Wildlife Center Classroom Series
Welcome to the Team:
Becoming an Education Ambassador

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Five minutes until class! Who's excited?
Comment From David in VA.
Class should be a HOOT today.

Comment From BarbG
waiting

Comment From ♥Jakermo ♥
I AM!!!

Comment From CarolinaGirl
Have my hot tea, a snowy view and I am ready!!

Comment From caleb (ター)
YAAAAAY! Classroom session on WCV Ambassadors! Kids are SOOOoo excited! Great topic, thanks to Izzy!

Comment From izzy2cool4u
Yay It’s time for class I didn’t miss it! :)

Comment From David in VA.
Momma bear is trying to decide which room to give birth to her 2 cubs TODAY!!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
That would certainly make class exciting. And might steal some thunder ...

Welcome to the Team:
Becoming an Education Ambassador

Wed, Feb. 12 at 1:00 pm Eastern
on the Critter Cam's moderated discussion

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Welcome to our monthly Wildlife Center Classroom Series!
Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Did you know that this is our one-year anniversary of the WCCS? Last February, we started offering these monthly classes. I think they’ve been a good addition!

Comment From CarolinaGirl
A great addition. Love them!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
So ... thanks to a suggestion by izzy2cool4u, today’s class will focus on our education animal ambassadors! More specifically – how we choose one, the animal’s role at the Wildlife Center, etc.

Comment From Regina, IL
Eating lunch now so I can sit in on class. Thank you Cathy-cms,FFXVA for sponsoring the Critter Cams today.

Comment From izzy2cool4u
Hi Amanda :) it’s been a great year of learning!!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
And thanks for your class idea! It was a good one ... for a couple of reasons. :)

Comment From ♥Jakermo ♥
Oooh, this is good. Can't wait to hear.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
I think many of you are familiar with at least some of our education animals – Buddy the Bald Eagle being one of the most well-known and well-loved ...

Buddy

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
But of course, a lot of our other education animal ambassadors have fan clubs too!
Comment From ♥Jakermo ♥
Oh, love Athena, and Mr Buttercup

Comment From ♥Jakermo ♥
love that pix of him

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
You can find a complete list of our education animals here: http://wildlifecenter.org/critter-corner/education-animals. And just follow the link to “adopt” them through our Caring for Critters program!
Comment From Dave in Missouri
Ok which one is it Jakermo,LoL!

Comment From izzy2cool4u
I have to say I love them all, but Miss Athena has a very special spot in my heart :)

Comment From Lydia, PA ♥ ง•ᴗ•ง ♥
Thanks to izzy for the idea for today! Great class topic

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
So just how do we choose our ambassadors?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Before we get into that, it’s important to understand the role of the education animal at the Wildlife Center – basically, WHY we even have education ambassadors.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
The Wildlife Center’s mission is “to teach the world to care about and to care for wildlife and the environment.” Education is at the core of everything we do.

Comment From ♥Jakermo ♥
Well, you want to spread the word, and teaching through wildlife that has been injured is the best way!!

Comment From CarolinaGirl
Guessing that as all teachers know, you need a visual....and what better visual to teach about wild life than wildlife??

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
As some of you “regulars” probably know, we draw our education lessons from the stories of the thousands of wild animals that arrive at our doorstep every year.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
These patients give us a ton of information – and their stories often illustrate the wider problems wildlife face. Can you guys list some of those issues – why wild animals often end up in our care?

Comment From BarbG
cats outdoors

Comment From PaulaR
struck by cars..while grrazing on human garbage at the side of the road

Comment From Dave in Missouri
Hit by car

Comment From izzy2cool4u
impact with vehicles, orphaned, kept by well meaning individuals so they imprinted on humans
Injured, orphaned or humanized.

hit by car, cat/dog attacks

Humans thinking wild animals are pets.

The big no-no throwing food out the car and animals getting hit by cars

inappropriate feeding of wild critters

Human interaction....people trying to raise wildlife.

storms

caught in traps (grrrrr)

Oh, and kidnapping seemingly orphaned babies.

Thinking mom is gone, but shes not.

Hey, you guys have been paying attention! :) Yep, all great answers.

We tell the stories of our patients and education animals in on- and off-site education programs, open houses, our website, and our moderated discussion! For our in-person programs, we use non-releasable animals and use their stories to help illustrate some of the issues that wildlife face.
Comment From ♥Jakermo ♥
OH, great picture of Chapin and Athena!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
And of course, we also use these stories to offer solutions and advice – and to challenge people to take action to help wildlife.

Comment From izzy2cool4u
Fantastic photo of Chapin and Athena! I hope Lydia is watching this :)

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
For example, one of our very important “call to actions” is keeping cats indoors. This is a pretty big hot-button issue these days, and different animal organizations have some pretty varying opinions.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
For us, we see patients every day that have been attacked by free-roaming cats. This is a frequent cause of admission for an animal at the Wildlife Center – and one of the hardest things to treat. Often, even with treatment, these patients do not survive. It can be quite frustrating, especially in "baby season", when so many young animals (of many many species) are attacked by cats.

