

# WILDLIFE REHABILITATORS OF NORTH CAROLINA

OFFICIAL QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF WRNC INC.



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## President's Message:

WRITTEN BY REBEKAH KRISTON

### WRNC Member – What's In It For Me?

Have you considered being a member of Wildlife Rehabilitators of North Carolina (WRNC) or are you considering renewing your membership? We encourage you to join WRNC and keep renewing! "Why", might you ask? Here are some of the benefits to being a member of WRNC.



Photo by John Althouse.

# President's Message

WRITTEN BY REBEKAH KRISTON

- 1. Discount on the Wildlife Symposium** - WRNC members get a discounted price to attend the annual WRNC Wildlife Symposium at the NC State College of Veterinary Medicine. This symposium offers a variety of courses ranging from beginner to advanced levels that teach many different subject matters under the umbrella of wildlife rehabilitation. The symposium also offers CEUs for veterinarians and vet techs. It's a great place to network and meet other wildlife rehabilitators from across the state and even the nation.
- 2. Symposium Scholarship Opportunities** - WRNC offers three scholarships to members in financial need so they may attend the WRNC Wildlife Symposium. These scholarships pay for admission to the symposium for two days as well as hotel accommodations.
- 3. Enclosure Grant Opportunities** - Each year, WRNC offers two enclosure grants to help build enclosures for animals that are being rehabilitated. The selectees of these grants are each given \$1000.
- 4. Incubator Grant Opportunities** - WRNC offers one incubator grant in which the selectee is provided with an incubator that values \$900.
- 5. Chimney Swift Tower Grant Opportunities** - Three grants of \$500 each are given out every year to help build towers specifically for chimney swifts due to the destruction of their natural habitats. Note: Non-members may apply for the Chimney Swift Tower Grant.
- 6. Networking Opportunities** - Members can access our WRNC Membership Directory as well as have the option for their name to appear in a wildlife rehabilitator directory available to the public.
- 7. Certified Mentors** - This year in 2026, WRNC will be offering certification for outstanding mentors in our state. Wildlife mentors with these certificates will be placed on a mentor list so that future apprentices can easily find a reputable mentor for their apprenticeships.
- 8. Access to the WRNC Newsletter** - WRNC publishes a quarterly newsletter containing an assortment of wildlife information and happenings within our state and beyond.

WRNC appreciates you and all you do for the wild animals of North Carolina! If you are a WRNC member, thank you for being part of us! We encourage you to invite a fellow rehabber to join as well. If you are considering joining us, we hope you will! WRNC wants you and needs you to help grow our community and our network of wildlife rehabilitators. You can join through our website, [www.ncwildliferehab.org](http://www.ncwildliferehab.org). Membership is only \$15.00/year, with the membership year running from May 1 to April 30. (Paying on or after May 1, 2026, will give you membership until April 30, 2027.) Please feel free to contact us through our website for more information or if you have questions. We look forward to a growing year!



Photo by John Althouse.

# 2026 WRNC Symposium Recap



Photo by John Althouse.

*Thank you to everyone who joined us for the 2026 Wildlife Rehabilitators of North Carolina (WRNC) Symposium!*

Photo by John Althouse.



Photo by John Althouse.

The Wildlife Rehabilitators of North Carolina (WRNC) Symposium brought together dedicated wildlife rehabilitators and enthusiasts from across the state (and even across the nation!) for a weekend of learning, connection, and inspiration. This year's event offered a dynamic mix of educational sessions, hands-on labs, and meaningful networking opportunities that strengthened both skills and community.

Attendees had access to a wide range of classes tailored to every stage of the rehabilitation journey. Our Intro to Rehab sessions provided foundational knowledge for those new to the field, while advanced medical courses expanded clinical skills and deepened understanding of treatment protocols. Some highlights of the weekend include our RVS training, medical labs, and opportunities for CE credit. Public outreach classes also played a key role in this year's program, equipping rehabilitators with tools to educate their communities, build partnerships, and advocate for native wildlife.

Beyond the classroom, the symposium fostered invaluable networking. Rehabilitators from a diverse range of backgrounds shared stories, problem-solved together, and built new professional relationships. Whether between sessions, over coffee, or during lunch, the exchange of ideas and experiences was impactful. Delicious meals offered time to recharge and connect in a relaxed setting.



