received her M.S. in Health Service Administration. Due to a life changing experience in 1986 during a trip to Africa she began working with wild animals. In 2015, she was appointed to the Pennsylvania Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Council, which she has chaired since 2017. Also in 2017, Sue saw an opportunity to further her work with PA native wild animals. She then founded Wildlife In Need Emergency Response of Pennsylvania (Wildlife In Need PA), a state - wide dispatch and capture organization. Those animals that are captured by volunteers are delivered to PA Wildlife Rehabilitation facilities.

Tara Frost

(Introduction to Wildlife Rehabilitation, Capture and Restraint of Small Mammals and Birds, Intro to Songbird ID and Diet Needs)

Tara Frost is a 2019 Lees McRae graduate, earning her BS degree in Wildlife Biology with a focus on wildlife rehabilitation. Upon Graduation Tara has been working at the May Wildlife Rehabilitation Center at Lees McRae College in Banner Elk NC as one of the fulltime wildlife rehabilitators, where she helps care for the 1,500+ patients a year, that includes but not limited to, opossums, squirrels, rabbits, reptiles, owls, hawks, and her favorite, songbirds. Her main duties include daily animal care, emergency triage, assisting the veterinarian with surgeries, monitoring anesthesia and patient status. Tara is also responsible for help in teaching the college students wildlife rehabilitation in and outside the center. She is currently a student at Appalachian State University studying Veterinary Technology with the goal of becoming a Registered Veterinary Technician to better help her patients and students. Tara, as of last year, is a board member of the WRNC and wants to continue improving the lives and care provided to our wildlife.

Nina Fischesser

(Talking to your vets)

Nina Fischesser has been a licensed rehabilitator since 1991, was the founding WRNC president, and works with Avian, small mammalian, and reptilian native NC species. She holds a MA in Environmental Education and Communication from Royal Roads University in Victoria, BC Canada, and a BA in Therapeutic Recreation from Southern Illinois University. Nina has been employed for 21 years at Lees-McRae College in Banner Elk, NC, as Director of the May Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, teaching wildlife rehabilitation and wildlife education through experientially based program as a BS in Wildlife Biology: Concentration Wildlife Rehabilitation. Nina was employed by the North Carolina Outward Bound School as a field instructor for 11 years, and is a strong believer in experiential education through wildlife rehabilitation and wilderness adventure.

Dr. Antonia Gardner, DVM

(Seabird Medicine, Zoonoses and You: Education, Control and Prevention)

Antonia Gardner graduated with her veterinary degree from the University of Florida in 2004, after which she completed a small animal/ exotic internship at Florida Veterinary Specialists and North Bay Animal Hospital. After that she moved to southeast Florida and began working

at the South Florida Wildlife Center (SFWC) in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. In 2014 she became the medical director at the SFWC and continued in that position until June 2022. As the medical director she was not only in charge of clinical operations and staff management, but also overseeing a very active undergraduate internship and a veterinary externship. Educating students on wildlife medicine is one of her passions, as is forging relationships between wildlife centers and the veterinary research community.

Dr. Gardner has presented at several conferences, including the American Association of Zoological Medicine Conference, the International Wildlife Rehabilitators' Council symposium, the Wildlife Disease Association's international symposium, the NC Wildlife Medicine symposium, and previously at the WRNC symposium. She is also a guest lecturer for the HSVMA, and presented a 4-part webinar series for the University of Miami's Avian and Wildlife Laboratory on wildlife medicine. Dr. Gardner authored a chapter on Virginia opossum in Medical Management of Wildlife Species: A Guide for Practitioners, and co-authored a chapter in the recently published Wildlife and Exotic Animal Ophthalmology textbook series. She also published a research article on cardiac measurements in flying foxes. In summer 2022, Dr. Gardner and her family relocated to Charlotte, North Carolina where she became one of the veterinarians at the Carolina Raptor Center in Huntersville and is also a consulting veterinarian at Carolina Wildlife Conservation Center located outside of Charlotte. She also provides care for canine and feline patient at Spay Neuter Clinic of the Carolinas, and is looking forward to becoming more involved in the wildlife community in North Carolina.