So, keeping cats indoors is one of our education messages.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Another lesson that we draw from several of our education animals’ stories is to NOT keep wild animals as pets. If you find an injured or orphaned wild animal, call a permitted rehabilitator in your state.

If you are unsure if an animal is orphaned or not – call someone BEFORE you take action! We receive hundreds of young animals every year – and a good number of these have been “kidnapped”.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Many times, the animals’ natural history is such that the mother will often leave her young alone for several hours at a time. This is the case with rabbits and fawns – our most often kidnapped species!
Right?

Comment From David in VA.
LOL at the cartoon

Comment From cms, FFX VA
LOL @ cartoon!

Comment From ♥Jakermo ♥
I love that cartoon...... LOL

Comment From izzy2cool4u
LOL that's a great way to illustrate the point..

Comment From PaulaR
wish you had a "like" button for posts like this!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
It's a great analogy, right? What if some big alien species ran around scooping up kids in the sandbox or kids playing basketball in the driveway. Mom doesn't always have to be directly beside their offspring!

Comment From Sweetpea
Like

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
For all we know, this could've also been the situation with Edie the American Kestrel and Gus the Barred Owl – they were both found as babies. Gus was kept illegally as a pet.
Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
On a similar note, Wilson the Eastern Box Turtle helps us spread the message that wildlife shouldn’t be kept as pets—even if it seems like they’d be fun or “easy” to care for—they are wild animals, and they should be allowed to live their wild lives!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Wilson stays quite busy each year, and when he appears in programs, we encourage folks to take “The Turtle Promise!”

Comment From katiesmom♥
AND they should NOT be painted – just because they are called a painted turtle!

Comment From Jakermo ♥
A neighbor cat walks by the window sometimes when I am on the Blog. I never know what to say to owner. They just say, he has always been an outside cat.

Comment From Lydia, PA ♥ʕ•ᴥ•ʔ♥
(yes, AA taught me the cat lesson and I used to feed feral cats, spay neuter based on advice of a well intentioned rescue group—but they did not have the whole story, and then I started having all the wildlife in my yard killed. No more)

Comment From Kate
If I amy ask. I have a small backyard and 2 terriers. I found 4 baby rabbits under a bush after one of my dogs had brought it inside...very gently laid it on the floor...unharmed. I took them to a woman I worked with who does that type of work. Was it wrong to remove them as the dogs have to use the yard?
Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
It is very tricky with dogs -- and sometimes surprising that mom rabbit makes her nest in an active dog area! Sometimes nests can be moved very short distances (if say, it was right beside a fenceline). Or, if its possible to fence off the area from the dogs (depending on the layout of the yard/nest/etc). But, it was good to protect them from the dogs -- once they figure out where a nest is, they often won’t leave it alone!

Comment From Lydia, PA ♥ ʕ•ᴥ•ʔ ♥
I am watching izzy! Our beautiful Athena (I cannot believe someone on WCV FB page called Athena ugly)

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
(that person needs their head examined. or eyes)

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Can anyone else suggest some “call to actions” that our education ambassadors help us teach? What other things do we like to encourage people to do – or NOT to do (it seems like a lot of our message are – “hey, don’t do this.”)

Comment From PaulaR
help turtles across the road in the direction in which they’re going

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Yep, a good one ...

Comment From Deb in SD
A biggie---encourage hunters to use non-lead ammo!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Yes, helping educate those who hunt –

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Comment From Agnes in MA
Besides birds, don’t feed the wildlife!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:

Comment From Linda in Suffok, VA
I have helped snakes get across the road too. :)}
Comment From cms, FFX VA
Don't feed the animals.

Comment From PaulaR
don't feed bread to waterfowl...or deer or songbirds, for that matter

Comment From Sweetpea
Don't feed wild ducks white bread.

Comment From Lydia, PA ♥ ʕ•ᴥ•ʔ ♥
people throwing food and apple cores and such out of car windows--and then the critters come to eat and get hit by cars

Comment From MAK, PA
Throw food out the car window

Comment From CarolinaGirl
Throw food out the car window!! :-)

Comment From MAK, PA
I meant to say not to throw food out the car window

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
:

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Yes, this is a big one!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Not litter in general ... and a special emphasis on not even throwing biodegradable litter out of the car window.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
We encourage people to dispose of their trash by putting it IN the trash – or recycling when possible. Too many things like plastic bottles, soda cans, and trash end up in the environment. It’s sad that littering still happens – and we do see patients admitted that are sometimes entrapped in litter situations – paws stuck in soda cans, heads stick in yogurt cups or jars, etc.
Don't litter.

Comment From CarolinaGirl
I remember the skunk with his head in a jar!

Comment From Deb in SD
Ah yes--the skunk incdent!
Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
For those who haven’t seen it, I’d encourage you to watch our famous “Skunk head in a Jar” video on YouTube later. I’ll just post the link – check it out after class! http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O0eFlwzLXjk

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
The other part of our “don’t litter” message is “the message of the apple core”. I know some of you guys know this message! Anyone want to share?

