



# NaturePhile

Written/Published by: Your Trust-ed Staff

Volume #16/Issue #2 2018

The Balsam Mountain Trust inspires people to be responsible stewards of the natural and cultural resources of the Southern Blue Ridge Mountains through education and conservation leadership.



Nature is always presenting us with wonderments. Case in point: this shot of our young musk (or stink-pot) turtle (*Sternotherus odoratus*), which will be on display at the Nature Center, and this female Eastern Hercules beetle (*Dynastes tityus*), which is the largest beetle found in this area. The quarter gives you a great reference for the size of these two creatures: one diminutive and one ginormous—for a bug that is. This is why it's so fun to hike and discover the myriad surprises in store for you in the natural world.

Photo by: M. Skinner

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## From the Trailhead:

By Michael Skinner, executive director

### The Final Countdown!

Yes, indeed, we're making wonderful progress with the remodel, and now, the move back into N.C. 2.0. And we have had the help of some BMP members— which is really great! The remodel portion of the building is complete so now it's time to move the hardware and software. We're anticipating to be in and working by the second or third week of July, give-or-take a day or two.

This is a great chapter in the story of the Trust as we also have so many of you to thank for your generosity in helping bring our vision to fruition. Not only have many of you contributed your financial support but we now have folks lending a hand with deconstructing N.C. 1.5 and reconstructing N.C. 2.0. Thanks to: Janie Stratigos, Sabrina Watkins, Mary Bassett, Ed and Linda James, Cathy and Mike Nervie, Cindy Schuppert, Linda Outlaw and Pam Frey. If you would like to lend a strong back and a steady hand, by all means, give us a shout. We have still have work to do before the grand re-opening.

### An Eye on the Natural World

Do any of you carry a camera with you everywhere you go? I'm guessing yes because pretty much everyone has a mobile phone right? I offer the following for your contemplation as when I'm on the trail I'm always looking for the myriad upon myriad forms of life which make up the puzzle of life on Earth.

Just looking at the cover photo of this issue of NaturePhile beckons and challenges the mind to contemplate the amazing technicolor, cinematic story which unfolds daily (and nightly) on the planet's journey through space.

Please immerse yourself in the photographs offered here and please, think about sending something/anything that you would like to share with the readers of this magazine. We would be happy to offer suggestions about what you might offer, quality, quantity, etc., of images.

See images on next page.

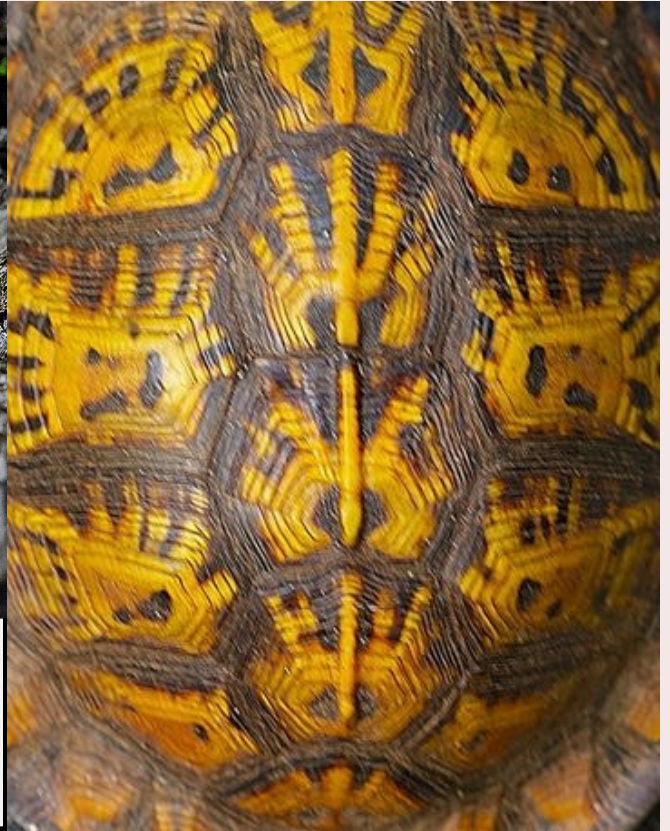


Mary Bassett instructs Janie Stratigos on the proper tools and technique to use during the removal of the period wall paper that was put up in the early 1900s.