Dr. Sarah Hargrove, DVM, MSc

Sarah Hargrove is a 2006 graduate of the NCSU-College of Veterinary Medicine. Afterwards, she earned her MSc in Conservation Biology at the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology within the University of Kent at Canterbury. She has been living in Asheville, NC since 2008, working as both a small animal and exotics veterinarian and as the veterinarian for Appalachian Wildlife Refuge. Her interest in working with native wildlife grew while serving in the Peace Corps in Tanzania, and having summer breaks during vet school helping in research in Rwanda, working in Tanzania and South Africa, and 4 th year rotations in Thailand. She has been working with AWR since its inception over 10 years ago. She has particularly fallen in love with box turtles.

Colleen Hartman

(Raptor Ambassador Equipment)

Colleen Hartman, CPBT-KA, serves as the Director of Ambassador Programs & Education at Carolina Raptor Center and has been working with raptors since 2014. In her role, she leads the team responsible for caring for ambassador birds and delivering conservation-focused educational programs. Colleen brings extensive expertise in raptor training, husbandry, and welfare, and is experienced in assessing non-releasable raptors for placement, training new ambassador candidates, and managing bird shows and engaging free-flight presentations.

Peggy Hentz

(Wildlife Rehabilitation Success: Funding, Followers and Avoiding Fallout, Cottontails 101: From Call to Care, Cottontail Breakthroughs: Proven Techniques for Higher Survival)

Peggy Hentz is the founder and director of Red Creek Wildlife Center, Inc. (1991). A licensed wildlife rehabilitator, educator, and author, she has spent her career advancing the care and understanding of native wildlife.

Peggy serves on the Pennsylvania Rehabilitation and Education Advisory Council to the Pennsylvania Game Commission and has helped shape state-level standards for wildlife rehabilitators, including certification programs for threatened and endangered species and wildlife capture and transport training programs used in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. She is the author of *Rescuing Wildlife: A Guide to Injured and Orphaned Animals*, *Raising the Neonatal Cottontail*, and several children's books that combine her love of writing, poetry, and illustration.

Peggy also created Wildlife EDU, an online training resource, and the Wildlife Rehab Assistant App, supporting wildlife professionals with practical tools and calculators. She frequently speaks at national and regional conferences, sharing strategies for animal care and nonprofit management.

Peggy lives in Pennsylvania with her Standard Poodle, Seven, and her cat, Shortness.

Carla Johnson (*Handling Wildlife Calls*, *Zoonosis: Sanitation/Keeping it Clean*) Carla has been rehabbing for over 30 years, is on the board of WRNC. She has coordinated wildlife rehabilitation classes through the local community college in Winston-Salem, NC and has presented countless environmental education programs to surrounding communities. She is on the symposium committee and helped put together and teach the refresher course taught by

WRNC. In her spare time, she rescues dogs from puppy mills and natural disaster situations, is the southeast regional coordinator, treasurer and a board member for Chihuahua Rescue & Transport, Inc., a national 501(c)3 organization and she enjoys working to place unwanted hairless breed dogs. She also is treasurer and a board member of Humane Solution Spay & Neuter Program that offers low cost S/N vouchers to people in the Winston-Salem and surrounding areas

Rebekah Kriston

(Apprentice Permit and New Rehabber Q&A, Is Mentoring for You?)