Comment From PaulaR
Don’t toss out apple cores...they may seem biodegradeable but they attract small animals to the edge of the road, where they either fall victim to cars or attract larger predators which then fall victim to cars...

Comment From izzy2cool4u
If you throw even an apple core out the window you are encouraging wildlife like deer or raccoons to venture closer to the road where they can get hit. Not even biodegradable items should be thrown from a car even if they seem harmless

Comment From CarolinaGirl
Yes. What Paula and Izzy said!

Comment From Deb in SD
I try to remind my friends to move the animal way off the side of the road if they should have an unfortunate run-in with one. That way, any raptors will not get hit when they feed on the carcass.

Comment From Lydia, PA ♥ ʕ•ᴥ•ʔ ♥
yes izzy, and then the eagle comes to eat the carrion and gets hit too, and etc..it multiplies

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Very good!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
And I’m happy to say that we have this up on our website now. We talk about it so much, we realized it was kind of funny that it wasn’t on the site!

http://wildlifecenter.org/message-apple-core

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
AND -- I need your help.

Comment From ♥Jakermo ♥
We’re here for you.

Comment From Deb in SD
yes???

Comment From ♥Jakermo ♥
That was at my first Open House [apple core]
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Comment From izzy2cool4u
We love to help!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Raina and I have been working on this apple core message -- we're pretty excited about it -- to have it anchored on the website, and about this meme!

We love to help!

No litter is "safe" litter

Remember the message of the apple core

www.wildlifecenter.org/applecore

Check out the link!

Comment From BarbG
this is great

Comment From Linda in Suffok, VA
Ooo - we can share that on our FB pages!

Comment From katiesmom♥
What can we help you with Amanda?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
I have this queued up on Facebook -- so after class, if you Facebook users can go to our page and SHARE this message -- we will make it go viral! I want to see it spread far and wide on Facebook. :)

Comment From cms, FFX VA
Ah, you can count on CN to spread it far and wide!
Comment From MAK, PA
Will do AA!

Comment From ♥Jakermo ♥
Can we do it?? YES we can!!

Comment From Deb in SD
Will do, Amanda!!

Comment From Lydia, PA ♥ʕ•ᴥ•ʔ ♥
Okay! we are on it!

Comment From katiesmom ♥
Bet that driver was wondering what ya'll were doing on the ground taking that photo. Or was that Ed?

Comment From Deb in SD
I recognize that road--it's right at your driveway, isn't it??

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Yes, we did a photo shoot with Chapin's apple core and I played chicken with the cars and trucks. It was an adventure. Team effort.

Comment From PaulaR
will definitely do it, Amanda!

Comment From CarolinaGirl
We can do that. You know us...just give us a challenge!!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Whew, okay that was exciting. But now class gets MORE exciting!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
So, all of our education animals have a story to tell – and all of them help us teach people not only about wildlife, but about what people can do to help wildlife. All of our education ambassadors are important members of the outreach team!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
As you can imagine, selecting a new member of the team can be challenging! Like any human staff member, we want our education animal ambassadors to be the right fit for us. Just like a human staff member, it can be a bit of a process to find the right fit!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
To have our variety of education animal ambassadors, we must hold a few different permits. We need to have a permit and annual inspection from the USDA so that we can have our education opossums.

We also need to have permits from the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (for both mammals and birds). And of course, to have our education birds, we need to have federal permits from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.
Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Each permit has a set of conditions/regulations – so that people, including wildlife rehabilitators, cannot just keep non-releasable wildlife for the sake of keeping them. The intent of the permits is wildlife conservation education.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
For example, in the federal permit conditions, it states that each migratory bird held under the permit must be presented in a minimum of 12 public programs each year. So again, just wanted to ensure that these non-releasable birds are used for education, not simply kept.

Comment From Lois - Bath, NY
Do these permits have expiration dates associated with them

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Yes, it varies from permit to permit -- some need to be renewed annually, some every three years.

Comment From katiesmom ♥
Wow, I did not realize that!@ So good records must be kept of each outing that an Education animal takes.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
The migratory bird rehabilitation permits help determine what type of injury would not be suitable for a captive animal – such as amputations of a leg, foot, wing above the elbow joint, or a completely blind bird.

Comment From Lydia, PA ♥ ʕ•ᴥ•ʔ ♥
This is the part you are waiting for izzy!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
So, nearly all of our education ambassadors start out as patients. As you might guess, the scenario is usually that the animal is admitted with an injury or issue, the veterinarians treat the patient, but at some point, it is determined that the animal is non-releasable.

Comment From Linda in Suffok, VA
Does the tour associated with your Open Houses count as a public event?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Yes.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
After an animal has been deemed non-releasable, the vets need to make as assessment on that patient. Is the injury stable? Or is the patient’s condition deteriorating? If the animal was kept in captivity, would the injury cause pain? Does the patient seem like it can adapt to life in captivity? Or is the patient very stressed out by people – or constantly trying to find a way out of the enclosure? Will that animal hurt itself more in captivity?

