

**4/27/11 2:58pm-4:31pm**

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

Hello, Ed Clark here. The chicks have arrived at the Wildlife Center and appear to be in good condition.

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

A lot of people are very curious about the eaglets and what is going to happen. I'll try to tell all we know and type as fast as I can. Please be patient and know that spelling is highly over-rated!

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

Along with everyone else, we heard the tragic news about the adult female eagle from the NBG nest yesterday. We were, of course, as saddened and heartbroken as everyone. Shortly thereafter, we were contacted by DGIF to offer thoughts and suggestions

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

Essentially, there were three options: 1) do nothing and let the father do his best, 2) bring them into captivity, or 3) separate the babies and move them to other eagle nests. All were valid in their own way, but these are honestly not just any three babies. These have public interest worldwide, so it was felt that keeping them together was the best option.

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

There are going to be a lot of shoulda-woulda-coulda comments, but the decision is made and the deed is done. People need to let it go and support a positive outcome for these three chicks. The chicks arrived here about ten minutes ago and are being examined now by our veterinary staff.

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

We are in the midst of preparing a special habitat for them in which they will have as natural a setting as we can provide.

Space is being partitioned off in one end of our 85' flight cage, creating an area of about 12' X 16". We have built an artificial nest platform up off the ground, created a bed of sticks and a lining of pine straw. It is not a duplicate of their original nest—we're not that good at nest-building---but it will enable them to still huddle together, move around and poop over the edge! There will also be a series of perches that will allow them to simulate "branching"....moving out from the nest to test their wings. The area will be adjacent to the remainder of the flight cage, in which adult eagles will be housed. They will be able to see an adult bird, even if it will not actually be bringing in the food.

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

The chicks will remain with us until August or September, depending on their progress and development. When they begin to fly in their small enclosure, the partition will be removed and they will be allowed to fly the full length of the 85' flight cage. That 85' foot enclosure is the short

leg of an L-shaped flight cage. The wall between the short leg and the longer 100' wing can slide open like a barn door, providing a cavernous 200 foot long exercise space, one of the biggest eagle cages in the country.

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

The birds will be given a variety of foods that they can expect to find in the wild, with fish being the major component of their diet. We invariably try to bring in live fish for them to catch out of a tank, mainly to give them the association between water and food. A lot of those decisions won't be made until the time comes for that part of their training. By the time they are ready for release, they will know as much about life as we can teach them, and certainly enough to get started in the wild.

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

I'm going to keep rambling but will stop to answer questions in a minute

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

A lot of folks were initially upset about the fact that the babies were not left with the remaining parent, but there is more to that story.

Everyone needs to keep in mind that the eaglets will triple in size (and appetite) over the next two months. Their food demands will be enormous, and probably beyond the capacity of a single parent to provide. As romantic a notion as it may be for the male to take over as Mr. Mom, sooner or later there will not be enough food. Eventually the stronger chicks will force the weaker ones out of the nest, or even worse; the weakest chicks may be killed by its siblings. The decision made by DGIF will provided the very best chance that all will survive and be released to the wild.

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

The question has been asked about our experience with young eaglets. Yes, we raise one to three young birds every year with a very, very high release rate. The fact that these three came in directly from the nest, without having fallen out or been injured gives them the best chance possible of success.

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

Those who think one eaglet should have been left in the nest really don't have a handle on the reality of life in the wild. That single eaglet would have be extremely vulnerable to predation or injury from exposure without siblings or two parents. There are a lot of human emotions and sentimental thoughts bouncing around, but the biology says that these chicks have the best chance of survival in a two-parent nest, or in captivity.

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

Ultimately, if things go well, the babies will be released in Tidewater Virginia, somewhere near a large eagle population. It is too soon to start planning the release of these guys, but we have typically released previous young-of-the-year near the Westover Plantation, across from the James River National Wildlife Refuge, where there is a large concentration of immature birds.