Rebekah Kriston is the proud cofounder of A Wild Life: Center for Wildlife Rescue, Rehabilitation, and Release in Lumberton, NC. She never anticipated that she would become a wildlife rehabilitator although she has always had a love for animals and taking care of those that were injured. Rebekah is a graduate of North Carolina State University and Appalachian State University and holds a Master's Degree in Communication Disorders. She practiced speech pathology for nine years and following the birth of her daughter, Lilly, she became a stay-at-home mom. During this time, her work with rehabilitating wildlife gradually increased and she saw the great need for a local place of rehabilitation for the wild animals in her area as well as the need for public education about those animals. After collaboration with a wildlife rehabilitator friend, A Wild Life was founded. Rebekah currently holds a federal license to rehabilitate raptors and a state license to rehabilitate small mammals. She is planning to obtain the RVS license and has completed the courses necessary to move forward in this area. Rebekah currently lives in Lumberton, NC with her husband, daughter, six month old pug, two rescue cats, four parakeets, three rabbits, and a host of other animals. She enjoys writing music, singing, going to the beach, fishing, reading, traveling, and of course, all things animals!

Dr. Gregory Lewbart

(Interesting Case Studies of Reptiles and Amphibians, Turtle Shell Repair Lab)

Worked for a large wholesaler of ornamental fishes before joining the faculty at the NC State College of Veterinary Medicine in 1993, where he is Professor of Aquatic, Wildlife, and Zoological Medicine. He is a diplomate of the American and European Colleges of Zoological Medicine and has authored or co-authored over 300 scientific articles and book chapters. Greg has made 32 trips to the Galápagos doing wildlife conservation

work. He is the faculty founder of the Turtle Rescue Team, a student-led wildlife clinic that has treated over 9,500 patients.

Betty O'Leary

(Avian Physical Exam Lab)

Betty has 25 years of raptor experience at Carolina Raptor Center. She worked with birds in rehabilitation and permanent resident birds used for education. She operated a hawk watch and raptor banding station during fall migration at Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge for four years, and assisted with two other stations for 10 years. She enjoys teaching others on raptor rehabilitation and care, and performing necropsies. Betty currently volunteers at Nature's Nanny Wildlife Rehabilitation in Chesapeake Virginia.

Tammy O'Neil

(Rehabilitating the Elusive Bobcat, Beavers - From Orphaned Kits to Ecosystem Engineers, Bat Rehab - Care for our Nocturnal Neighbors)

Tammy O'Neil is the Wildlife Care Manager for 31 years at Lake Metroparks Wildlife Center. She has a Bachelors Degree in Zoology, Masters in Environmental Management. Tammy presented at several state and national conferences on topics ranging from raising baby mammals to diseases, emergency planning, necropsies and bobcats, beavers and bats. She also served as a board member for Ohio Wildlife Rehabilitators Association and was a committee member for Ohio and Midwest Bat Working Group.

Alejandra Olvera

(The Art and Science of Opossum Rehabilitation, H2O Yes: The Importance of Water Quality in Aquatic Turtle Husbandry)

Alejandra Olvera is the Wildlife Rehabilitation Supervisor at the esteemed Wildlife Center of Virginia, where she plays a pivotal role in the rehabilitation and care of over 4,000 injured, orphaned, and distressed native wildlife per year. WCV is an internationally recognized teaching hospital for wildlife medicine and clinical research. Alex has enhanced and brought innovation to the centers' animal care protocols using her practical experience obtained from over a decade in wildlife conservation and zoological medicine. She has focused the

past few years enhancing reptile by incorporating bioactive setups and implementing outcome-based husbandry in all patient care. Alex will continue to be a driving force in the field of wildlife rehabilitation, hoping to inspire other to join the effort to apply evidence-based protocols and to protect these magnificent animals for generations to come.

Falyn Owens

(Rabies Species Regulations, Updates from the NCWRC, Expert Panel: Status of Wildlife Disease with Population Level Impacts in NC)

Falyn Owens is the extension biologist for the NC Wildlife Resources Commission. As such, she provides strategic outreach that promotes coexistence between people and wildlife. Her work primarily focuses on wildlife health and addressing human-wildlife conflicts. Prior to her work in North Carolina, Falyn spent over a decade conducting research and management on endangered songbirds, white-tailed deer, and urban wildlife. Falyn holds a Master of Science in Wildlife and Renewable Natural Resources from Louisiana State University.