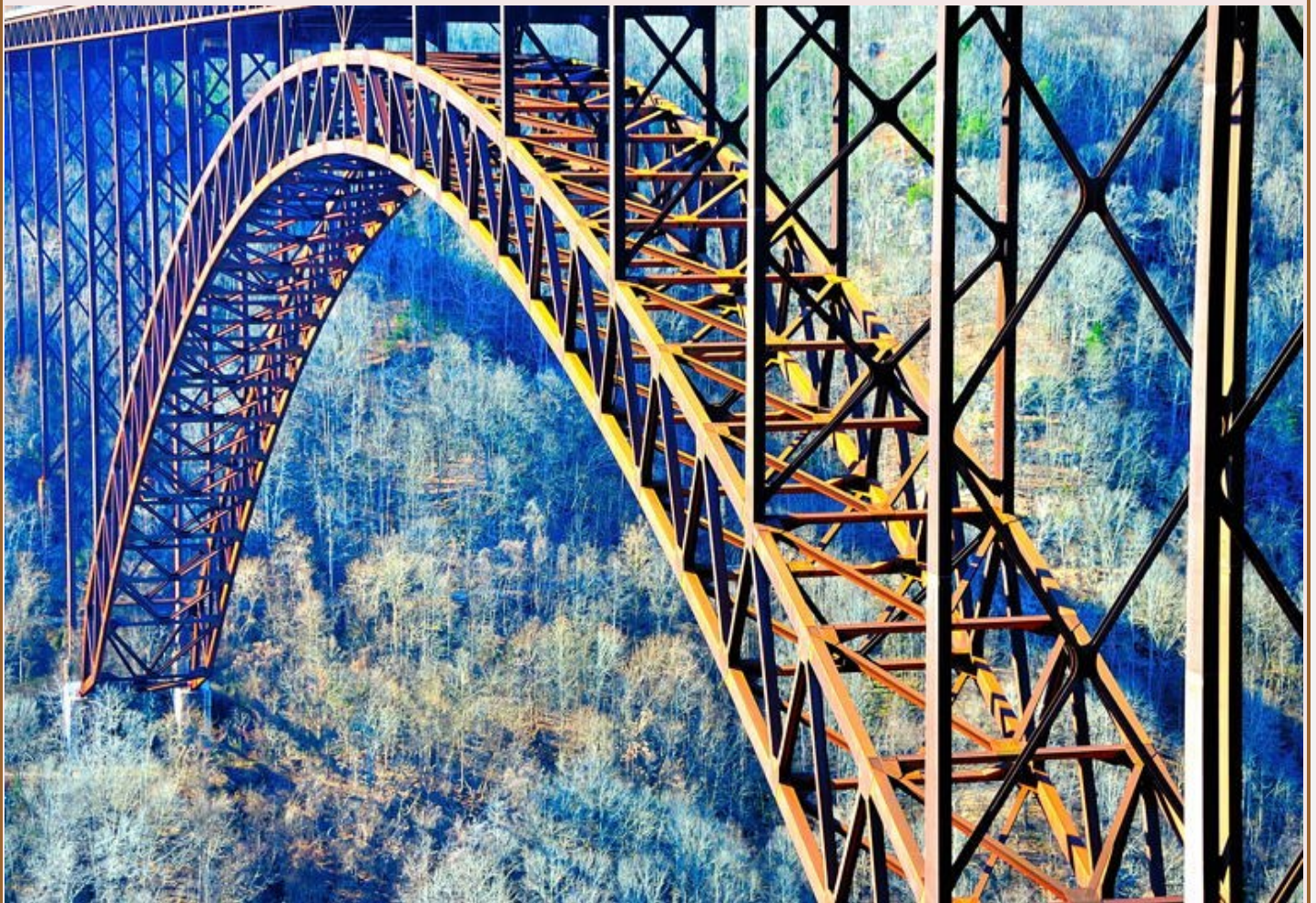
We think everyone is going to be pleasantly surprised by the facelift N.C. 2.0 is getting. Things are getting better ALL OVER the Preserve and we're excited to be a part of it all.





Top, clockwise: Cope's gray treefrog; eastern box turtle shell (carapace); New River Bridge support span

Photos by: Michael Skinner







## Education Mewsings: 'Wild' Care

By: Jen Knight, Co-Senior Naturalist/Education Director

Those of you who have met our newest animal ambassador, Blossom the Virginia opossum, know she is cute and unlike her wild counterparts, friendly! In fact, it was partly her sociable nature that led wildlife rehabilitators to deem her non-releasable. How are such decisions made? Who makes them? These questions fall under the purview of wildlife rehabilitation.

Wildlife rehabilitators, also known as “rehabbers,” are licensed to care for injured and orphaned wildlife. They may be animal care professionals who operate a species-specific rescue facility, or members of the public who have received specialized training and work out of their homes. In any case, rehabbers are subject to state and federal licensing, regulations and inspections. The Trust is permitted to stabilize wildlife until a rehabber can be reached, but we are not a licensed rehabilitation site.

When an injured or orphaned animal is brought in to a rehabber, they work with veterinary professionals to stabilize and treat serious conditions. If saved, the animal then begins the hard work of recovery, long term care or orphan rearing. The animals under a rehabber’s care face one of three outcomes: release, captivity or death – either from injuries or euthanasia.

