



## THE WILDLIFE CENTER OF VIRGINIA

P.O. BOX 1557 • WAYNESBORO, VIRGINIA 22980 • 540-942-WILD • FAX 540-943-WILD

### Elusive Mississippi Kite Admitted to the Wildlife Center of Virginia

The first of its kind treated at the Center, this rare species reveals the hidden world of wildlife in our own backyards

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE ####

Waynesboro, Virginia – August 26, 2022 On July 9, an officer with the Henrico Animal Protection department found a young raptor – a nestling, not yet able to fly or fend for itself -- on the side of the road. With no trees or sign of a nest nearby, the officer picked up the bird and [brought it to the Wildlife Center of Virginia that same day.](#)

Young raptors in need of care at the Center are not uncommon patients, particularly during the summer months; many birds of prey (hawks, eagles, falcons, and owls) in Virginia mate, lay eggs, and rear young during the spring season. Offspring that are separated from their parents at a young age, suffer from physical injury or illness, or simply fail to thrive on their own are admitted to the Wildlife Center with a degree of predictability each year. From June 1 to September 30, 2021, the Center admitted a combined total of 105 hatchling, fledgling, and juvenile raptors: 1 Barred Owl, 3 Broad-winged Hawks, 4 American Kestrels, 13 Bald Eagles, 13 Cooper's Hawks, 17 Eastern Screech-owls, 25 Red-tailed Hawks, and 29 Red-shouldered Hawks.

This particular raptor's presence was anything but predictable, though. At the time of admission, the bird was identified as a Cooper's Hawk – a fairly common hawk in the *accipiter* family. Raptor identification can be tricky at times, even for wildlife professionals. As the young bird developed more flight feathers and began looking more like a juvenile raptor, the staff were puzzled by the raptor's lack of interest in the provided diet of mice and chicks. The young bird also did not look like a growing Cooper's Hawk. After additional scrutiny, the staff realized that this bird was actually a Mississippi Kite – a first for the Wildlife Center throughout their 40-year history of wildlife rehabilitation!

Named for their graceful and acrobatic flying, Mississippi Kites soar, circle, and swoop through the air in search of large flying insects, which make up a majority of their diet. Unlike some other North American raptors, the Mississippi Kite is not currently listed as threatened or endangered; on the contrary, their overall population numbers and geographic range has greatly increased since the mid-1900's. Even so, kites are not common in Virginia. Established



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breeding populations exist in the Richmond and Virginia Beach areas, but their long-distance migrations (from North America through Central America, Brazil, and as far south as Argentina) make formally documented sightings extremely rare in our area.

This young kite has been receiving specialized veterinary care at the Center during the past month and a half; on admission, the young raptor was having difficulty breathing. The veterinary team found that the young bird had a puncture wound on the left side of its abdomen, along with significant bruising. The veterinary staff started the bird on a course of anti-inflammatories and placed it in a small enclosure with supplemental oxygen. Following several weeks of gradual improvement, the kite was transitioned to an outdoor flight pen, where the rehabilitation staff are now offering a diet of insects. The young bird is exercising daily in preparation for fall migration.

For more information and to arrange an interview, contact Public Affairs Manager Alex Wehrung. A collection of high-quality photographs of this and other raptor patients are available upon request.

**Press Availability: To schedule an interview, contact Public Affairs Manager Alex Wehrung. Wildlife Center of Virginia staff are available Monday through Friday during regular business hours for virtual interviews about bird patients, online events, and their education and outreach work. A collection of high-quality photographs of patients and ambassador animals are available upon request.**

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*The Wildlife Center of Virginia is an internationally acclaimed teaching and research hospital for wildlife and conservation medicine. The nonprofit Center has cared for more than 90,000 wild animals, representing 200 species of native birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. The Center's public education programs share insights gained through the care of injured and orphaned wildlife, in hopes of reducing human damage to wildlife.*