

Beginner Track

SAFELY CAPTURING WILDLIFE: A QUICK GUIDE FOR THE PUBLIC

Presenter: Sue DeArment

This presentation will focus on calls where the person who found the animal can safely contain the animal without causing harm to that person, the animal, and anyone around them.

Techniques will be discussed that anyone can follow when the proper conditions allow.

COTTONTAILS 101: FROM CALL TO CARE

Presenter: Peggy Hentz

Success with cottontails begins long before the intake—it starts with the phone call. Knowing when and how to keep babies with their mother is often the key to saving lives. This session explores what true success looks like, how to triage compassionately, and when intervention helps—or harms. We'll cover stabilization, accurate aging, and creating an effective care plan that sets each patient on the path to recovery and release.

COTTONTAIL BREAKTHROUGHS: PROVEN TECHNIQUES FOR HIGHER SURVIVAL

Presenter: Peggy Hentz

Consistent success in raising neonatal eastern cottontails is not only possible—it's repeatable. Discover the newest advancements, feeding protocols, and handling innovations that are transforming outcomes. Learn how to reduce mortality, streamline care, and replicate success from litter to litter. Whether you're refining your methods or seeking that breakthrough moment, you'll leave inspired and equipped to raise more bunnies to release.

BASIC MEDICAL TERMINOLOGY

Presenter: Jean Chamberlain

Have you ever been to pick up an animal from a veterinarian and felt like you were hearing a different language as they went through the patient's condition and prognosis (likely outcome or future for the patient)? Well, medical terminology is like a new language for many new, or non-medical rehabilitators. This lecture aims to teach some of the more common terminology, used in caring for wildlife in the rehabilitation and veterinary settings.

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF OPOSSUM REHABILITATION

Presenter: Alejandra Olvera

This presentation introduces the fundamentals of opossum rehabilitation, focusing on the balance between evidence-based care and compassionate husbandry. Topics include common reasons opossums are admitted to rehabilitation, techniques for hand-rearing healthy juveniles, and the application of outcome-based husbandry to support natural behaviors and successful release. By blending scientific understanding with practical experience, this session aims to help future veterinarians and rehabilitators provide effective, welfare-centered care for North America's only marsupial.

BEYOND SURVIVAL: A FRESH APPROACH TO NEONATAL SQUIRREL REHAB

Presenter: Betsy D. Shank, CWR

Not all squirrel rehabilitation methods are created equal. In this session, we will discuss proven, hands-on approach to raising Eastern Grey Squirrels from birth to three weeks old; an approach that challenges traditional methods and focuses on helping neonates *thrive*, not just survive.

BEYOND THE BOTTLE: ADVANCING SQUIRREL CARE FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

Presenter: Betsy D. Shank, CWR

As Eastern Grey Squirrels grow beyond the neonatal stage, their needs change rapidly and so should our methods. In this follow-up session, we will continue with the "Beyond Survival" approach, focusing on how to raise healthy, confident juveniles ready for the wild.

RVS Track

READY FOR RVS REHABBING?!

Presenter: Ruby Davis

This course provides wildlife rehabilitators with the essential knowledge and regulatory guidance needed to safely and legally care for North Carolina's Rabies Vector Species (RVS)—raccoons, foxes, skunks, bobcats, and bats. Students will learn species basics, safe handling and quarantine procedures, zoonotic disease precautions, and requirements set by the NC Wildlife Resources Commission.

Topics include intake assessment, neonatal and juvenile care, appropriate housing and enrichment, common medical issues, and release planning. Emphasis is placed on public safety, rabies risk management, and compliance with state laws. This course is ideal for beginners preparing to work with RVS or support licensed rehab facilities.

SHOULD YOU REHAB RACCOONS?

Presenter: Ruby Davis

This introductory course provides the foundational knowledge and practical skills needed to care for sick, injured, and orphaned raccoons. Participants will learn the essential principles of raccoon biology, behavior, nutrition, housing, and medical needs, as well as safe handling practices and legal considerations required for ethical and compliant rehabilitation.