Euthanasia – while never ideal – can be the most humane choice for animals with severe situations or conditions. The choice to end a wild animal’s life is never made lightly. Veterinary staff and rehabbers weigh many variables, but the main concern is the animal’s quality of life.

For example, wild rabbits are notoriously high strung in captivity and may die from stress while under treatment for a relatively routine injury. A veterinarian may opt to euthanize a rabbit with a simple fracture rather than subject it to the stress of captivity. Similarly, there are regulations in place regarding bird amputations. Amputations above the elbow joint significantly affect a bird’s ability to balance and are thought to detract too much from their quality of life for rehabilitation to be ethical.

An animal whose injuries do not cause significant pain or discomfort, but nevertheless negatively impact its ability to survive in the wild, is considered a candidate for captive placement. These animals will live out their lives in certified facilities like zoos and nature centers where they may be displayed or trained to participate in educational programs. Such animals are often referred to as “ambassadors” and play an important role in fostering connections between the public and wildlife.

While life as an animal ambassador may seem like a happy ending, the primary goal of wildlife rehabilitation is release back into the wild. Once an animal’s physical injuries are healed, its behaviors are monitored and tested to ensure it stands a chance in the wild. For instance, birds of prey, who are fed by humans during their recovery period, are given the “mouse test” to assess their ability to capture and kill live prey. Rasta, The Trust’s Eastern screech owl ambassador, was deemed non-releasable after failing his mouse test.



Blossom’s carefree nature makes her an ideal education animal but would limit her ability to survive in the wild.

Demeanor is another of the many factors rehabbers assess when determining the outcome for an animal in their care. Comfort around humans is a great quality for an ambassador, but can put a wild animal at risk. Rehabbers take great care to avoid habituating wild animals to humans and taming or “imprinting” wild orphans. They avoid handling animals unless absolutely necessary and will even avoid speaking around them. If raised with others of their kind and allowed to engage in natural behaviors, most hand-reared orphans can still be successfully released.

Some animals come in to rehabbers’ care desensitized to humans. For instance, Blossom’s lack of fear is likely a result of her apparent head injury. Cheyenne, our red-tailed hawk, was illegally taken out of the wild and kept as a pet. In both cases, their willingness to approach humans could result in harm to themselves or another person, so release is not an option. Once an animal is placed with us, Trust staff work one-on-one to habituate the animal to life at the Nature Center. This is a critical step toward their long-term quality of life and our ability to provide them with care.

For some people, the biggest questions surrounding wildlife rehabilitation are “Why do it at all? Isn’t death and injury just part of nature?”. Certainly no one can argue that nature can be a brutal and unforgiving domain. However, it is ideally a system in balance. Most wildlife injuries presented to rehabbers have an anthropogenic source, i.e., are caused in some way by humans. Vehicle strikes, pet attacks, poisoning and landscape netting entanglements are not injuries native wildlife would encounter without an ‘anthropogenic’ source. Wildlife rehabilitation is one way humans help reset ecosystem imbalances that we have created and, with animal ambassadors to help us, show others how to avoid creating these imbalances in the first place.



## AmeriCorps Update & Wild Migratory Bird Day (WMBD)

By Bethany Sheffer

Happy summer, everyone! I truly cannot believe that my second and final AmeriCorps term ends this month. Words cannot express my exuberance at serving both my terms with the Trust these past two years through curriculum development, program delivery, festival planning, animal care and more. Additionally, I have immensely enjoyed building relationships with BMP homeowners and BMP/BMT staff. What a relief I’m not going anywhere immediately! If you were not aware, I will be continuing with the Trust in Rose’s position during her maternity leave until October. I am so thrilled for this opportunity and cannot wait to work alongside Jen as co-Education Director/Lead Naturalist this summer.

One accomplishment I would like to highlight is World Migratory Bird Day 2018 I planned. This year’s celebration highlighted “Year of the Bird” – an initiative recognized by conservation giants such as the National Audubon Society, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Geographic – which sought to inspire participants to protect birds 365 days/year by planting native plants, decreasing window collisions, keeping cats indoors, etc. We had 275 participants at this year’s event in Bridge Park in Sylva on 12 May and were very pleased with the high level of engagement. Families played bird-themed games, made bird crafts and even got their faces painted! We had twelve regional organizations participate as exhibitors and ten volunteers



Bethany’s first look at baby Blossom!



*(many from BMT/BMP!) who made the event the success it was. I couldn't have been more pleased with the turnout and am so thankful to have been given the opportunity to spearhead this initiative.*



Highlights of Bethany's very successful Wild Migratory Bird Day day! In the end all we can all do is do the best we can do for the stewardship of the natural resources we all need to survive on planet Earth.

Three Cheers Bethany, Job Well Done!