Comment From izzy2cool4u
This is awesome, we are so lucky to be able to learn all these things :)

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
If the animal in question does have a stable injury, and seems fairly calm and adaptable, then the veterinarians will wander down the hall and will chat with me. WCV outreach team gets first dibs, before we try to place that animal at another educational facility. For the most part, the vets know what sort of animal we are looking for – if we would like a particular species, or a particular age of a species, etc.

**Amanda Nicholson, WCV:**
At the Wildlife Center, we generally have about two dozen education animals at any one time. We like to have a few opossums, a couple species of native snakes, a turtle, and a variety of hawks, owls, falcons, and an eagle. This meets our programming needs for the type of programs that we present, and about two dozen animals allow us to rotate through the team of ambassadors, so everyone can take a break.

**Comment From BarbG**
if they are in training like Buddy, can they do less programs a year and be ok??

**Amanda Nicholson, WCV:**
If they are official education animals, like Buddy, then they need to do their programs! But remember, we do about a 100 or so on-site programs each year.

**Comment From ♥Jakermo ♥**
But you will have your Eagle for a long long time, so you don't need any of them, correct?

**Amanda Nicholson, WCV:**
Exactly. And a lot of our raptors live a long time, so as you guys can imagine, we don't need to add to the team too frequently. Opossums are definitely the biggest "turnover" since they sadly don't live too long (compared to a 20 year old raptor).

**Comment From ♢️⚫️⭐️ dancelady ⚫️♣️**
Can you go out and look for such an animal, if you don't have any non-releasable on hand? That is, if you wanted a raccoon (I know you don't treat or keep them), could you call a rehabber or other hospitals and see if they had any?

**Amanda Nicholson, WCV:**
We can, sure. We can look to other rehabilitators or even out-of-state centers.

**Comment From Jackie in CA**
I'm at work and can't stay in the chat, so will this class be archived, please?

**Amanda Nicholson, WCV:**
Yes, along with all the others!

**Comment From David in VA.**
What if it is deemed that an animal could not be released but would not be able to tolerate being around people?

**Amanda Nicholson, WCV:**
Then the most humane thing to do would be to euthanize that animal. If the animal is so distressed by being in captivity, it wouldn't be fair to keep it.
Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
So, if we decide that we are interested in a non-releasable animal, then that patient becomes an education candidate. Some folks have a tendency to say, “hey, you have a new education ____! What’s its name?” But names are the very LAST thing we think about with education candidates -- because they’re candidates, not official ambassadors.

Names are the icing on the cake! First – we need to determine if this animal is a good fit for our team.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Some animals, like snakes and opossums, are probably a little bit easier to train – at least the ones we’re dealing with. If you look at many of our education opossums – most are here because they were kept illegally by people – so they are already kind of friendly toward people. Or, if they are injured (like Phebe), we’ve typically had them from a very young age.

Comment From CarolinaGirl
So, how did you know Phebe was a fit? Was it pretty obvious from the start?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
We didn't know it from the start, but we figured the odds were good, given that she was so young. We'd be able to let her grow up around humans as much as possible, so we figured she'd probably end up being pretty friendly!

Comment From PaulaR
Phebe has such a calm, sweet demeanor i bet she aced her interview!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Many of our snakes come to us as unwanted or confiscated pets. So many of them are already used to spending some time around people too.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
So the path to becoming an education snake or opossum might be a bit shorter – we may reach a conclusion faster than we would with a raptor.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Training opossums usually involves handling the opossum a good bit – every day, and typically a few times a day. The rehab staff like to help us with this too – and it’s good for the opossum to get used to multiple people. Generally, we just pick them up for a bit and hold them. Ideally, we want them to relax and not try to jump out of our arms!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Sometimes we use food to help train too – just a nice positive reinforcement: people = nice things like food.

http://youtu.be/WvGEJxtGkHg

Comment From ♥Jakermo ♥
I thought that was Amanda with Phebe at first, but I think it's Chapin, right/
Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Right! I love the part where she comes when she’s called. So. Cute.

Comment From teri in va
Love the feeding session with Phoebe :)

Comment From Lydia, PA ♥ ʕ•ᴥ•ʔ ♥
I remember when I cam to a summer open house Phebe was in a little baksset and blanket with the front desk coordinators

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Hard work, right? Carrying around a little opossum in a basket ...

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
For the a snake candidate, daily handling is scheduled, and we simply hold them for awhile and let them get used to us.

Comment From PaulaR
I would need to get used to handling the snake correctly, too!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
For an education raptor, we have more of a regimented training period. We set a training/trial period of about two months. During this time, the outreach staff begins to work with the bird in question to determine if this bird will be a good glove-trained bird.

While we do have a couple of exceptions to the rule, for the most part, we want all of our education raptors to be good traveling education birds – we’re generally not interested in acquiring “display only” birds.

Comment From PaulaR
Was Jaz ever a traveling bird?

