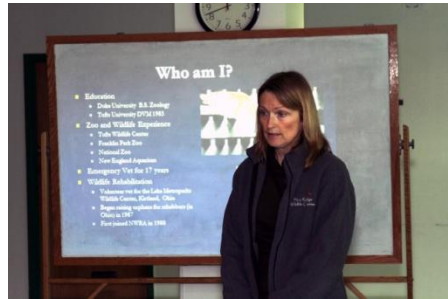




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DECEMBER MEMBERSHIP MEETING



Dr. Belinda Burwell, Director of the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center (BRWC) in Millwood, Virginia, gave an overview of the center, including its areas of expertise and focus. She also discussed cooperative

opportunities with WRL, and the ways that we can support each other. She gave an excellent presentation on the protocols and procedures that BRWC staff have developed to respond to and to treat specific species, including trauma and emergency scenarios. The presentation provided one CEU credit for rehabilitators.

BRWC is a 502(c)3 non-profit that provides quality rehabilitative care for wildlife, and operates a hotline at 540-837-9000. For more information, you can visit its website at www.blueridgewildlife.org.

ECO WATCH!

OPINION:

IF A BUTTERFLY FLAPS ITS WINGS IN AUSTRALIA, WILL A HERMIT CRAB BECOME HOMELESS IN ASSATEAGUE?

By Jen Connors, former editor of the Rescue Report

“Take only photos, leave only footprints.” As an environmentalist and idealist (and former Girl Scout), I hold fast to this credo – a how-to for protecting our natural areas in a tidy six words. Its compact wisdom needs no clarification or footnotes, no attachments or visual aids. It’s a “Conservation for Dummies” that would have made Rachel Carson proud. Who would have thought that the ecological wisdom of the ages could fit on a Post-it note?

I was long under the impression that naturalists and their assorted kin likewise revered this little gem. No self-respecting conservationist would make an exception to *this* rule. Right? Not so. A recent encounter with an accredited scientist made me wonder how many other specialists felt the same way.

Rescue Report

Wildlife Rescue League  
P.O. Box 704  
Falls Church, Virginia 22040  
703.391.8625  
wrl@wildliferescueleague.org  
www.wildliferescueleauge.org

WILDLIFE HOTLINE:

703.440.0800

Editor

Bill Hicks

Editorial Assistant

Jean Fogarty

Writers/Reporters

Karen Brace

Jerry Bondell

Jen Connors

Photography

Bill Hicks

Hoppy Haven

Dogue Hollow Wildlife Sanctuary

Karen Brace

Membership & Data Manager

Doug Brown

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Have a great story to tell and pictures to share? Send articles, digital pictures, announcements, etc. to: WRLEditor@comcast.net

My road to disillusionment all started with hermit crabs. I'd once read that hermit crabs spend 75 percent of their lives seeking out larger shells each time they outgrow an old one. The same article urged readers to refrain from collecting shells, such as whelks and winkles, as these might be potential new homes for crabs. (Horrified by this revelation, I went into guilt overdrive and dumped a container filled with shells collected some 30 years earlier back into the Atlantic.) Besides, some shells are still occupied, resulting in tragic consequences for the inhabitants if removed.

Shell collecting is a good example of the photos-footprints doctrine at work. This ordinary pastime likely will not upset the balance of nature as a whole. But what's important here is adhering to a standard *principle*. Indian tribes warned New World settlers about the repercussions of disturbing the balance, including eradicating natural predators such as wolves and bear, but their advice went unheeded – to the detriment of future deer populations. Permitting or encouraging park visitors to collect shells sets a dangerous precedent and weakens a link in the preserve-and-protect chain.

{The proverbial butterfly is flapping its wings...}

In Galapagos, visitors are not permitted to take so much as a twig or fallen leaf. Instead, eco-tourists are invited, via cloth sacks, to collect as much refuse from the beach as they can carry. The idea is to instill in visitors that the islands are to be kept as pristine and natural as possible. Collecting garbage (most of which washes ashore from private watercraft) is a productive and recreational way to help further this goal.