We will explore topics such as natural history, intake procedures, infant and juvenile care, common injuries and illnesses, enrichment, zoonotic disease precautions, and preparing raccoons for release back into the wild. Emphasis is placed on humane practices, public safety, and supporting the animal's physical and psychological development.

This course is ideal for beginner rehabilitators, animal care volunteers, veterinary assistants, or anyone interested in supporting raccoon rescue and rehabilitation efforts. No prior experience is required, but a commitment to compassionate, responsible wildlife care is essential.

COMPREHENSIVE RACCOON CARE: DIAGNOSTICS, TREATMENT AND RELEASE

STRATEGIES

Presenter: Ruby Davis

The course is designed for experienced wildlife rehabilitators seeking to deepen their expertise in the complex medical, behavioral, and developmental needs of raccoons. Building on foundational rehabilitation skills, this course explores advanced diagnostics, treatment protocols, enrichment strategies, and release planning to support successful outcomes for challenging or high-risk cases.

Participants will learn to manage severe trauma, infectious diseases, and neurological conditions; develop advanced infant and juvenile care techniques; design species-specific housing for long-term cases; and implement behaviorally informed enrichment to promote natural instincts and reduce habituation. Additional training includes evaluating candidates for soft and hard release, addressing human–wildlife conflict issues, coordinating with veterinarians and agencies, and developing data-driven rehabilitation plans.

The material will help students refine their ability to assess complex cases, troubleshoot rehabilitation challenges, and make informed decisions that prioritize animal welfare and public safety. This course is ideal for rehabilitators with prior experience caring for raccoons who want to advance their clinical skills, expand their problem-solving abilities, and strengthen their readiness to manage demanding cases.

SKUNKS & THE STINK'N TRUTH!

Presenter: Ruby Davis

This introductory course offers the essential knowledge and skills needed to provide safe, ethical, and effective care for orphaned, injured, and ill skunks. Students will gain a strong foundation in skunk biology, behavior, natural history, and legal considerations while learning practical techniques for handling and rehabilitation.

Course content includes species identification, safe and low-stress handling methods, neonate and juvenile care, nutritional requirements, common medical issues, intake procedures, appropriate housing and enrichment, and strategies to minimize stress and prevent habituation. Special emphasis is placed on managing scent gland challenges, understanding skunk defense behaviors, and ensuring both animal welfare and human safety.

Participants will also explore behavioral development, pre-release conditioning, release strategies, and how to evaluate a skunk's readiness for return to the wild. Designed for beginning rehabilitators, animal care volunteers, and veterinary assistants, this course equips students with the confidence and competence to support successful outcomes in skunk rehabilitation.

HELPING THE CLEVER CANIDS: FOX REHAB ESSENTIALS

Presenter: Ruby Davis

This introductory course provides the essential knowledge and hands-on skills required to care for orphaned, injured, or ill foxes. Students will learn the fundamentals of fox biology, behavior, nutrition, and natural history, along with the ethical and legal responsibilities involved in fox rehabilitation. The course covers species identification, safe capture and handling, infant neonate care, common medical issues, intake assessments, appropriate housing and enrichment, zoonotic disease precautions, and strategies to prevent imprinting and habituation. Participants will also explore the behavioral development of young foxes, techniques for fostering natural hunting and survival skills, and best practices for preparing foxes for release back into the wild. Designed for new rehabilitators, volunteers, and animal care professionals, this course emphasizes humane, evidence-based practices and public safety. No prior experience is required—only a commitment to responsible wildlife care and a willingness to learn.

REHABILITATING RABIES VECTOR SPECIES IN NC: LICENSING AND REGULATIONS

Presenters: Falyn Owens and Christina Stylianos

Rehabilitation of Rabies Vector Species (RVS) requires additional safeguards for rehabilitators, volunteers, facilities, and enclosures. This presentation will outline these requirements and the process to get licensed to work with rabies vector species in NC.

REHABILITATING THE ELUSIVE BOBCAT

Presenter: Tammy O'Neil

Join us for an in-depth session on the specialized care, growth, and release preparation of bobcats in wildlife rehabilitation. This presentation will cover techniques for raising orphaned kits, minimizing human imprinting, safety, and creating naturalistic environments that encourage essential wild behaviors. Attendees will learn about enrichment strategies, diet progression, and post-release monitoring. Whether you're new to working with bobcats or looking to refine your current practices, this session allows us to share what we have learned over the years rehabilitating this apex predator.