Photo by John Althouse.



Photo by John Althouse.

# 2026 WRNC Symposium Recap



Photo by John Althouse.

The weekend culminated in a wonderful banquet featuring keynote speaker Debbie Foster, host of The Backyard Naturalist Podcast. A certified avian trainer and founder of Parrot PS and QS, Debbie delivered an engaging and thought-provoking presentation that blended science, storytelling, and practical advice. Her passion for education and her deep experience working with birds left attendees both inspired and energized to continue their important work.

Another exciting highlight of the symposium was the raffle, which featured an impressive array of prizes generously donated by supporters and vendors. Ticket items included zoo experiences, enclosures and habitat supplies, enrichment tools, feeding supplies, and even an incubator—resources that will directly benefit wildlife patients across the state. The raffle not only added fun and anticipation to the weekend but also helped support WRNC's ongoing mission.

Overall, the WRNC Symposium was a celebration of dedication, education, and community. From in-depth medical training to public outreach strategies, from shared meals to the banquet's inspiring keynote, the event reinforced the strength and compassion of North Carolina's and the surrounding areas' wildlife rehabilitation network. We are grateful to our speakers, sponsors, volunteers, and attendees who made this year's symposium such a success—and we look forward to continuing this important work together.



Photo by John Althouse.

## 2026 WRNC Grant Awards

### ENCLOSURE GRANTS

Jessica Cline, Concord, NC  
Linda Veraldi, Raleigh, NC

### INCUBATOR

Shari Avery, Hampstead, NC

### CHIMNEY SWIFT TOWER GRANTS

Victoria Priest, Orrum, NC (site - residence)  
Tara Calabrese, Shallotte, NC (site - West Brunswick High School)

***Grant applications are due November 1<sup>st</sup> annually. Visit [ncwildliferehab.org](http://ncwildliferehab.org) and click on "Grants" for more information.***

*Thank you to all of our applicants for your time, effort, and dedication. Congratulations to all of our WRNC grant award winners of 2026!*

# Heartfelt Thanks to Our Raffle Donors and Exhibitors - You Powered WRNC's Success

WRITTEN BY TARA FROST

The Wildlife Rehabilitators of North Carolina (WRNC) extends our deepest gratitude to the many individuals, organizations, and vendors whose generosity and participation made our recent conference truly unforgettable. Your support not only fueled an inspiring event but also strengthened North Carolina's network of wildlife rehabilitators and supported the care of countless wild patients.

Photo by John Althouse.



Photo by John Althouse.



Photo by John Althouse.



Photo by John Althouse.

## Raffle Donors – You Made a Difference!

A special thank-you goes out to the generous donors who contributed incredible prizes for this year's raffle. Your gifts brought excitement, joy, and fun to the event while helping WRNC raise a record-breaking amount in support of our mission.

With heartfelt appreciation to: Greater Good Charities, Chewy, WNC Nature Center, Mike's Falconry, NC Zoo, Carolina Raptor Center, Grandfather Mountain, Lafeber Company, Mazuri Exotic Animal Nutrition, Mike Dupuy Hawk Food, Northwoods Falconry, The Squirrel Store, Nature's Way, Tractor Supply, Pet Supplies Plus, Henry's Healthy Pet Foods, Baby Warm, Original Bunny Nip, RodentPro, Dubia, Tanya Szulak, Josh's Frogs, C Specialties, Beverly Hester, and Linda Bergman-Althouse.

Every item – from specialized diets and habitat supplies to educational experiences and unique gift items – plays a vital role in supporting our work to rescue, rehabilitate, and release wildlife back into their natural habitats.

## Exhibitors — Sharing Expertise and Inspiration

We're also incredibly grateful to the exhibitors who brought their knowledge, passion, and products to share with our community. Your engaging displays, expert demonstrations, and one-on-one conversations enriched every attendee's experience and helped spark new partnerships that will continue to benefit North Carolina's wildlife and the people who care for them.