Dr. Tracey K. Ritzman, DVM, Dipl. ABVP (American Board of Veterinary Practitioners) Board Certified in Avian & Exotic Companion Mammal Practice

(Exotic Mammal Wound Care and Healing and Avian Wound Care and Healing Part 1 and 2)

Dr. Ritzman is a native of northern Ohio. She obtained her undergraduate degree from North Carolina State University College with a B.S. degree in Zoology and completed her Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree from North Carolina State College of Veterinary Medicine in 1995. Dr. Ritzman is dual board-certified by the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners in Avian and Exotic Companion Mammal practice. The board certification process involves many years of additional training after veterinary school in medicine and surgery for the specific species, and a rigorous examination process. Dr. Ritzman is currently the only dual board-certified veterinary specialist through ABVP for Avian and Exotic Companion Mammals in the state of North Carolina! Dr. Ritzman's veterinary interests include avian and exotic medicine and surgery, wildlife rehabilitation and conservation, and nutrition. Her clinical work focuses on non-traditional animals such as birds (companion and wild), exotic mammals (ferrets, rabbits, rodents, chinchillas, guinea pigs), reptiles, and fish. She also cares for dogs and cats. Dr. Ritzman works at Whole Pet Veterinary Hospital – Mountain Island, in Charlotte, N.C. and is also veterinarian for the Carolina Raptor Center

in Huntersville, N.C. Dr. Ritzman supports the veterinary community through teaching in avian and exotic animal medicine. She is a frequent speaker at national and regional veterinary meetings and has published numerous veterinary articles. Teaching and mentoring are important to Dr. Ritzman. She strives to be a positive role model for veterinary students, veterinary technicians and new graduate veterinarians entering the field of veterinary medicine. Through mentoring, Dr. Ritzman hopes to “pay it forward” to the next generation of avian, exotic pet and wildlife professionals. One of the most rewarding things she does as a veterinarian is to provide care at the Carolina Raptor Center for severely injured wild raptors with orthopedic injuries such as wing or leg fractures. Her surgical care allows many of these birds to be able to recover, regain their ability to fly and hunt, allowing them to be released back into the wild to live a free and wonderful life.

Dr. Ritzman, her husband, and son live in Huntersville, North Carolina.

Allison Rudisill

Alli is a 2nd-year Doctor of Veterinary Medicine candidate at North Carolina State University with interests in large animal and wildlife medicine. She is a Wildlife Husbandry Technician at Appalachian Wildlife Refuge in Western North Carolina, where she has been involved since before they were founded in 2014. Although she has over a decade of experience with Appalachian Wild, her wildlife rehabilitation experience started when she was 8 years old, as she closely accompanied Savannah Trantham in her wildlife rehabilitation efforts. With decades of hands-on wildlife care, she brings experience in husbandry, rehabilitation, veterinary care, and species-specific management of various local NC wildlife species. Her plan after graduation is to join Appalachian Wildlife Refuge to continue learning about, treating, and advocating for local injured and orphaned wildlife! When not in school or working with wildlife, Alli is immensely involved in sheep and goat management and livestock judging and showing.

Dr. Olivia Schiermeyer

(Snake Fungal Disease: Medical Management and Husbandry, Medical Management of Virginia Possums)

Dr. Olivia Schiermeyer is the Veterinary Research Fellow at the Wildlife Center of Virginia. She completed her Bachelor of Science in biology at the University of Mary Washington in 2016, then earned her Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree at the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine in 2020. During her veterinary education, Dr. Olivia completed externships

with several wildlife rehabilitation centers in the U.S. including the California Wildlife Center, the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center of Minnesota, Tristate Bird Rescue and Research Inc., the Marine Mammal Center, and the Wildlife Center of Virginia, as well as ARCAS in Guatemala. Her experiences with wildlife as a student solidified her love of the field of wildlife rehabilitation medicine and for all of our wild creatures. After receiving her DVM, Dr. Olivia spent two years working as a shelter veterinarian in Wisconsin before moving back to Virginia. Dr. Olivia loves treating all of our native wildlife but is particularly fond of songbirds, bats, and snakes. She also has a new-found love of working with Virginia opossums. The parts of her job she loves the most are learning new techniques and creative solutions to care for her patients and performing surgical procedures, especially for opossums.