BAT REHAB - CARE FOR OUR NOCTURNAL NEIGHBORS

Presenter: Tammy O'Neil

Discover the specialized techniques involved in the care and rehabilitation of bats, from tiny orphaned pups to adults recovering from injury. This session will cover intake assessment, handling, safety, feeding and flight conditioning, hibernating, and safe release practices.

Vet Lectures

MEDICAL MANAGEMENT OF VIRGINIA OPOSSUMS

Presenter: Dr. Olivia Schiermeyer, DVM

The Virginia opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*) is North America's only native marsupial, playing a crucial role in its ecosystem by controlling insect populations and contributing to nutrient cycling. Despite their ecological significance, these animals face numerous challenges, including habitat loss, vehicular accidents, and urbanization. This presentation provides a comprehensive overview of medical management for Virginia opossums, focusing on common presenting conditions resulting from trauma, infectious disease, and more. Several real-life cases presented to the Wildlife Center of Virginia illustrate practical applications of rehabilitation

techniques, including handling complex injuries and successful treatment regimens. This presentation equips attendees with the knowledge and tools needed to improve rehabilitation outcomes and address the challenges these resilient yet vulnerable marsupials face.

SNAKE FUNGAL DISEASE: MEDICAL MANAGEMENT AND HUSBANDRY

Presenter: Dr. Oliva Schiermeyer, DVM

Snake fungal disease (SFD) is an emerging disease caused by the fungal pathogen, *Ophidiomyces ophiodiicola* in snake populations in the Eastern and Midwestern United States. This presentation provides an overview on the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of snake fungal disease in a rehabilitation setting. This presentation will also address appropriate husbandry for snakes affected by snake fungal disease to improve patient outcomes.

AVIAN WOUND HEALING AND CARE (2 CLASSES)

Presenter: Dr Tracey Ritzman DVM Dipl. ABVP

Wound management in the avian patient requires a thorough understanding of the mechanisms of wound healing in birds and knowledge of treatment options. For wild birds, potential causes of wounds include trauma, bite wounds inflicted by other animals in the environment, barb wire injury, gunshot wounds, constriction injury, bacterial, fungal, parasitic and viral infections, cutaneous neoplasia, and thermal or frostbite injury. The unique anatomy of avian skin and its inflammatory processes present challenges to the successful treatment or repair of skin and soft tissue wounds. Wound healing is a complex process of host response to injury, which leads to regeneration of tissue, vascular supply, and epithelialization. Selection of a treatment plan for optimization of wound healing requires an understanding of the specific tissue-healing processes in the avian patient. Birds have a very thin dermis and very little extra adjacent skin compared to mammals, which presents some unique challenges for wound care. Protection of the wound area with bandages during the healing process is crucial to management of wounds in avian species. Avian patients with wounds can be challenging to treat, as they are prone to focusing their attention on the wound site, often causing disruption of the wound or bandage materials with their beaks. This presentation will review the principles of wound healing in birds, types of wound care available, current treatment options including new treatment options, principles of bandage care and case examples.

EXOTIC MAMMAL WOUND HEALING AND CARE

Presenter: Dr. Tracey Ritzman DMV Dipl. ABVP

Wound management in the wild mammal patient requires a thorough understanding of the mechanisms of wound healing in mammals and knowledge of treatment options. For wild mammals, potential causes of wounds include trauma, bite wounds inflicted by other animals in the environment, vehicular injury, bacterial, fungal, parasitic and viral infections, cutaneous neoplasia, and thermal or frostbite injury. The anatomy of mammalian skin and its inflammatory processes often respond well to the treatment or repair of skin and soft tissue wounds. Wound healing is a complex process of host response to injury, which leads to regeneration of tissue, vascular supply, and epithelialization. Selection of a treatment plan for optimization of wound healing requires an understanding of the specific tissue-healing processes in the mammal patient. Protection of the wound area with bandages during the healing process is crucial to management of wounds in wild animals. Many mammalian patients with wounds are prone to focusing their attention on the wound site, often causing disruption of the wound or bandage materials. This presentation will review the principles of wound healing in wild mammals, types of wound care available, current treatment options including new treatment options, principles of bandage care and case examples.