Thank you to: The Original Bunny Nip, Henry's Healthy Pets, Red Creek Wildlife Center, The Turtle Rescue Team, Maleena's Wildlife Rescue, New Leaf Wildlife Rehab, Donna Wesley Spencer Photography, Painted Acres Wildlife Rehab, Possumwood Acres, Humane World for Animals, Dr. Cynthia Post, and Smoky Mountain Wildlife Rehabilitation.



Photo by John Althouse.



Photo by John Althouse.



Photo by John Althouse.

To all who supported, attended, or contributed — thank you for making this year's conference a success. Your collective passion, generosity, and dedication make North Carolina's wildlife rehabilitation community stronger than ever. We can't wait to see you again next year!

## Become A WRNC Member

By becoming a member of WRNC, you can enjoy exclusive perks!

WRNC offers multiple grants to assist wildlife rehabilitators across North Carolina. Members have the ability to apply for grants to help fund a pre-release enclosure, an incubator, or emergency relief. WRNC members may also enjoy reduced symposium registration fees and access to our newsletter archive.

Membership is only \$15.

The membership year runs from May 1 to April 30. This timeframe remains the same, regardless of when registration is completed.



Photo by John Althouse.

[Join here](#)

# Welcoming Melonie Almengual New WRNC Board Member

AUTOBIOGRAPHY WRITTEN BY MELONIE ALMENGUAL

My name is Melonie Almengual. I earned a Bachelor of Science in Nursing and have worked as a nurse in a couple of states. My husband and I have been married for 38 years and moved to Winston Salem, North Carolina in 1988. We have two adult children, one who lives in WS and one who lives in Louisiana. We have also had many domestic pets. Some organizations I have volunteered with include Forsyth Humane Society, Habitat for Humanity, Wildlife Rehab Inc., Humane Solution. In addition, I have spent 13 years on the board for Forsyth County public schools, eight years as landscaper and four years as volunteer coordinator. I grew up in Georgia spending most of my time outside, and as an adult, I continue to spend most of my time outside. I love working in the yard and watching what nature provides, but I have always enjoyed watching birds.

Photo of Melonie Almengual.



Photo of Melonie Almengual.



I took a wildlife rehab class at a local community college which is where I met Jean Chamberlain and Carla Johnson. Jean taught me about rehabbing birds of prey, but because I don't have the property to house injured birds, I am unable to become a federally licensed rehabber, however I have possessed my small mammal rehab permit through WRC in Raleigh since 2016. I am a current member of WRNC and have attended the WRNC Annual Symposium six times previous to this year, so this year makes seven. I am also involved with Owls Roost, which provides education about birds of prey at private programs and public events using unreleasable birds who are wildlife ambassadors. My rehab experience may not run the full gamut of all indigenous wildlife in North Carolina, but I make up for that with passion for all wildlife. I would like to use my passion to help WRNC further their mission and educational commitment to share information and knowledge about wildlife rehabilitation for the benefit of native wildlife.

# Introducing John Althouse WRNC BOD Technology Advisor

John's experience with computers began while serving on active duty in the Marine Corps when they were first introduced to the workplace. He set up various data programs to assist Marine Corps installations throughout northeastern United States, establishing reporting procedures and record keeping, greatly reducing manhours by enhancing the speed and accuracy of the reporting processes. Called upon by multiple commands, John often traveled, met with, and provided setup instruction while providing follow-on guidance as other commands came online. He moved into personnel management coupled with statistical reporting, ensuring deploying commands were staffed with the necessary personnel to meet the mission while being deployed.

Photo of John Althouse..



Photo of John Althouse..

After retiring from the Marine Corps, John accepted a position at The Daily News as a staff photographer. Shortly thereafter, photography moved into the digital age. John's background made the transition from film to digital a smooth process for the other photographers on the team. As a result of John's knowledge, The Daily News was the first newspaper with Freedom Communications in the United States to be issued digital cameras. He was called upon to travel and provide guidance to other papers bringing them up to speed with digital photography. All these images needed to be filed, managed and made available to other papers and news systems nationwide. John was promoted to department head as the Multimedia/Chief Photographer which he held until his retirement.