Dr. David Scott

(Aspergillus in Raptors, Raptor Care Study, Avian Orthopedics)

David Scott earned a BS in Electrical Engineering from the Univ. of Illinois in 1988 and his DVM in 1997. He was the staff veterinarian at the Carolina Raptor Center for 14 years where he oversaw the medical care of up to 1000 injured birds of prey each year.

His specialties include orthopedic surgery and bioinformatics and he has developed the RaptorMed medical management software system in use at many major rehabilitation facilities worldwide.

In addition to the 3rd edition of his book, "Raptor Medicine, Surgery and Rehabilitation", he has also published "The red-tailed hawk: A surgical dissection", a detailed, layer-by-layer dissection of a common wildlife species.

Savannah Trantham, CWR

Savannah started her journey as a wildlife rehabilitator more than 20 years ago alongside her start in the zoo community. Starting out with small mammals and herptiles but ultimately branching out to many species. Savannah graduated from Lees McRae College with a B.S. in biology with a concentration in wildlife rehabilitation in 2008 and returned to the AZA and zoo community for a total of 18 years specializing in small and mid-sized mammals and herptiles. During her AZA career she was able to continue to focus on wildlife rehabilitation through her facility. In 2014 she co-founded Appalachian Wildlife Refuge in Candler, NC and shifted to full

time rehabilitation and Appalachian Wild in 2018. When not working with wildlife, Savannah helps run her family farm where she and her family have raised wool sheep and goats for more than 30 years.

Miranda Turner

(Expert Panel: Status of Wildlife Disease with Population-Level Impacts in NC)

Miranda Turner is the state Wildlife Health Biologist with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. In this role she works to manage native wildlife populations, conducts surveillance and monitoring of wildlife diseases, responds to emerging pathogens and zoonotic disease events, directs disease related research, and educates the public about wildlife health topics. Prior to this position she worked on wildlife health projects in small mammals, white tailed deer, and bats. Miranda holds a Master of Science in Ecology from Stony Brook University.

Tonya Weil

(Apprentice Permit & New Rehabber Q&A, Is Mentoring for You?)

Tonya Weil holds federal permits for all bird species and state permits for small mammals, reptiles, amphibians and birds. Tonya stumbled into wildlife rehabilitation while trying to find that one thing she needed in life, passion in work! In 2013, while attending UNCW for Environmental Science, she completed an internship with Toni O'Neil at Possumwood Acres Wildlife Sanctuary in Hubert NC. She decided wildlife rehabilitation was what had been missing in her life and dove in. She became the Education Coordinator at Possumwood Acres and set out to make the world a better place for wildlife by educating the public. In 2019, she started at Cape Fear Raptor Center. Raptors have always been her soft spot and CFRC has allowed her to focus on them and grow as a wildlife rehabilitator. CFRC was founded by Dr. Joni Shimp and having a DVM and falconer as her mentor has allowed her to obtain valuable and advanced skills in wildlife rehab. This is where Tonya completed her Eagle mentorship. In 2020, When the Raptor Center went to education only, Tonya and long-time friend Kaitlan Adkins, formed Wild at Heart Wildlife Sanctuary. They specialize in Eagles and Raptors but take in whatever needs help. Before wildlife rehab, Tonya was a Marine and proudly served her country as a CH-46 aviation electrician and aerial gunner. She was meritoriously promoted twice and left the Marine Corps as a Sergeant. She obtained her AA in Liberal Arts from National University in La Jolla CA. Her husband Chris, retired from active-duty Marine Corps as a Gunnery Sergeant in 2020. They

have an amazing daughter, Tiffany, that attends the Onslow Early College High School and many furry and feathered family members to keep them busy in their free time (aka not baby season).