We now come to a December 2011 trip to the Eastern Shore of Maryland and my clash-of-ideals with the aforementioned scientist, who happens to be the executive director of a marine science organization. The weekend activities culminated in birding a remote stretch of beach on an island where only federal government and civilian employees have access. The ED announced we were welcome to collect shells from the beach. With visions of homeless hermit crabs dancing in my head, I mutinied from the group and began filling a plastic supermarket bag, found half-buried in the sand, with broken beer bottles, bits of colored plastic and other discarded odds-and-ends.

During my frenzy to cram as much trash as I could find into the flimsy bag, I attempted to enlighten the ED that while shell collecting might appear to be unobtrusive, well-meaning people carry home what they learn from one trip and take it to their next destination. In terms of wild areas, this can have serious consequences. A child caught removing terns' eggs from a protected nesting area on a public beach in North Carolina, for instance, might well have learned this detrimental behavior after receiving the green light to take shells from a beach in Virginia.

{Our butterfly is now traveling at an alarming rate...}

The unimpressed ED disagreed with my modified chaos theory assessment, which concerned me. Individuals in decision-making positions of authority are often viewed as having the final say in their areas of expertise. All that the hypothetical beach-combing tyke needed was a green light from a person "in charge" to lead him to believe it was not wrong to take the terns' eggs.

Not buying it? Then allow me to offer some healthy substitutes. Alternatives to shell (or rock, or leaf, or wood, or flower, or bone) collecting can be just as rewarding. Here are a few of my ideas:

1. *Promote garbage.* Make picking up trash fun. Hand out gloves and long-handled grabbers. Invent games for kids: "Whoever finds the most plastic six-pack rings gets a SAVE THE FROGS T-shirt!"
2. *Head toward the store (not the shore) for souvenirs.* Buying from park bookstores and gift shops puts dollars back into the park without harming natural areas. (Bonus points for the local economy: Stock the shelves with regionally made products.)
3. *Corral the critters.* People love the petting ponds found in aquariums and visitors' centers. These allow direct interaction with aquatic life in a controlled setting, and visitors learn to respect and appreciate nature.

Simpler really is better. If regional, state and national parks all employed the same “don’t touch” ideology, then everyone would benefit in the long term. A universal principle would ensure across-the-board understanding of what is, or is not, detrimental to each fragile ecosystem.

Until then, our butterfly has not yet touched down, and there are only so many plastic garbage-filled bags I can tote. Maybe the optimistic golden nugget needs a footnote after all. To borrow a line from the Beach Boys, “Wouldn’t it be nice?”

### OPOSSUM RELEASE!

By Jerry Blondell, WRL Member with information provided by Erika Yery, noted rehabilitator (all photo's courtesy of Dogue Hollow Wildlife Sanctuary)

The Virginia Opossum (*Didelphis marsupialis*) is North America’s only marsupial and an incredible survivor, going back 70 million years, when it walked among (and mainly below) the dinosaurs.

The opossum gives birth after about 12 days, the shortest gestation period of any mammal. The tiny blind and deaf newborn must use its front paws to claw and lift itself three to four inches to get into its mother’s pouch, where it triples in size in one week feeding on her milk. Weight increases tenfold during the same period.

Opossum in this area generally mate January through February. The group of four young opossum pictured here were part of the nine brought to Dogue Hollow Wildlife Sanctuary last spring. Their eyes were open indicating they were already two months old. Note their white conical heads and pink noses and feet. The Virginia Opossum is so named because it was first seen in Virginia by English settlers and the name opossum is derived from an Algonquian Indian word meaning white animal.

Babies like to snuggle and use each other as soft bedding for daytime sleeping. As they get older they are almost exclusively nocturnal.

Look at the star-shaped front feet with five claws on this little explorer. On the hind feet it has four “fingers” and an opposable “thumb,” which it uses for holding onto branches. It’s the only mammal with hind feet like that.