ASPERGILLOSIS IN RAPTORS

Presenter: Dr David Scott

Aspergillus infections are a very common and important part of raptor medicine. This presentation will discuss the various presentations and their diagnosis as well as detailed treatment protocols. We will also cover risk factors and prevention measures.

RAPTOR CASE STUDY

Presenter: Dr David Scott

During this presentation, we will discuss several interesting and clinically relevant raptor cases. This is an interactive discussion so bring your questions regarding any cases that you may have.

AVIAN ORTHOPEDICS

Presenter: Dr David Scott

Trauma resulting in orthopedic injuries are very common in wildlife rehabilitation and this is especially important for raptors. This session is intended for those (both veterinarians and rehab staff) interested in treating fractures. We will discuss the equipment and supplies needed, and as time allows, we will talk about the appropriate way to treat most common fractures.

INTERESTING CASE STUDIES OF REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

Presenter: Dr. Gregory Lewbart, DVM

In this talk I will present a series of medical cases of wild amphibians and reptiles. The case list will include husbandry, environmental, medical, and surgical management. There will be a focus on cases that might present to a clinic or rehabilitation in North Carolina.

THE STUPID THINGS SNAKES EAT AND HOW WE TREAT THEM

Presenter: Savannah Trantham, CWR and Dr. Sarah Hargrove DVM, MSc

Snakes can't read and they can't tell the difference between fake and real when it comes to eggs for food! Join us for a look into our protocol and successes with foreign body obstructions, removal, and healing to release in eastern rat snakes. Appalachian Wildlife Refuge sees multiple snakes each year with foreign body ingestion and through many years of trial with protocols, have found what works well in our setting resulting in released, healthy snakes, minus the golf ball or other items!

RESPONSIBLE ANTIBIOTIC USE FOR WILDLIFE; IT'S NOT JUST BAYTRIL

Presenter: Dr. Sarah Hargrove, DVM, MSc

In livestock animal medicine, veterinarians have limitations as to which medications they can use by law, while companion animal medicine has a wider range of options. Wildlife medicine, with the wide range of species cared for and limited studies available of medication efficacy, tends to rely on a few 'tried and true' options, all of which are off-label. As a group, we need to start becoming more aware of the importance of using first or second generation antibiotics before moving to the 'big gun' antibiotics. Antimicrobial resistance in humans and animals is becoming more prevalent and wildlife populations can play a part in spreading this. Let's look at what options we have in treating our patients before they are released back into our native populations.

General

WATERFOWL RESCUE - WHY SO CHALLENGING?

Presenter: Sue DeArment

One of the most challenging rescues usually involves waterfowl.

This presentation will explain the reasons waterfowl rescues are so challenging. Learn about waterfowl adaptations, and how you can assess the situation and approach the rescue in a way that you may be able to succeed in capturing. Different rescue techniques will be discussed that can be used depending on the situation.

UPDATES FOR THE NC WILDLIFE RESOURCE COMMISSION

Presenters: Falyn Owens, Christina Stylianos, and Miranda Turner (pending availability)

Learn what wildlife rehab laws changed on January 1, 2026 and how they impact you. NCWRC biologists will also provide updates about emerging/ongoing wildlife disease outbreaks (e.g., Chronic Wasting Disease, avian influenza, mange, and distemper), impacts from Hurricane Helene, and other developing issues.

EXPERT PANEL: STATUS OF WILDLIFE DISEASE WITH POPULATION-LEVEL IMPACTS IN NC

Presenters: Dr. Carl Williams, Miranda Turner, Falyn Owens

Wildlife health experts from the NC Wildlife Resources Commission and NC Department of Health & Human Services will answer your questions about ongoing and emerging disease outbreaks, with a focus on diseases with zoonotic potential and/or have population-level impacts (e.g., rabies, avian influenza, Chronic Wasting Disease, mange, distemper, and others). Bring your questions and curiosity!