John ensured smooth business operations and provided technical support to employees. He upheld the highest ethical and professional standards, managing company resources responsibly while fostering a culture focused on exceeding customer expectations. Accustomed to working collaboratively toward organizational goals, John promoted open communication, teamwork, and accountability. A skilled decision-maker, he is accustomed to navigating changing priorities with confidence, adapting to challenges while staying dedicated to organizational success. Leading by example, he invests time and talent into achieving goals and creating an energetic, positive work environment. John fostered a culture of learning and growth by actively listening, providing constructive feedback, and managing conflict to keep teams united. John celebrates achievements and guides teams through change by building trust, encouraging open dialogue, and keeping everyone aligned with the organization's vision.

John is a current member of WRNC and has performed as honorary photographer through the years at its annual symposiums. He is familiar with Microsoft Word, Excel, Power Point, Google Workspace, WordPress, Mailer Lite, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, ZOOM, Photoshop, Adobe Premiere Pro, Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Lightroom and Adobe Acrobat.

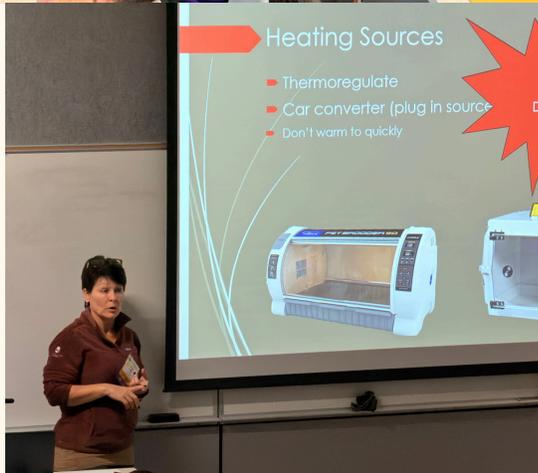
# WRNC 2026 Symposium Memories

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN ALTHOUSE



# WRNC 2026 Symposium Memories

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN ALTHOUSE



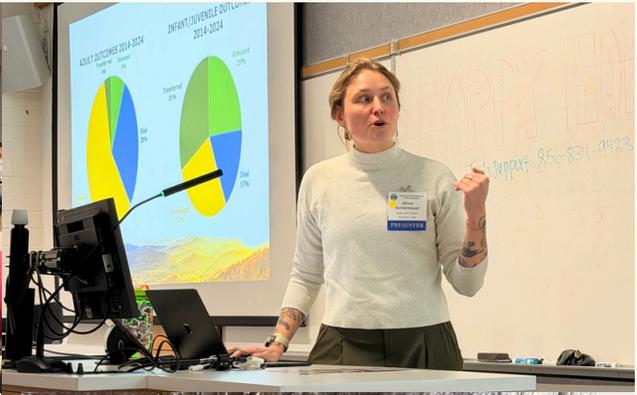
Heating Sources

- Thermoregulate
- Car converter (plug in source)
- Don't warm to quickly



# WRNC 2026 Symposium Memories

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN ALTHOUSE



# Checking In With The VSLs

WRITTEN BY MORGAN JETER AND LIZ HOLLAND

Hello wildlife rehab community!

For those of you who we did not have the privilege of meeting at the symposium, we are Morgan Jeter and Liz Holland, and we're excited to serve as the new junior Veterinary Student Liaisons (VSLs) alongside the current senior VSLs, Sydney MacDonald and Trina Dedes. We are so grateful to everyone who attended the symposium. We enjoyed learning alongside you and hearing about your wonderful experiences within the profession. We're excited to continue being part of this event and can't wait to help come up with new ideas to make next year just as successful.

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Life at the NC State College of Veterinary Medicine has been very exciting! Here are a few updates we wanted to share:

The Turtle Team (TRT) wrapped up a busy 2025 with a total of 809 intakes and 342 releases. With the new year in full swing, it's no surprise the "TRT" has already had 13 turtles cross its door. As with every new year, the new naming theme is "Any Animal but a Turtle," giving our veterinary students a wide array of names to choose from for their patients. For even more exciting news, we have welcomed 11 interns to our new undergraduate internship program, giving aspiring zookeepers, rehabilitators, and veterinarians the opportunity to gain hands-on experience and learn more about reptile husbandry and medicine. This program will not only be especially beneficial to our team with the increased caseload we expect in the spring and summer months, but hopefully encourage students to take interest in and pursue wildlife medicine and care.

Photo by WRNC VSLs.