Comment From ♥Jakermo ♥
Jaz must be "display only"?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Right, Jaz is one of our two current exceptions.

Comment From CarolinaGirl
Well, there is Buttercup. :-)

Comment From dj
is Buttercup the exception? She (or he...can't remember) is exceptional!

Comment From ♥Jakermo ♥
Or maybe Buttercup?
Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
And he’s the other. :) Although some day ... !

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
An education raptor candidate typically has two trainers. During this time, the trainers feed the raptor and work with it every day (and all day for the first month). The bird usually lives indoors at first, and spends the entire day on the glove of one of the two outreach trainers.

After a few weeks, the trainers start transitioning the bird to the outdoor enclosure. At the end of the trial period, the trainers will make an assessment as to whether or not the bird will be a good fit for our team.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
That means, for a little while, we get a feathered “officemate”. Here’s a photo from when Ruby was back inside last fall for sort of a training “bootcamp”.

Hanging out with the team.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
At the end of the training period, when we make our assessment, if the answer is “yes”, and we are interested in this bird as a permanent member of the team, then we will schedule a follow-up medical examination with the veterinary team, just to ensure that any injuries the animal may have really ARE stable and okay. If that is clear ... then we have a new member of the team!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
And, I should add, throughout the training of all of these animals – particularly the opossums and birds – we do introduce them to people. We’ll walk the animal through the lobby, we might stop and chat with some visitors, and sometimes the animals will attend daily rounds in the hospital, or the monthly staff meeting.
Comment From Lydia, PA ♥ .dataSource: $$\text{Comment From Lydia, PA ♥ dataSource: }$$
Athena was too, I remember! I think Athena spent a good deal of time with you AA

**Amanda Nicholson, WCV:**
Right, she was another feathered officemate.

Comment From CarolinaGirl
Uh Oh, did Ruby forget her manners?

**Amanda Nicholson, WCV:**
Yes ... her initial training took a bit longer. Actually, that was sort of under the former education department ... we set some new edu bird training guidelines when we became the outreach department. We just need a more structured period, basically.

Comment From ♥Jakermo ♥
YAY for the Team!

Comment From izzy2cool4u
What would happen to an animal in training if they didn't fit the team or turned out to not be trainable for educational outreach purposes?

**Amanda Nicholson, WCV:**
We would look for placement elsewhere -- perhaps as a display bird at a nature center, or with someone who had more time to dedicate to training.

Comment From PaulaR
I get the impression from time to time that not everyone at WCV feels that Buddy's the right fit as an ambassador...
Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
No, I don’t think that’s true. I think it’s just that he’s a bit more work -- and we sometimes get used to those dream birds like Grayson or Athena who trained up really quickly and are good to go. Buddy, and eagles in general, just fall into a different sort of training regimen. Expectations just have to be adjusted.

And he’s doing programs as of 2013 -- so that’s all we want for him -- to teach!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
So, after all that -- if we decide to bring the animal on -- then the only thing left to do is to pick a suitable name!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
The nice thing about waiting to name the bird (besides it really not being at all important to training) is that we do have a better sense of the bird’s personality.

We also give ourselves an “out” so that if at the end of that trial period, if we decide the bird is not suitable for us, we can place it elsewhere -- and we don’t have that attachment to a name (which makes it feel like the bird is more “official”).

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
We pick the names of our education animals through a variety of ways -- sometimes it’s been through a naming contest (Ruby, Athena, Briscoe) ... sometimes we’ll auction off naming rights (Alex, Phebe) ... and sometimes a staff member just comes up with a really good suggestion that we can’t pass up (Severus, Albus, Edie). We’ve also had some staff-only naming contests where staff members suggest names and we vote on them in-house (Grayson).

Comment From CarolinaGirl
That makes sense!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
At the heart of it all, we really like to have some sort of meaning behind the name -- because helps us tell that animal’s story. Remember, if our goal is education, and sharing stories -- then a good meaningful name can help us share a bit about the animal’s natural history, or particular circumstance of rescue.

Comment From izzy2cool4u
I've sort of wondered about the naming process in that when we train our pets for example what we ask of them often starts by saying their name. How do you work with a raptor on commands for example and let them know you mean for them to "step up" and aren't talking to someone else?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Because we're working with them one on one (they're on the glove, with us nearly all of the time at first), they aren't really confused about who we're talking to -- but as you said, they do start to cue into those words. It's not really important to say "hey you" -- more more important for them to get familiar with "step up" and "perch!".

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Although maybe that explains why Chapin sometimes leaps into the air when I'm talking to a raptor nearby ...

Comment From PaulaR
tee hee...she's some long-legged bird, she is!
Comment From Linda in Suffok, VA
How do you categorize Papa G’Ho?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Papa is a surrogate, not an education animal. While he’s a permanent animal, he doesn't see the public.

Comment From izzy2cool4u
Giggles sounds like Chapin could be a lot of fun!

Comment From BarbG
do you need permits for hi?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Yes, he's listed on our rehab permit, I believe -- as a surrogate.