WILDLIFE REHAB SUCCESS: FUNDING, FOLLOWERS, AND AVOIDING FALLOUT

Presenter: Peggy Hentz

What makes a wildlife center truly thrive? In this fast-paced, no-fluff session, we'll explore the keys to long-term success from fundraising, grant writing, and creative income streams to building a loyal volunteer base and an engaged online following. Discover how to keep your supporters energized and your reputation strong while steering clear of the common pitfalls that can derail even the best efforts. Whether you're just starting out or ready to take your organization to the next level, expect real-world examples, practical strategies, and a few hard-hitting truths you won't hear anywhere else.

BETWEEN FEATHERS AND FUR: THE HIDDEN LIVES OF HIPPOBOSCID FLIES AND OTHER ECTOPARASITES OF WILDLIFE CONCERN

Presenter: Katherine Brown

This class explores the biology, ecology, and public health importance of ectoparasitic arthropods affecting wildlife, with a focus on the family Hippoboscidae (louse flies, keds, and flat flies). Attendees will gain an insight into taxonomy, life cycles, host associations, and pathogen transmission dynamics of key ectoparasite groups, including ticks and mosquitoes. Emphasis is placed on host-parasite interactions, vector competence, and current surveillance methods used at the University of South Carolina and the Institute for Infectious Disease Translational Research. The presentation will also discuss the interface between wildlife, domestic animals, and human health in a One Health context.

H2-OH YEA! IMPORTANCE OF WATER QUALITY FOR AQUATIC TURTLE CARE

Presenter: Alejandra Olvera

Clean water isn't just a luxury for aquatic turtles—it's the foundation of their health and wellbeing. This presentation dives into the process of developing and implementing a comprehensive water quality protocol designed specifically for aquatic turtle enclosures. Starting with a review of key parameters—pH, salinity, ammonia, nitrite, nitrate, and temperature—the project explores how these factors influence turtle health and behavior. We'll highlight the vital role of biological filtration, routine water testing, and staff training in maintaining stable, healthy systems. The result is a practical, replicable protocol that keeps tanks balanced, turtles thriving, and caretakers confident in their aquatic care routines.

ZOONOSES AND YOU: EDUCATION, CONTROL, AND PREVENTION

Presenter: Antonia Gardner, DVM

According to the CDC, the majority of emerging diseases are zoonotic or vector-borne. This number is likely rising as human proximity to wildlife, the spread of global travel and commerce, and human impacts to the environment increase. Those of us working with animals, especially wildlife, are more vulnerable to these diseases than the general public. We also have a responsibility to educate ourselves and the public about zoonotic disease. With that in mind, this session's goal is to discuss the sources and risk factors for zoonotic diseases and routes of transmission. Preventative strategies to reduce the risk of transmission of zoonotic diseases to veterinarians, rehabilitators, and volunteers are also discussed. Finally, this presentation gives an overview of specific zoonotic diseases, their pathophysiology, routes of transmission, diagnosis, and treatment.

SEABIRD MEDICINE – AN OVERVIEW

Presenter: Antonia Gardner, DVM

One of the joys of doing wildlife rehabilitation in a coastal environment is working with the unique birds that call the oceans home – seabirds. However, with the special adaptations that they have evolved come special challenges for both rehabilitation and medicine. Treating a species that is adapted for an aquatic environment on land can be frustrating and require special resources.

This presentation discusses the specific requirements for rehabilitation and handling many of these species have. It also discusses some of the unique medical presentations you may see when dealing with these birds, and some tips for success with them.

Although currently mainly working with land-based species, Dr. Gardner's background as a veterinarian at the South Florida Wildlife Center in Fort Lauderdale, FL gave her the opportunity to work extensively with these birds. They are fascinating species, and she is thrilled to share this information with those of you that may encounter these birds on North Carolina's shores.

BEAVERS - FROM ORPHANED KITS TO ECOSYSTEM ENGINEERS

Presenter: Tammy O'Neil

This session explores the unique challenges and rewards of rehabilitating beavers, from bottle-fed kits to release-ready adults. Presenters will discuss proper housing, diet, socialization, and the importance of pairing young beavers to promote natural behaviors such as dam-building and lodge construction. Attendees will gain insight into the gradual release process and habitat preparation that support successful reintroduction. Learn how to help these remarkable animals thrive in care and return to their vital role in creating and maintaining healthy wetlands.