Opossum like to spend their daytimes in burrows in the ground, usually made by other animals or a hollow log. Getting comfortably situated with seven or eight brothers and sisters takes some doing!

The opossum seen here is just taking a yawn before naptime. Opossum have 50 needlelike, sharp teeth that are quite formidable once they grow in – more than any other mammal.

June 13, 2011, saw the first release of four of the opossum, who had become quite a handful.



At left, Jenna held one ready to be transferred to his new home in the woods. He seemed a bit dubious.

Opossum are good tree climbers thanks to the opposable thumb on their hind feet and a prehensile tail, which is also used to carry nest material as well as hold onto a branch.

The second release was on June 25. In a short time (after lots of sniffing) they were on their way, enjoying a diet of insects, grubs, snails, mice, moles, fruits and berries (and mainly crickets and daddy longlegs).



## SOMETHING BELOVED

*By Karen Brace, WRL Member*

In November 2011 my husband and I traveled to Ecuador for 12 days of vacation and to explore the country. We spent two nights in the Ecuadorian Amazon, where I had the opportunity to visit AmaZOOnico, a wildlife rescue center. It was an experience that opened my eyes not only to incredible beauty, but also to incredible cruelty, abuse, neglect and hope.

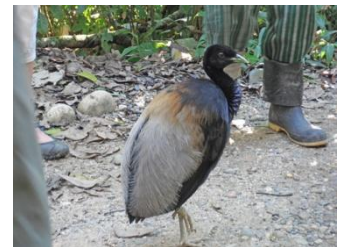
Ecuador may not have bragging rights as far as the size of the country goes (it's about the size of Colorado), but it does have some of the most gorgeous and diverse plant and animal life I've ever seen: Lush mountains boast volcanoes that spit steam and ash; crystal-clear winding rivers teem with fish; rainforests deep and thick display amazing beauty and color (and the BIGGEST bugs I've ever seen!); and desert landscapes are peppered with red volcanic rock, cactus and other succulents. The animals of Ecuador are equally as stunning and varied. The brilliant flash of red across the sky is a scarlet macaw, just one of 1,600 different species of bird in Ecuador. The noisy racket emerging through the rainforest canopy is a troop of howler monkeys. Sea lions bask on volcanic beaches, giant tortoises lumber through dry fields, caimans cut paths through the rivers with their scaly bodies and ocelots hunt their dinner in the forests.



AmaZOOnico, on the banks of the Napo River, is home to many different species of animals. There are 22 species of birds, three species of small bears, six species of cats, four species of rodents (including the capybara – the largest rodent in the world, coming in around 140 pounds), four species of reptiles and 11 species of primates. AmaZOOnico has large outdoor habitats as well as indoor facilities where the young, sick and injured animals are cared for. Our guide, Chris, who is interning at the shelter for one year from Germany, showed us around and explained how animals come to be at AmaZOOnico:

- 40% arrive from other rescue centers,
- 20% are surrendered by private citizens, many of whom purchased the animals out of pity or as pets from illegal trades,
- 20% come from the state, where the animals are confiscated through police controls in Baeza or Tena,
- 20% are brought in by people from the nearby area who find the injured or abandoned animals.

The majority of the animals who are fortunate enough to find shelter at AmaZOOnico are in very poor condition due to being malnourished, tied up, mistreated or simply fed the wrong diet, which causes them to grow up deformed. About 25 percent of the animals die within a few days of arriving at the shelter. Another 25 percent are successfully rehabilitated and are able to go back to living normal lives. The remaining 50 percent of the animals must stay at the shelter, either in enclosures or roaming the grounds. The reasons for not being able to release these animals back into their natural habitat are many. Some animals are too young to be released on their own and need protection. Others are too injured, weak or aggressive to be released. Some animals are too used to human contact and are no longer scared of them. These animals have lost their natural instincts, making them vulnerable to being captured and killed by locals. A perfect example of this was the gray-winged trumpet bird who followed the tour group around like a small dog. He stayed with us for the entire tour, often shoving his way through the group



to get to the front. He was constantly on the lookout for snakes or other dangers so he could “trumpet” a warning to us and chase the enemy away.

