

Wildlife Vet Care – The Cage that sets birds free

Photo by Chris Weber

By **Chris Weber**

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Normally when you think of a cage you think of a place to confine a person or animal. But a Flight Cage is different. A flight cage sets birds free. And Doctor Belinda Burwell needs one. And here's why.

First a little background. Doctor Belinda Burwell is one of the leading wildlife experts in our area, having dedicated over 30 years of her life to rescuing and rehabilitating orphaned and injured wildlife. Having earned Bachelor of Science in Zoology from Duke University and a Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine from Tufts University.

Specializing in Zoo and Wildlife Medicine she received additional training at the Franklin Park Zoo, the Stone Zoo in Boston, and at the National Zoo in Washington, D.C.

She went on to work with wildlife and help bring public awareness to the cause, first in New Hampshire, then in Ohio where she also worked as the pro bono vet for the Lake Metroparks Wildlife Center, and now finally here in Virginia. found several wildlife and animal medical and rescue facilities in the area. Her latest project, "Wildlife Vet Care" is her most ambitious yet .

The mission of Wildlife Veterinary Care (WVC) is to supply veterinary care to sick and injured wildlife, and unlike many other facilities, WVC provides this care on an emergency basis 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In addition to providing emergency care the mission of WVC is to teach veterinarians, their staff, and veterinary students to do the same. WVC assists wildlife rehabilitator, environmental organizations and the public with wildlife health concerns, and monitors wildlife and environmental health. WVC rescues and rehabilitates wildlife, and teaches others to do the same. WVC also educates the public about wildlife rescue and wildlife health issues. Releases of wildlife back into the wild which is the ultimate goal of every rescue, are held regularly and the public is welcome to come and view these spectacular releases.

While WVC accepts all sorts of wildlife, Doctor Burwell's special expertise is in birds. Dr. Burwell is one of only a few veterinarians providing orthopedic surgery to eagles and other large birds in this area. She has treated great horned owls, barred owls, barn owls, long-eared owls, screech owls, saw-whet owls, short-eared owls, Northern harriers, red-tailed hawks, red-shouldered hawks, broad winged hawks, merlins, peregrine falcons, American kestrels, Cooper's hawks, sharp-shinned hawks, and of course Bald Eagles.

And this is where the urgent need for a flight-cage comes into play. In order to rehabilitate these birds the center needs a large cage to exercise them in and even train them to fly or hunt for food again.

"These birds need to fly well and be strong enough to catch food and avoid predators when they are released back into the wild, so this preparation is essential to their survival." – Belinda Burwell DVM

Currently the center is housing a bald eagle, a great horned owl and a red-tailed hawk, all which would benefit from a flight-cage on the premises. A great blue heron released last weekend would also have benefited from a larger flight rehabilitation cage before release.

The cost of the flight-cage is a hurdle but not an insurmountable one. For the site prep and all the construction and materials costs are expected to run around \$50,000, so the center is reaching out to the general public to help raise the funds build the new cage and help Doctor Burwell continue her amazing work with our areas great birds of prey.

If you'd like to help Doctor Burwell and Wildlife Vet Care continue their amazing work rehabilitating our great birds of prey, then you can donate on their Facebook page, (<https://www.facebook.com/wildlifevetcare/>) using the "Donate" button, or on their website (<http://wildlifevetcare.com/>) or by sending a check to Wildlife Veterinary Care PO Box 288, Millwood, VA 22646.

Patients currently receiving care at the Center include a barred owl hit by a train that has head trauma, a red-tailed hawk with a fractured wing, a bald eagle recovering from trauma and an infection, a great horned owl found on a golf course that is recovering from an illness, another barred owl that was hit by a car and has a fractured beak and eye trauma, a pied-billed grebe that became grounded, four box turtles with fractured shells, a wood turtle and a box turtle with eye injuries, a squirrel that was attacked by a cat and a bat with a wing injury.

If you have injured or orphaned Wildlife please call 540-664-9494 any time. They are there to help.

Doctor Burwell and the WVC are also accepting interns and trainees so if you have time and are willing to work to help these animals please contact the center.