WOUND MANAGEMENT IN TURTLES

Presenter: Savannah Trantham, CWR

While turtles seem to be quite invincible they find themselves in some pretty significant predicaments with gnarly injuries to heal from. In this lecture we will touch on the case examples we see at Appalachian Wildlife Refuge and how we have found success in treating them. From extensive intervention to a full hands off approach we have seen a lot of variety in the way turtles seem to magically heal with the appropriate support.

NETWORKING AND WHY IT CAN MAKE OR BREAK YOUR SUCCESS

Presenter: Savannah Trantham, CWR

Join the conversation on why networking with your colleagues and other rehabilitators and wildlife facilities is so important beyond having someone to vent to because 'they get it!'. Layering in the importance of also having your community, neighborhood, local animal control agencies, animal shelters, vet offices, state agencies, and more in your fold. It takes a village to make a difference for wildlife and you are in an unique position to be the gravitational pull to inspire a big difference - right or wrong.

EUTHANASIA IS NOT A FAILURE

Presenter: Halley Buckanoff

Euthanasia is one of the outcomes that wildlife rehabbers are faced with. Having to make life and death decisions can and should be hard. But it doesn't mean that the rehabber has failed. This presentation will go over some of the legalities, methodology, as well as ethics of Euthanasia and how we can become more comfortable in our decision making for euthanizing patients.

Labs

RAPTOR AMBASSADOR EQUIPMENT WORKSHOP (2 HOUR LAB)

Presenter: Colleen Hartman and Sunny Cooper

This lab will focus on creating and applying equipment for educational ambassador raptors, as well as evaluating durability and determining when replacements are needed. Participants will learn how to make leather anklets, along with leather and paracord jesses. There will also be hands-on opportunities to craft equipment that participants can take home for their own use.

LARGE BIRD BANDAGING LAB (2 HOUR LAB)

Presenter: Sunny Cooper

This lab will focus on understanding the purpose of a good bandage and how to apply them. Anatomy and function will be a large emphasis in this lab. There will be plenty of time for participants to practice wing wraps and leg splints on cadavers.

TURTLE SHELL REPAIR LAB (2 HOUR LAB)

Presenter: Dr Gregory Lewbart, DVM and Turtle Rescue Team Students

I will co-present this lab with a group of dedicated Turtle Rescue Team students. After a short (20-30 minutes) talk, attendees will be able to observe and then perform shell repair, feeding

tube placement, blood collection, and aural abscess management. Anatomy will be emphasized. Actual procedures will depend on the available specimens.

AVIAN PHYSICAL EXAM (2 HOUR LAB)

Presenter: Betty O'Leary

This lab covers the basics of an avian external anatomy and examination. Students are supplied with cadavers and an examination form to practice during class.

TUBE FEEDING FOR NUTRITION AND MEDICAL CARE (2 HOUR LAB)

Presenters: Savannah Trantham, CWR and Allison Rudisill

From tiny neonates to injured adults and everything in between, nutrition and hydration is essential to a full recovery and release. Rather you are simply maintaining a growing infant, trying to get medication into a stubborn goose, or helping a large large snapping turtle heal; tube/gavage feeding ability is something you need in your repertoire of rehabilitation skills. In this lecture we will touch on a variety of reasons and times tube feeding is not only appropriate, but essential. How tube feeding may increase your success rates. When to choose gavage feeding over other options. What items go through those tubes! What tubes to choose for various species and ages. How to successfully gavage feed a variety of species. And then we will put it all to practice in the hands-on portion.

FLUID THERAPY LAB (2 HOUR LAB)

Presenter: TDB

This lab will give participants the opportunity to practice administering fluids to cadaver animals of all species.

MAMMAL PHYSICAL EXAM LAB (2 HOUR LAB)

Presenter: TBD

This lab will cover the basics of mammalian anatomy and examination. Students will be supplied with cadavers to practice.