Photo of WRNC VSLs: Liz Holland, Katarina Dedes, Sydney MacDonald, and Morgan Jeter.

The wolves with the Carnivore Conservation crew have been enjoying their holiday Christmas tree enrichment, graciously donated by our local Campbell Road Nursery to provide them with something new this holiday season. The team is always thinking up new ways to provide the best care possible for these amazing creatures, and it is wonderful to see collaboration with our community. In addition to this, it has been a gift watching our five puppies grow into confident adults. Furthermore, our puppies now have names! Each puppy is named after a type of jewel to represent the precious value they bring to the Saving Animals From Extinction program. The five chosen names are Jade, Opal, Jasper, Onyx, and Sapphire.

We hope you are all enjoying your winter season and staying warm! 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.

- Morgan Jeter and Liz Holland

# “Big Owl Babies!”

AS WRITTEN FOR 'CAROLINA SALT MAGAZINE' BY LINDA BERGMAN-ALTHOUSE

Some of the biggest babies wildlife rehabilitators at our shelter raise during each baby season are Great Horned Owls. We have admitted four to date and unfortunately, we were unable this year to return any to their Momma as a successful re-nest. Like many bird babies, Great Horned Owls make a move to do some things before they are truly ready and find themselves on the ground instead of remaining in the safety of their nest, high in the air and away from danger and predators. Great Horned Owls are one of the earliest spring nesting birds. Eggs may be laid in January or February through April. They use abandoned stick nests of a hawk, heron, or crow, but also nest in rock alcoves, hollows of trees, abandoned buildings, and sometimes on the ground. Mated pairs are monogamous and defend their territories with vigorous hooting, barking, chuckling, growling, hissing, screeching, screaming or by clacking their beak. Generally, 2 to 3 white eggs are laid. Both the male and female incubate the eggs between 30 to 35 days. The young are fed by both parents who fiercely defend their nest against intruders. If a young owl falls out of the nest prematurely, the adults will feed the bird on the ground, however, if a human finds an owl youngster in a precarious situation, they usually choose to transport the young one to a wildlife shelter for safety reasons.



Photo by John Althouse



Photo by John Althouse.

Such was the case when an infant Great Horned Owl was found on the ground at the port city harbor in Morehead City. Although the fluffy one had pressed himself against one of the huge, bulky shipping containers, it was apparent that his parents and he would be dodging quite a few pieces of heavy equipment and vehicular traffic, if in fact they could! The good Samaritans monitoring his plight could not take that risk and brought him to the shelter. It's the consensus that he may have fallen from a nesting area untypically constructed on the top of a crane. Another baby Great Horned was found nesting aboard a boat taken out of storage that was well under way. Infant Great Horned Owls arrive as huge balls of fluffy feathers with big round, yellow eyes and exceptionally large, feet with sharp taloned toes that they eventually grow into.

# “Big Owl Babies!”

AS WRITTEN FOR 'CAROLINA SALT MAGAZINE' BY LINDA BERGMAN-ALTHOUSE

Great Horned Owls are fierce and powerful predators who usually hunt at night by listening for sounds that betray their prey's presence, and they have such strong talons that when clenched, it takes the force of about thirty pounds to open them. That is a deadly grip. They hunt using their incredible hearing and a “perch and pounce” method. Great Horned Owls eat a wide variety of prey, both small and large. Cottontails seem to be a prominent food, but they will take squirrels, shrews, muskrats, mice, weasels, skunks, gophers, snakes, domestic cats, bats, beetles, scorpions, frogs, grasshoppers and a wide variety of birds, from small juncos and sparrows to crows, wild ducks, geese, pheasants and even other owls. If you ever hear an agitated group of cawing American Crows, they may be mobbing a Great Horned Owl. Crows will gather to harass a Great Horned Owl for hours. The crows have good reason because the Great Horned Owl is their most dangerous predator. It seems the world is one big buffet to a Great Horned Owl. After an owl has eaten, its stomach forms a pellet of fur, feathers, exoskeletons, and bones that they cannot digest. The owl then “upchucks” this pellet. Most shelters keep these pellets on hand for teachers in the area who request them for their science classes. Students can dissect them and identify what the owl has been eating. At the shelter, the little-big babies’ diet will consist of rats and mice until release.



