



Rockfish Wildlife Sanctuary

Spring/Summer 2026 Newsletter

ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT INSIDE!



← The **actual size** of a special duckling you'll learn about in this newsletter!



How you can help the Sanctuary today:

DONATE MONEY

Our funding comes from animal lovers like you! Please visit our website to donate or scan the QR code below.

PLANNED GIVING

Leave a legacy for our wild world by joining the **Merlin Society** at RWS. More information inside or on our website.

DONATE SUPPLIES

- Plain paper towels/tissues
- Nitrile gloves, sizes M & L
- Pet waste bags
- 13gal trash bags
- Hand sanitizer
- Sponges
- Scrub brushes
- Dawn dish soap
- Old towels and blankets in good condition
- Metal or ceramic pet bowls (no rubber)
- Pet training pads
- Gift cards to: Chewy, Amazon, Food Lion

SHOP OUR RESALE BOOTH

Visit our booth at the Greene House Shops antique mall in Ruckersville, VA. **100% of proceeds** go to our lifesaving work for wildlife! Visit our website for more information.



VISIT US ON THE WEB:
rockfishwildlifesanctuary.org

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CAMERA TO
DONATE TO THE
SANCTUARY! →



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October 2, 2026

Mountain View
Magic

A Sanctuary Soirée

Now welcoming
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silent auction!



More details



Rockfish Wildlife Sanctuary

5450 Wheelers Cove Road, Shipman, VA 22971 • (434) 263-4954 • rockfishwildlifesanctuary.org

A Semi-Annual Newsletter



Spring/Summer 2026

MAKE WAY FOR DUCKLINGS!

Follow a waterfowl patient's journey from admission to release as we care for a whopping 70+ orphaned ducklings and goslings (so far!) this season.

The garden is blooming, the bat house is full, and baby animals are bursting through the doors at Rockfish Wildlife Sanctuary. We're currently keeping up with our previous admission record pace. While we've already cared for over 40 different species in 2026, one group has made up about 15% of all of our patients: orphaned waterfowl. **The walls don't talk at RWS – they quack!**

RWS is one of the few wildlife rehabilitation organizations in the state equipped to care for orphaned ducklings and goslings from rescue through release. It's an important job! Native waterfowl control plant and insect populations and also disperse nutrients and seeds between ever-diminishing wetland habitats.

Thanks to a major renovation supported by our donors and a generous grant from the Anne & Gene Worrell Foundation, we now have a dedicated waterfowl nursery. Our outdoor pre-release enclosures recently received upgrades, too, including pools nearly four times larger than before! Even our biggest Canada Goose patients can dive and swim to their heart's content.

Now, patient 26-307 is moving through our rehabilitation program in three specialized steps.

STEP 1: WATERFOWL NURSERY

In the wild, young waterfowl are led to water shortly after hatching. They learn to stand, walk, and swim within 24 hours! It's important we hone those same early skills in our organization's care as a result.

Our new nursery's bathtubs (yes, bathtubs!) make that skill practice possible. Through daily supervised swim sessions, the ducklings float, paddle, and forage while our team scatters food across the water's surface.

In addition to the special waterfowl pellets and greens we offer, we provide 26-307 with plenty of insects. In the wild, young Wood Ducks actually mostly eat protein-rich bugs before transitioning to a more herbivorous diet as adults. With appetites like 26-307's, it's no wonder we end up feeding over half a million insects to our patients each year!



WOOD DUCKLING 26-307

With so many exciting updates to our waterfowl rehabilitation program, we wanted to share one patient's journey through the Sanctuary. **Let's dive (pun intended) into the tale of Wood Duck patient 26-307!**

This teeny duckling arrived all alone after a concerned community member found her wandering through a restaurant parking lot in downtown Lexington, with no sign of her mother or siblings nearby. Her rescuer sprang into action and brought the little orphan to RWS for help.



OUR NEW WATERFOWL NURSERY



BATHTUB SWIM CLASS

Throughout these sessions, our team wears full protective equipment to prevent transmission of diseases like Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza. The dedicated, biosecure nursery has been a game changer for safe, healthy care.



STEP 2: ACCLIMATION AVIARY

Good news: duckling 26-307 and her friends have already moved outdoors – but they haven't been thrown into the deep end just yet. In our transition aviary, juvenile waterfowl experience real weather and larger pools while still having heat support.

STEP 3: PRE-RELEASE ENCLOSURE

As that fluffy down gets replaced with glossy plumage, Wood Duck 26-307 will soon graduate to the final stage of rehabilitation: a flight enclosure, now featuring a giant pool! **Her squad will stretch their wings, dive, and swim all day long.**

Because Wood Ducks naturally perch and nest in tree cavities, we'll also provide upright logs, fixed perches, dense vegetation, and extra hiding spaces to mimic the wooded wetland habitats they prefer.

MAKE WAY FOR RACCOONS, TOO!