Comment From izzy2cool4u
Is there any species that WCV doesn't currently have as an ambassador that would be useful if the situation presented one as non releaseable?

Comment From katiesmom♥
So is there a variety of Education animal that if it came along you would want???

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Yes -- SNAKES! Corn snake, hognosed snake, pine snake, garter snake ... snakes!

Comment From ❥••• dancelady ( Gymnast)
How did they get a permit for Challenger to fly through a stadium during a football game -- I can imagine what that permit said....?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
I believe that would be on the education permit -- there are a good number of places that do flight shows with their birds.

Comment From Guest
For class: I learned in civics class that Ambassadors serve "at the pleasure of the President." Does that mean if Ed doesn't like one, that they are, shall we say, "out of here?"

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Ha ... no. :) Hopefully class explained that it starts with the outreach team and of course, the veterinary team for all things medical. Eagles would be the exception.
Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
So, I hope that gives you a bit of perspective on what goes into choose a new member of the team! In many ways, it is like a prolonged interview process – to make sure the outreach department has the right fit.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Now, do you guys want to hear a story?

Comment From BarbG
yes we do

Comment From izzy2cool4u
Yes please!! I love stories!

Comment From CarolinaGirl
Of course!!

Comment From PaulaR
yes, please!

Comment From Lydia, PA ♥ ง•ᴥ•ง ♥
Yes. We love sorties

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Once upon a time, there was a man driving through the town of Mechanicsville, Virginia.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
At one of the intersections, he noticed an injured bird sitting on the ground. He picked it up and called a local wildlife rehabilitator.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
The local rehabilitator examined the injured bird. It was a Red-shouldered Hawk. The rehabber took it to an animal hospital in Richmond, and then later that same day, the bird was transported to the Wildlife Center of Virginia.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
The hawk was an immature bird – young of the year. It was in really bad shape. The bird had a bruised and broken right wing, was very, very thin and dehydrated, had some changes to its left eye, and was having difficulty breathing.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
The bruising on the wing was green-ish – indicating that the injury was already several days old. This also made sense – the bird was so thin and dehydrated, it clearly had not been able to take care of itself or hunt for awhile. The left eye had some “floating debris” in it – meaning that the vets couldn’t really see into the back of the eye to tell if there were injuries or not.
Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
So, this bird was in really bad shape.

Comment From Guest
oh how sad

Comment From Stephen in NC
I am starting to like this sorty a whole lot

Comment From MAK, PA
Oh good Once upon a time!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Over the next few days, the Red-shouldered Hawk was rehydrated and tube-fed. The vets were able to take radiographs to get a better visual on the fractured right wing, which was actually fractured in two places.

Fractured radius and ulna

Comment From izzy2cool4u
Oh dear this hawk has some troubles! Glad we know it made it to WCV!

Comment From Guest
ouch
Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Because of the locations of the two fractures, the vets decided that a surgical fix was not an option – because there was a high risk that the joint capsule would be affected. So, the veterinary team bandaged the wing securely and had to rely on the bird’s bones sort of forming a natural split for each other, since they were fractured in different locations. Here’s another view – a “skyline” of the wing:

Comment From PaulaR
poor guy. I see he’s got a tailguard on in the picture

Comment From Frankfromchicago
AA the story teller,

Comment From izzy2cool4u
Sounds like a tough case for this bird! Wow this story is amazing even has x rays!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
As the wing healed, the eye healed a little too – and the vets were able to see the left retina much more clearly. And, they found some degeneration. Something to keep an eye on [no pun intended!] as the bird progressed.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
About a month after admission, the veterinary team was beginning to suspect that the Red-shouldered Hawk might be non-releasable. They were also concerned that osteoarthritis could be an issue in the future for this hawk.

Comment From PaulaR
I think i met this bird! Chayton?

Comment From Lydia, PA ♥ ʕ•ᴥ•ʔ ♥
Something tells me we know this bird
Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Osteoarthritis is a common joint disorder. Many humans get this as they age – basically, aging and wear and tear on a joint causes this disorder. While the Red-shouldered Hawk wasn’t old – it did have a lot of wear and tear due to the way the wing fractures occurred.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
So … lots of question marks for this bird. Would the injured wing deteriorate over time? Would a Red-shouldered Hawk be a suitable candidate as an education bird? Would anyone even want a Red-shouldered Hawk?

Comment From izzy2cool4u
I really like where this story is going…!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
To answer the first question, the vet staff decided to give the bird some time, and to follow-up in a few months with additional radiographs … IF there were placement options for this bird. Time would tell if there were changes in the joints.

Comment From Lois - Bath, NY
LOL, so do I Izzy

Comment From Polly
I'm not so sure. Sometimes Amanda's stories don't have happy endings.

Comment From Lydia, PA ♥ ＹｅｅｅｅｅｅExchange
No Paula, Chayton was not a RSHA

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
As for the second question … well, Red-shouldered Hawks can definitely be high-strung sometimes. They can be very vocal, and a little spazzy … but this bird is what is called a “passage” bird – a wild bird that is under 12 months old.