The goal of AmaZOOnico, like all good rescue centers, is to rehabilitate the animals so that they can rejoin their brethren; however, as mentioned above, 50 percent of the animals here will never be able to return to their natural habitat. Many of them are victims of the third most profitable illicit commerce in the world: wildlife trafficking. This is a lucrative business, bringing in \$10 billion per year. Ecuador, and other countries in Latin America, is vulnerable to wildlife trafficking due to its rich diversity of animal life. Although there are laws that prohibit wildlife trafficking, Ecuador lacks the resources to enforce these laws, so conservation isn't a priority.

You would think that once these beautiful animals were ripped from their homes they would be shipped all over the world, and indeed many of them are sent to the United States, Europe or Japan, but a large portion of them remain in their native countries and end up as tourist attractions in hotels and restaurants or as household pets. In Latin America it is an old tradition to keep native wild animals such as parrots, monkeys and turtles in homes, and in Brazil “tamed” wild animals are called *xerimbabos*, which means “something beloved.”

It was a bittersweet experience to visit the shelter. I was almost close enough to touch the regal scarlet macaws, to catch the shadow of a sleek, black jaguarondi, to become deafened by the scream of an alpha male spider monkey, and to experience the startlingly unpleasant aroma of a peccary (a species of wild pig). Yet as amazing as these animals were to behold, the reasons why they were at the shelter could not be ignored. As I listened to Chris explain what had happened to many of them, I realized that the majority of the reasons were the same as those of us who work with wildlife in Virginia and across the United States see: animals who have been injured and abandoned, animals whose habitats have been destroyed, animals who made interesting “pets” until they became “too wild,” and animals who are deformed due to being fed the wrong type of food. I remember one heartbreaking incident that occurred when we first arrived at the shelter. As our group assembled for our tour a white-bellied spider monkey lay on her side in front of the shelter and rolled from one side to the other, seemingly posing for our pictures and bathing in the attention. Then our guide, Chris, explained why she was at the shelter. He said she had been kept as a pet and fed the wrong type of food, which caused her leg bones to become deformed, preventing her from bending her ankles. As a result, she was not able to bend walk, or run or jump. The best she could manage was a lop-sided, shuffling gait around the shelter, which will be her home for the rest of her life.

AmaZOOnico is an incredible place full of wondrous creatures and caring people. If you are interested in visiting the website or making a donation, the address is: <http://www.selvaviva.ec/amazonico/index.php?l=en>. The zoo is funded primarily by donations, but it does receive some money from the admission it charges (a whopping \$3 per person) and its small gift shop.



As the temperature warms in Northern Virginia I will begin my first spring with the Wildlife Rescue League. Though I am up to my eyeballs in little fuzzy critters (and little fuzzy critter poop), I will think back to my visit to that shelter in the Ecuadorian Amazon, on the banks of the Napo River, with fondness, knowing that I too am a part of the fight to save wildlife and to keep them in their natural habitats. While some people may see wild animals as pests or profit, I see them as something to be treasured, something of value...*something beloved*.

## THE OTHER GUYS

*By John White, Owner, Hoppy Haven*

Being an organization devoted to the rehabilitation of wildlife, WRL rehabbers are very familiar with the Eastern Cottontail. For the general public, the WRL pamphlet “Cottontail Rabbits in Northern Virginia” by Anne M. Tomlinson (1998) is an excellent source of information about our native wild rabbit. But what about “the other guys,” the domestic rabbits who may find themselves out “in the wild” for a variety of reasons. Unfortunately, whether they escape from their home due to a careless moment or are intentionally released by an owner who no longer wants them, their chance for survival in the wild is almost zero. While the Eastern Cottontail (*Sylvilagus Floridanus*) is native to North America, domestic rabbits (*Oryctolagus Cuniculus*) are descended from European wild rabbits who originally lived in the deserts of Spain. Being a different genus from the Cottontail, there is no chance that a domestic rabbit released into the wild will find a colony and live happily ever after. Rabbits are highly territorial, and the wild rabbits will attack and chase away the interloper.