Photo by John Althouse

Photo by John Althouse.



Fortunately, our non-releasable, adult Great Horned Owl resident doesn't mind fostering the owlets and teaching them what they need to know to be the best owls they can be! As adults, Great Horned Owls are large birds weighing 3 to 4 pounds, standing 18-25" tall with a wingspan of 36 to 60 inches. Males and females are similar in appearance, except the female is the larger of the two. The plumage of the Great Horned Owl varies regionally, from pale to dark. In general, they have brown body plumage covered with darker brown spots and white throat feathers that contrast with the dark cross-banded under parts. The white feathers stand out like a collar against the darker underside feathers. Some Great Horned Owls may be very pale underneath, but still the white collar stands out. The Great Horned Owls' facial disk may have orange or grayish feathers, and whiter feathers that form a V between the yellow eyes with black pupils. Contrary to popular belief, owls cannot turn their heads completely around, but they can rotate their heads 270 degrees, thanks to extra vertebra in their necks.

# “Big Owl Babies!”

AS WRITTEN FOR 'CAROLINA SALT MAGAZINE' BY LINDA BERGMAN-ALTHOUSE

Photo by John Althouse

Their eyes are fixed in their sockets, so they can't move their eyes up or down or side to side. Owls must move their whole head to compensate for the fixed eyes. Their ear tufts are large and set far apart on the head. Just like a dog, Great Horned Owls use these ear tufts or "horns" to convey body language, indicating their mood. When they are irritated the tufts lie flat and when they are inquisitive the tufts stand upright. So, those "horns" or "ears" are not really ears at all! These feather tufts are also part of the owl's camouflage. They can make the owl look like part of a tree. The owl's real ears are slits on either side of its head, just behind the facial disks. For identification, four good field marks for the great horned owl are: size, eye color, ear tufts, and the white collar. Their call is a series of deep hoots, from 3 to 8 notes long, and sounds like - "Who's Awake, Me Too," with the "Me Too" part descending in tone. Like a coyote howl, the call of the great horned owl is a classic sound of the wild and can be heard from far away. When nesting pairs of Great Horned Owls call, the female has the higher pitched voice. Great Horned Owls can be found all over the United States and most of Canada, and southward to Central and South America to the Straits of Magellan.



Photo of the author: Linda Bergman-Althouse.

They are one of the most widespread species of owls. They mostly reside year-round in their territories, but owls from far north move southward in fall or winter. The Great Horned Owls' main enemy is man. Many owls die in collisions with automobiles or power lines. Mice and other rodents that have been exposed to pesticides may also be fatal to Great Horned Owls. If they can stay clear of perilous situations humans create, they usually live to be 12 - 15 years of age. The oldest Great Horned Owl on record is said to have been nearly 30 years old and from Ohio. There is so much to know and learn about Great Horned Owls, and it's all amazing! They are gorgeous, incredible, and magnificent raptors, but as magical and Harry-Potter-like as they are, remember the Great Horned Owl's prowess as a predator, and if they are present in your area, please keep your puppies and kitties inside!