Passage birds are typically (not always!) a little more calm and adaptable. That seemed true so far for this bird. And the Red-shouldered Hawk didn’t seem particularly vocal (yet, anyway).

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
So then the question of … would anyone want a Red-shouldered Hawk?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
YES!

Comment From VA Kris
Was it WCV that wanted it?
Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
To put this in real-time perspective ... this all occurred last fall.

We've been wanted to add another hawk to our team for awhile now – we only have two hawks, and given that one of them can be a little bit of a handful sometimes and is a staff-only bird (Ruby), we really wanted a third hawk just so Grayson and Ruby could have some breaks if needed.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
So ... Red-shouldered Hawk #13-2329 became an education candidate last fall.

Comment From izzy2cool4u
Oh this is so cool!! A lesson and a story with the best news in it!!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Raina and I decided to start the training after the Call of the Wild conference – it was just too chaotic before that to spend any quality training time with the bird. That timeline turned into “after Thanksgiving”, so in early December, we began our training program.

Comment From VA Kris
Yay...so you're introducing the newest staff member!

Comment From Lydia, PA ♥️ʕ•ᴥ•ʔ♥️
Oh boy! We have a new member of the team!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
(I think you guys are getting ahead of yourselves ... what about all that selection stuff we just talked about?)

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Red-shouldered Hawk #13-2329 moved into the outreach room in December and was crated at night, but spent her days out on the glove. We were pretty impressed with out she picked things up quickly – within a couple of weeks, we were able to move around the hospital well, and go in and out of interior and exterior doors fairly easily. The hawk bated (flew off of the glove) a bit at first, but learned how to recover quickly.

Comment From janeinstpetefl
Amazing how many secrets you keep from CN! Ha!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
We also learned that the left eye injury was fairly significant – the hawk had a fairly large blind spot on her lower left side. This made her a little jumpy when she was surprised by something, but overall, behavior was working out.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
By early January, we started getting ready to move the hawk outside – we prepped an enclosure, and started taking a few visits out there during the course of the day.
Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
By the end of January, the bird was doing pretty well – a few little behavioral things to work on (staying calm when someone enters the enclosure), but we were ready to make our decision -- from the outreach perspective anyway.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
But ... if you remember ... this bird was on a “medical trial” too. We needed to make sure that we weren’t going to see any degenerative issues with that injured wing.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Raina and I knew it was a risk – that we might train this bird, decide that it was a great behavioral fit for us, and then might find out that medically, the bird was not stable.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
So we were QUITE nervous when it was time for Dr. Rich to perform a follow-up physical examination.

Comment From Linda in Suffok, VA
Sad endings are NOT allowed to this story! ;)

Comment From izzy2cool4u
Aww that would be hard for you and Raina, I know you all care so much about your ambassadors!

Comment From PaulaR
gosh Amanda, the suspense is killing me...so afraid you’re going to find her dead or with crippling arthritis...

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Dr. Rich did a physical examination, took rads, took blood, and performed a few other tests.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Results ...

Comment From Doris
And...

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
All good. :) Wing injury was stable – no changes since October! Medical clearance!

Comment From Linda in Suffok, VA
YIPPEE!
Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
While osteoarthritis will be something that we need to look out for on physical examination each year, Dr. Rich has no qualms about the hawk remaining in captivity.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
MINE TOO!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
So ...

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
All that was left ...

Comment From Linda in Suffok, VA
Is naming her!
Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
The icing on the cake! We just had to pick a name.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
One of the other tests that was done during the “medical clearance” exam was a gender test – and we found out that the hawk is a female.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
The outreach department asked the staff for name ideas. And we received 16 suggestions ... and then Chapin, Raina, and I reviewed them.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
And only one name made each of our lists (okay, my list was only one name long because I was sold when I heard the name suggested).

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
So ...

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
I’m pleased to introduce ...

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
The newest member of the outreach team ...
Meet Keeya!

Comment From cms, FFX VA
Clap, clap, clap!

Comment From VA Kris
Excellent choice. I love her

Comment From Guest
aww awesome

Comment From ʃ ● ● ʃ dancelady (@)
clap, clap, clap!

Comment From Randy @ Wildlife Center
That is a FINE looking hawk!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
She is lovely.

Comment From Frankfromchicago
I'll bet you couldn't wait to tell this story
Comment From BarbG
beautiful

Comment From Beth
beautiful!!!!

Comment From PaulaR
Awwwwwww, hello beautiful, welcome to the team! She's named after her call?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
And kudos to BOTH Dr. Kristin AND Randy for suggesting the name. They each had different suggestions for spelling, but the name, and the reason, was the same.

“KEE-ah, KEE-ah” is the characteristic Red-shouldered Hawk call.

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/red-shouldered_hawk/sounds

Comment From Lydia, PA ♥ ʕ•ᴥ•ʔ ♥
AWESOME! Love it!

Comment From Randy @ Wildlife Center
I think I'll eat a cookie in honor of Keeya.

Comment From janeinstpetefl
Keeya is gorgeous!