RWS's major renovations also included two nurseries for infant raccoons. The spaces became a huge help at the start of the season when we admitted three kits in early May. The newborn raccoons were sadly found inside a cardboard box, abandoned next to a city dumpster in downtown Richmond.

Despite this unfair start to life, the kits have cleared their quarantine period and are thriving in care! They've tripled in size, opened their eyes, and love their daily enrichment. Soon they'll move outdoors to a release conditioning enclosure. Then, before we know it, they'll be heading back to the wild for the life they always deserved.



If all continues to go according to plan, Patient 26-307 will lift off from RWS later this summer and return to the wild – one of hundreds of animals given a second chance this season thanks to the compassion of our community and the hard work from our rehab team. **We look forward to continuing to expand what's possible for wildlife at the Sanctuary, with your help!**



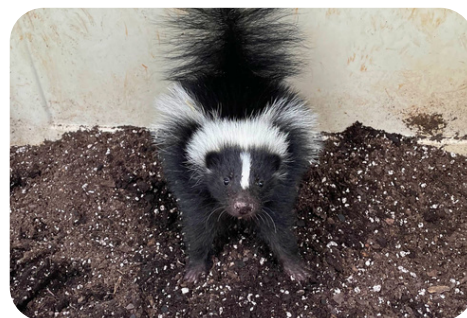
SPRING AT THE SANCTUARY



Meet our unofficial security guards! If you've visited the Sanctuary in the past year, you might have noticed a pair of Black Vultures sunning themselves on our back deck. Between preening each other and admiring their own reflections in our window, they've still found time for parenthood. They're often joined by their baby from last summer!



Love is in the air at RWS. Our team has seen many of "the locals" raising families! Eastern Phoebe's are nesting above our porch light (pictured above on hatch day!), ratsnakes are mating in the garden, and we've spotted a mother fox carrying prey back to her den. It is a true privilege to provide a safe harbor to our patients *and* to the wild neighbors who live on our peaceful, forested property.



Smells like an upgrade! We're thrilled to be underway expanding our specialized skunk enclosures this season. Orphaned skunk patients at RWS will have more room to roam, forage, and dig in these new spaces. We've already admitted over 20 skunk kits this baby season, so the renovated enclosures will be put to use right away.

MEMORABLE PATIENTS (SO FAR!)

Though a chilly winter led to a slower start to baby season, spring and summer have brought their usual hundreds of injured and orphaned animals. Each critter we care for is special, but there are always some patients that stick out to our team.



MEET "MAMA"

Sometimes, our patients help us raise others! That was certainly the case when it came to Groundhog patient 26-209, who we admitted after her mother was killed by a car. A community member saw her sitting next to her mom's body and was able to safely rescue her.

The rescuer immediately brought her to RWS, where she was one of the very first orphaned hoglets we cared for. As we admitted more lone orphans, 26-209 took them each under her wing paw – literally! She would fiercely guard them underneath her bigger body when we provided new meals or cleaned their enclosure. We also frequently observed 26-209 showing her younger adopted "siblings" how to forage, dig tunnels, and even climb logs.

Though we don't name our patients beyond their patient ID numbers, we admit we did affectionately call her "Mama." **We're thrilled to share that we successfully released "Mama" and her cohort in the late spring!**



YEAR OF THE HAWK

It's not every day you admit eight baby hawks! But at RWS, we've learned to expect the unexpected. This summer, we're proud to be caring for a record number of juvenile Red-shouldered Hawks.

How did we end up with so many? The hawks were all found orphaned in a different location across Virginia and transferred to us by fellow wildlife rehabilitators. Collaboration is a core part of our mission, and we regularly assist other rehabbers by accepting patients when specialized housing or additional capacity is needed.

The hawks have been thriving in care! Though they arrived across the developmental spectrum, each has been paired with a similarly sized companion and matched with an appropriate enclosure.

Their appetites are growing as quickly as they are – and feeding eight hungry hawks isn't cheap! **If you'd like to help support their care, please consider making a tax-deductible donation today.**



A TALE OF TWO FLEDGES

Ever heard of "fledgenapping?" That's how these two charming fledgling Blue Jays arrived. Both were found alone on the ground in late spring. In each case, the finder brought the bird indoors overnight and fed it foods they found recommended online.

We're by no means shaming these well-intentioned rescuers. However, based on their intake exams, both Blue Jays were likely healthy fledglings that didn't actually need a helping hand. Once a baby bird has been taken home and fed, though, a licensed rehabber *must* assess it for feeding injuries, gastrointestinal distress, and other conditions. (Pssst: feeding wildlife without a license is also illegal!)

While we're now happy to care for these boisterous Blue Jays (both nearing release!), we'd like to remind our community that **"re-nest is best."** Need help with a baby bird you've found? Give our hotline a call before intervening: **(434) 263-4954.**