# “The Bookshelf”

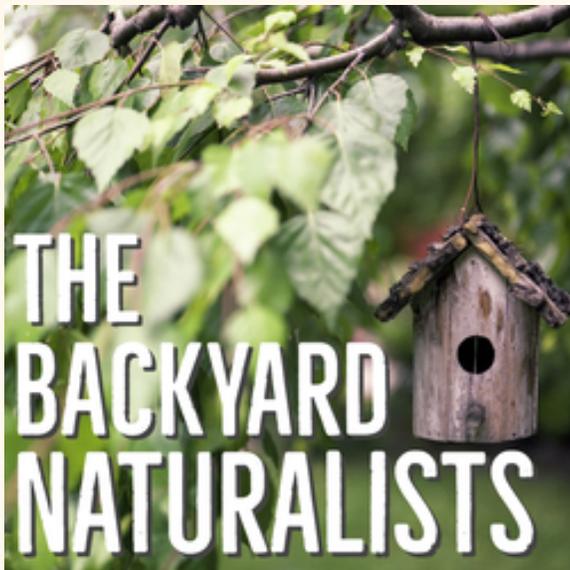
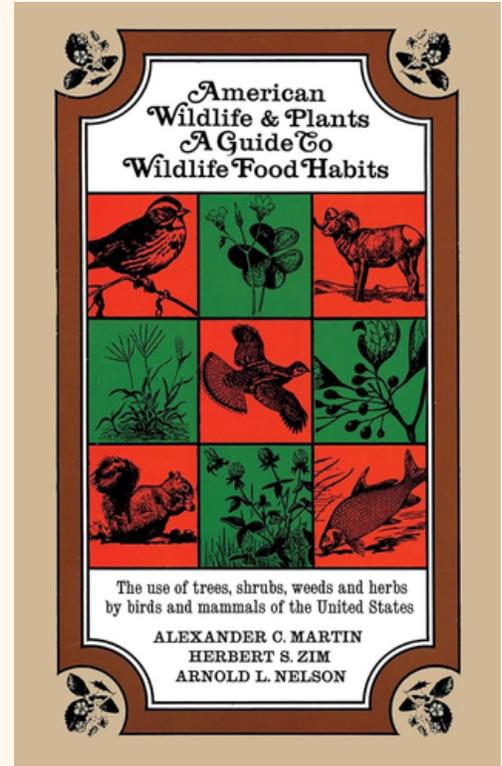
COMPILED BY LINNEA MINK

For this issue’s “The Bookshelf”, we’re highlighting two resources featured during our symposium. First is American Wildlife & Plants: A Guide to Wildlife Food Habits, a foundational reference, on sale at our book sales table, that explores the relationships between native plants and the wildlife that depend on them. This book is a useful tool for rehabbers thinking beyond release to long-term habitat health, and enjoyable for gardeners and landscapers who appreciate their wild neighbors. Second, we’d like to feature The Backyard Naturalists Podcast, hosted by this year’s banquet’s keynote speaker, Debbie Foster, and her colleague Laurie Horne. This podcast is just as entertaining as it is informative, and its audio format lets you listen and learn on the go!

## American Wildlife and Plants: A Guide To Wildlife Food Habits

BY ARNOLD L. NELSON, HERBERT S. ZIM, ALEXANDER C. MARTIN

For the last three-quarters of a century, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service has made concentrated researches into the food habits of American birds, mammals, and fish, collecting thousands of contributions from workers throughout the nation. This tremendous amount of material has been collected, correlated, and condensed into a 500-page volume which, as one reviewer has commented, “should prove a classic in its field and a must for every naturalist.” (Harold E. Anthony, Natural History). Here you will learn of the food and feeding habits of more than 1,000 species of birds and mammals, together with their distribution in America, their migratory habits, and the most important plant-animal relationships. Not only naturalists but also sportsmen, farmers, botanists, birdwatchers, foresters, Boy Scouts, and anyone with a general interest in American wildlife will find it a useful reference book.



## The Backyard Naturalists Podcast

BY DEBBIE FOSTER AND LAURIE HORNE

The Backyard Naturalists podcast is geared toward nature lovers of all kinds, from beginners to those with more experience. We have a very diverse lineup of topics planned for you, such as what you can do in your own yard to enhance the habitat for the creatures who live there, participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count as a citizen scientist, using native plants, which snakes live in our area, how to attract specific birds, common and uncommon raptors in the greater Charlotte region, spring and fall migration season for birds, plants for butterflies and much more!

# “Wildlife Rescue: The One-Eyed EASO”

WRITTEN BY LINNEA MINK AND JAMES WAGNER

As rehabilitators, it's easy for us to forget how intense a first rescue can feel for someone who's never done it before. We become accustomed to the unpredictability, the rapid decision-making, and problem-solving that come with wildlife work. Recently, I had the chance to witness a kind-hearted Samaritan's first rescue and eventual release. While I saw a fairly straightforward and common case, they experienced uncertainty, responsibility, and a strong desire to do the right thing. Moments like these are powerful reminders of the human side of wildlife rehabilitation. Beyond the clinical skills and protocols, this work is about connection and helping people engage meaningfully with wildlife, empowering them to feel proud of their choice to adopt a compassionate approach. Fostering that sense of stewardship is not only essential to our mission, as we widely rely on the public to rescue patients, such as in this case, but it's also one of the most rewarding aspects of what we do.