Comment From :none? dancelady @
So at what age is she now, and when will she get her full feather glow?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Tsk tsk ... her age is in the story ...

Comment From Frankfromchicago
Can I use this hawk as my screen saver?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
sure!

Comment From cms, FFX VA
Keeya is beautiful!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
We’re very excited to officially welcome her to the team!
Comment From Linda in Suffok, VA
In a list of baby names I looked at it means "Garden Flower."

Comment From Polly
And when will Keeya make her public debut?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
She already has! She's actually be in an on- and off-site program already.

Comment From ʕ•ᴥ•ʔ dancelady (@
I know she was young, but that was a way ago, now how old is she???

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
That was last fall. So she's still a passage bird.

Comment From Sweetpea
Oh my. She is beautiful

Comment From Lydia, PA ♥ ʕ•ᴥ•ʔ ♥
Oh boy! Maybe she will be at Riverfest this year???

Comment From Doris
Beautiful!

Comment From Lydia, PA ♥ ʕ•ᴥ•ʔ ♥
Izzy--we need a poem for Keeya!

Comment From izzy2cool4u
Oh how beautiful! Hi Keeya, when you're adoptable I know I won't be alone in wanting to adopt you!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
She's up and ready! http://wildlifecenter.org/critter-corner/current-patients/keeya

Comment From teri in va
Beautiful Keeya :) thank you Amanda

Comment From izzy2cool4u
*GROUP HUG!!* Thank you so much for this special day Amanda we got to learn how an ambassador is chosen and we got to meet the newest one! This is just too amazing!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Thank YOU for the idea -- it was a good idea in itself, but the timing just worked perfectly with announcing Keeya too. Perfect!
Comment From Sarah in VB
Is Keeya available for adoption through Caring for Critters?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Yes!

Comment From PaulaR
Her relatives fly around my neighborhood all summer. Lucky girl to have survived, healed, and been placed at WCV

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
oh right -- one more photo -- so this is what Keeya will look like when she's fully mature:

![Adult Red-shouldered Hawk](image)

Comment From JK in TN
AWESOME!!!!!

Comment From teri in va
Gorgeous!

Comment From BarbG
just wonderful-class and new hawk

Comment From Linda in Vermont
Wow! What a great photo!

Comment From Guest
wow
Comment From Phyl in Indiana
Love the red-shoulders !! Thanks for thinking of her as an ambassador, she will be great one..

Comment From Lydia, PA ♥ ʕ•ᴥ•ʔ ♥
Gorgeous! A great sorty and a great class! Thank You AA and Izzy!

Comment From Mardie in Seattle
Yay! Just finished reading the story of Keeya! What a gorgeous hawk. I'm so happy everything is turning out ok for her after all she's been through.

Comment From Lois - Bath, NY
Just adopted Keeya, so beautiful

Keeya!

Comment From ʕ•ᴥ•ʔ dancelady (@
Which is when they are how old, that they are mature -- 2 years?

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
the autumn of their second year.

Comment From Guest
Could this be the hawk i saw ~Dec. 27 in the welcome area of WCV on a staffer's arm?
Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Very likely!

Comment From Lydia, PA ♥ ง•ᴥ•ง♥
Yay!

Comment From Sarah in VB
Thank you, Amanda!

Comment From Susan in MA
Keeya - very pretty and creative name. It will be lots of fun watching her mature. What a great story teller you are Amanda - like a regular Johnny Appleseed. Thank you.

Comment From Sweetpea
Just awesome.

Comment From Frankfromchicago
Once again a story like this is the reason WCV is the only charity I give to

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Awww, thank you!

Comment From VA Kris
Red shoulder hawks are one of my favorite raptors. They are so darned pretty!

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
I do look forward to seeing her with their adult plumage. I've tried to tell her not to say her name while on the glove though ... so far, she's fairly quiet ... she can call in her enclosure, but hopefully not in our ear. :)

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
Thanks so much for tuning in for class, everyone!

Comment From VA Kris
Thanks for the great class,

Amanda Nicholson, WCV:
I'm going to go stand up and stretch. It's been fun!
Meet Keeya!

Comment From izzy2cool4u
I think one of the messages the ambassadors teach maybe..unintentionally is that even if they have a difference or something unique that keeps them from being in the wild, they are valued. I think it's important for children and adults alike to realize that a difference doesn't detract from the beauty and worth, it makes it more important because they are showing they can adapt and do things in their own way.

Comment From meems
AA ~ what a great classroom today ~ sorry I came in late - but this one is to be read by all ~ so informative (permits) and again very educational ~ thank you & Issy for the suggestion ~ Meeting Keeya was a bonus

Comment From PaulaR
I think Amanda's been overcome by emotion from izzy's lovely post...

Comment From Cathy in Poquoson
Wow! Great class Amanda! Love how you introduced Keeya!

Comment From Sweetpea
Thank you AA. Outstanding class as always

Comment From Susan in MA
Wonderful wrap-up, Izzy, to a great educational session. Thank you all. Glad I was able to be here.