Although domestics are different from our native wild rabbits, they are still rabbits, and they share many instinctive behaviors with their wild cousins. For example, the first instinct of all rabbits when frightened is to huddle down, become as small as possible and remain completely still. Most predators have vision keyed to sensing movement against background. By remaining still, the rabbit reduces his chances of being seen, and even if he is noticed, a predator glancing away may not be able to see him again when it looks back. This behavior works well when you have the coloring of the Cottontail, the brown-gray shade known as “agouti,” which blends in with the wooded background of the rabbit’s natural home. As you can imagine, it does not work well at all when your coloring more closely resembles the uniform of a football referee. Even worse, a domestic rabbit may have been living in a home where other animals such as cats and dogs were present and not seen as threats. If suddenly released into the wild, this rabbit may not recognize a predator as a threat until it is too late.

We know that if a Cottontail is uninjured, the best help we can give is to not help at all and allow him to continue his life without intervention. A domestic rabbit, however, must be rescued if possible, regardless of whether or not he is injured, simply because of the poor chances for survival in the open. If the rabbit is found to be uninjured, he or she can be transferred to a local rescue group, or to the local animal shelter. If there is an obvious injury or illness, transfer to a vet would be appropriate. Ideally, the rabbit should be seen by an “exotic” vet trained and skilled in the rabbit’s unique medical and physiological needs. Regular vets are sometimes unaware that many common treatments for other animals (such as flea control medications and some oral antibiotics) can be fatal to rabbits. If it is a problem that a rehabber feels comfortable treating, that is certainly an option. The domestic rabbit should never be released back into the wild, however, and will eventually have to be transferred to a rescue group or shelter if a home can’t be found.

So, when that phone call comes into the WRL Hotline from a person who has found a rabbit in her yard, how do you determine whether it is a Cottontail or a domestic bunny needing help? Having been involved with rabbit rescue for nearly ten years and having received quite a few of these calls, I’ve found that three questions are helpful as an initial “triage.”

First, ask what color the rabbit is. Any answer other than “brown” indicates that it is a domestic rabbit, and you don’t have to go any further. Second, if the answer is brown, then ask if the ears are floppy or pointed up. Floppy or “lop” ears are another indicator that it is a domestic rabbit. Third, if it is a brown “uppy-ear” rabbit, then ask how big it is. If the description fits that of a Cottontail – about four to five pounds, the size of a kitten – it may actually be a Cottontail. If it is described as any larger, or “plump,” it is most likely a domestic rabbit. But while helpful, these questions aren’t completely definitive. Even if the person describes a brown, uppy-ear rabbit about the size of a kitten, it could still be a domestic bunny. Additional questions about the rabbit’s behavior may provide further clarification.

Since healthy rabbits are basically odorless and can “self-train” to use a litter box, they make wonderful indoor pets. You have to earn the trust of rabbits, but once you do you will find that they are bright, clever creatures with individual personalities, and they want to interact with the other members of their family. Rehabbing Eastern Cottontails can be very

rewarding, but being accepted as a BFLR (Big Funny-Looking Rabbit) by one of “the other guys” can be immensely rewarding, too.



A Polish with Dutch markings, about 3 pounds



Ben: A purebred Florida White, about 4 pounds



Gus and Sophie: Mini Lops (bonded pair), about 5-6 pounds

# THANK YOU!

Dear WRL Board Members,

Thank you for allowing me the great privilege of serving as a transportation coordinator for the Wildlife Rescue League. It's a role I've enjoyed immensely. In this role, I've worked with some amazing individuals and helped some animals along the way, which is a great way to spend a day in my book. That said, due to heavy demands at the office and a family obligation, I think it best to pass the baton to another volunteer transporter.