Photo of the owl after being picked up, taken by James Wagner.

While driving south on US 321 near Tweetsie Railroad between Boone and Blowing Rock, a Watauga Resident, James, spotted a distressed Eastern Screech Owl sitting motionless in the middle of the road. He quickly made a U-turn, pulled onto the shoulder, and stepped out just as an oncoming northbound 18-wheeler approached the bird. James waved his arms to alert the driver, who brought the truck to a screeching stop with inches to spare. He picked up the injured owl from beneath the truck's bumper, placed him securely in his vehicle, exchanged a quick thumbs-up with the relieved driver, and drove the owl to the May Wildlife Rehabilitation Center at Lees-McRae College for care.

Upon intake, the small screech owl was diagnosed with head trauma, a common injury associated with vehicle collisions. Because owls' eyes occupy more than half of their skull volume, ocular trauma frequently accompanies head injuries in these species. Unfortunately, one eye was too severely damaged to repair. However, skilled wildlife veterinarians were able to perform an evisceration of the damaged eye, giving the owl a second chance in the wild.



Photo of the owl recovering from surgery, taken by Tara Frost.



Photo of the owl's damaged eye, taken by Tara Frost.

# “Wildlife Rescue: The One-Eyed EASO”

WRITTEN BY LINNEA MINK AND JAMES WAGNER

Though owls are renowned for their exceptional low-light vision, their acute hearing can compensate remarkably well for visual impairment during hunting. Unlike many diurnal raptors, such as hawks, certain owl species can successfully hunt and survive in the wild with only one functional eye. After recovering from surgery, the screech owl advanced to what we affectionately call “mouse school,” where live prey is placed overnight in an outdoor flight enclosure to evaluate hunting ability. This step is crucial in ensuring the post-release success of predatory species. The owl proceeded to successfully capture prey, maintain his weight, and demonstrate a strong mentation, ultimately clearing him for release.

Just weeks after intake, the May Wildlife Rehabilitation Center contacted James to tell him the owl was ready to return to the area where he had been found. I accompanied James up a quiet side road, a safe distance from the highway, yet still within the owl’s territory. As we approached the release site, we could hear the owl clacking defensively inside the box, a reassuring sign of his regained strength and vigor. Dusk settled over a pastoral landscape edged with mature forest, ideal habitat for a nocturnal (and sometimes crepuscular), cavity-nesting owl. James carefully opened the box, revealing the owl’s wary one-eyed gaze. After a brief pause, the owl launched silently and symmetrically into the evening air, gliding over a fence and disappearing into the treeline.



Photo of James releasing the owl, taken by Linnea Mink.



Photo of the owl feeling better in rehab, taken by Tara Frost.

For James, this first rescue had come full circle. What began as a split-second decision on a busy highway ended in a quiet moment of restoration. Watching him witness the owl’s powerful flight was deeply rewarding. It reminded me how extraordinary these interactions are for members of the public, and how meaningful it is for someone to know they truly made a difference for a wild neighbor.

## FUN FACTS

- “Mouse School” is a method typically used in young or human-raised raptors, but it is also necessary to test the hunting abilities of adult raptors whose injuries impair them long-term. It also allows them time to practice their skills with different physical capabilities before release.
- Eastern Screech Owls are only about the size of a Robin. In addition to small vertebrates, they also feed on invertebrate prey, like flying insects.

# Quinto's Comedy Corner

COMPILED BY LINDA BERGMAN-ALTHOUSE

You might be a wildlife rehabilitator:

If you stock your freezer with frozen mice and quail, instead of ice cream.

If you juggle state permits plus a federal one for birds, with home inspections as part of the gig!

If your blender purees "baby bird, opossum, squirrel or cottontail formula" rather than smoothies.

If continuing education - wildlife rehab training, 6 hours minimum - is your Netflix binge equivalent.

If your neighbors think you're running a zoo.

If your life is a hilarious mix of fur, feathers, and frantic midnight rescues.



Thanks for reading!  
We'll see you for the  
next issue!



Photo By John Althouse.

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## WRNC Newsletter Schedule

The WRNC newsletter is published quarterly.

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**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 [linneam01@gmail.com](mailto:linneam01@gmail.com).**