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Veterinarian Belinda Burwell prepares the young male great horned owl for release on a Waterford farm. The release was a team effort between Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, Wildlife Veterinary Care and the Waterford Foundation. [Douglas Graham/Loudoun Now]

Great Horned Owl Returns to the Wild in Waterford

[2016-10-05](#) [Margaret Morton](#) [0 Comment](#)

A crowd of about 100 people gathered in Waterford on Sunday to witness the release of a great horned owl that had been found injured in April.

There were environmentalists, bird and nature lovers, village residents and kids who had heard about the release and just wanted to gather at the Schooley Mill Barn field to cheer the bird on its way to freedom.

Veterinarian Belinda Burwell, owner of Wildlife Veterinary Care, said the release had to be done at dusk. "Otherwise, if the crows realize it's here, they'll mob it," she said.

Veterinarian Belinda Burwell prepares the young male great horned owl for release on a Waterford farm. The release was a team effort between Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, Wildlife Veterinary Care and the Waterford Foundation.

[Douglas Graham/Loudoun Now]After giving the crowd a close-up look at the fierce-eyed young owl, Burwell asked everyone to stand back and opened her hands. The bird rose straight up, and then headed southwest toward a grove of trees along the creek.

The release was a partnership of Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, Wildlife Veterinary Care and the Waterford Foundation.

The story of the rescue and subsequent release through the help of a team of individuals and organizations is heart-warming. Burwell said the injured bird was seen on April 1 by Waterford resident Kim Benz and Mike Fitzgerald, near the tennis court at his Rosemont Farm southwest of the village.

Benz noticed the fluffy white bird lying on the leaves. "I crept up and picked it up," she said. She then called Loudoun Animal Control Officer Kelli Kleptach, who in turn contacted Burwell.

"It had fallen out of its nest onto its head, hitting it hard and injuring its leg," Burwell said, recalling the fledgling had wobbly balance for the first few weeks. "It had to learn how to survive," she said.

Burwell turned to Nicole Hamilton, executive director at the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, to see if she could help locate the nest and its parents. LWC board members Patti Psaris, a neighbor of the Fitzgeralds, went looking for the nest and heard great horned owls calling from the wood line. She found the nest, but no birds. Psaris played a tape of owl calls to see if they would respond, but "they were long gone."

So Burwell nursed the owl back to health over the summer, feeding it chopped frozen mouse in small bites from a tweezer. Since the nest site at Rosemont was not far from the Waterford Foundation's Phillips Farm, it was decided that a release near it would provide a good foraging and sheltering habitat.



The great horned owl is released near Phillips Farm, which is expected to provide a good habitat for the fledgling bird, that had been found injured and was treated by Veterinarian Belinda Burwell .

[Douglas Graham/Loudoun Now]