Fortunately, Lucy Wiggins, one of our dedicated transporters, has offered to step into the role. I believe she will be great in the role. Assuming you have no objections, my plan is to transition the duties to her over the next month and allow her to completely assume the role at the beginning of 2012. Of course, Gary Reals, another one of our very dedicated volunteers, will continue to serve as a point of contact for transporters. And, although I won't be handling the scheduling duties next year, I look forward to continuing to support the WRL as a weekend transporter.

Of course, please do let me know if you have any questions or concerns about the transition plan or require additional information about Lucy, such as her contact information. Also, Lucy hopes to be able to attend the December Board meeting. I'm sure you will enjoy meeting her, if you haven't done so already.

Thank you again for allowing me to support the WRL in this role. It's been a wonderful experience.

Jen Dickey

**GRATITUDE**

Nan and I send our hearty thanks to those who provided fabric donations for our squirrel hammocks. The response was generous and exceeded our expectations. We not only want to thank the donors but again want to compliment the skilled and dedicated Rehabbers who care for the little ones!

Nan & Ed Beaver, President and CEO of Hammocks, Inc.

### THANK YOU TO OUR 2011 DONORS

The Board of Directors would like to thank everyone who made a donation to WRL in 2011. We are grateful for each and every gift, no matter its size. Each gift is put to good use in our efforts to rescue and rehab every injured or orphaned animal that the public calls us about. Listed below are our Wildlife Rescue League Donor Members:

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Generous donations were received in Honor of:

Nan and Ed Beaver  
Margo Bendery  
Nancy Bonomo  
Pam Fulmer

Kent Knowles, Judy Graham, Diana O'Conner, Christina Turner, and Randy Brooks for their participation in Hartwood Animal Hospital's Walk for Wildlife Event in April 2011

Erica Yery for her presentation to the Kate Waller Barrett Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution Wildlife Rehabilitators, past and present



## **NEXT MEETING!**

LONG BRANCH NATURE CENTER  
625 S. CARLIN SPRINGS ROAD  
ARLINGTON, VA

**March 3, 2011**

11AM - 1PM

Featured Speaker: John White

"Care of Domestic Rabbits, and the Difference Between Domestic and Cottontails"

John has been involved with domestic rabbit rescue groups since 2000. He is a founding director of RabbitWise Inc., an online-based organization devoted to education about and advocacy for domestic rabbits. He and his wife currently have five rabbit companions sharing their home.

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### **FROM THE EDITOR!**

Hello everyone! What a wonderful meeting we had last December. Quite a few folks came out despite the holiday season, and it was a delight meeting those in attendance. For those who were not there, I am Bill Hicks, the new editor of your newsletter. Many, many thanks go out to Maryann for adding the newsletter to her already busy schedule, but I decided to give her a break and take it over.

I am also an avid amateur nature photographer specializing in birds. Having traveled to many different countries, I have pictures of birds from around the world and my backyard, and will be sharing these with you in the newsletter.

If you think of anything you would like to read about, or an article you would like to see, please do not hesitate to contact me at

**WRLEditor@comcast.net**, and we will try to accommodate your request.



Northern Mockingbird, Feb '12

Birds of the World that I have taken pictures of. Enjoy!



New Zealand Tui (or Parsons Bird).  
Once endangered, they are making a comeback.



Lady Gouldian Finch, found in Australia.  
Currently endangered in the wild.



Shaft-tail Finch, found in Australia. Very large population second only to the Zebra Finch.



Yellow-eyed Penguin, native to New Zealand. Note the two chicks at her feet!

YES! I want to be a WRL member and help save Virginia's native wildlife!

Membership benefits include:

Rescue Report, Volunteer Opportunities, Meetings, Classes and much more!  
Sign up online at <http://wildliferescueleague.org/paypal.html>; call 703-391-8625;  
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I have also enclosed an additional donation in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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