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

There are a ton of questions coming in, some more nicely stated than others, inquiring about the possibility of a webcam on the chicks in captivity. Will we have one? When will we have one? In one of the chat rooms, someone even suggested flooding the Wildlife Center with emails “demanding” a webcam. Hopefully, we will not be getting a flood of emails “demanding” anything. First, it won’t go over very well with me; and second, it’s not necessary. We are already working on that project but it will take time and money to get the infrastructure in place. Fortunately, we have been planning a webcam network for the Center, so we already know what kind of networking we need. It is just a matter of getting it installed. We’ll get it as fast as we can. That I promise, even if I cannot say when exactly.

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

For those who take exception to the decision that was made, let me first say that it WAS NOT our decision. We voiced our input and that was all. The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries made the decision.... not the Wildlife Center.

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

For those who want us to get a webcam up immediately, I will remind you that we are a hospital, and a nonprofit organization. While we will get things online as soon as we can, we have to attend to the facilities for the birds before we deal with the needs and demands of their followers. We do not have budget dollars set aside for this, so we're going to have to cut something else to meet this demand. We will move as fast as we can.

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

The male eagle will almost certainly find a new mate before the next breeding season. It is not unreasonable to hope that he will bring his new mate back to the same nest for the new season, though only time will tell about that. I do not know what is going on with the male eagle, but suspect he'll hang around for a day or two before getting on with his life. He will almost certainly do just fine. Lament and self-pity are fortunately human traits not shared by most animals.

**Comment From Violet from Illinois**

How do you go about teaching these young eaglets to hunt and fish on their own?

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

The birds essentially teach themselves to fly. The perches will be designed to simulate the branches. We will put a variety of foods in the cage to acquaint the birds with what they are supposed to eat, but they are not "taught" to hunt, even by their parents. They follow the example of others, much of it is instinctive, and the rest comes from trial and error.

**Comment From Gail from Western NY**

Have you successfully fledged eaglets that you have gotten at this age or younger

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

A lot the young birds we have gotten are much younger than these chicks. I don't want to jinx it, but I would be happy to bet on complete success with these guys, barring an accident of something unexpected.

**Comment From Sue**

How long will it be until the eaglets can be released

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

We hope these babies will be ready to go by August or so

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

When they are ready to go, we'll certainly try to release them together.

**Comment From Nancy**

would you consider fitting these eaglets with transmitters to compare how they fare in the wild with their older siblings? Seems it would be interesting to see if the "intervention" has any effect. And thank you for taking care of these eaglets. I'm sure that deciding to remove them from the nest was an agonizing decision process!

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

The decision about transmitters is not ours to make. It is possible that DGIF or someone else might be interested in putting trackers on these guys, but I would be surprised. Like it or not, there is the possibility that captivity will change their behavior, even if only slightly, so with the expense of trackers and the satellite time, I'm not betting on that.

**Comment From jlfoltz**

since they are used to being fed, how do you feed the eaglets?

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

These babies are almost self-feeding. We will probably push that process by providing food that has been cut into bite-sized pieces. They will pick it up and eat it as soon as they see a sibling doing the same. When they get hungry, they will learn quickly!

**Comment From xcapt514**

Mr. Clark, Thank you for the information. My question is why not leave one of the chicks in the nest and let the dad finish raising at least one?

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

Well, as stated earlier, leaving one eaglet in the nest would have met a need of the public to avoid seeing the father left all alone, but it would have put the single chick at far greater risk of being killed by a predator while dad was out hunting for food. That would not really have been fair to the remaining chick

**Comment From Mary Jo Horton**

Does the wildlife center allow visitors?

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

The Wildlife Center has open houses in the spring and fall. We are too busy this time of the year to allow visitation, but we'll start back with our open house schedule in August, I believe. We are a hospital, though, not a nature center, so we don't really have a lot of animals for people to see. People wanting to learn about our work enjoy the visits, but people wanting a zoo may be disappointed. Reservations are required since the group size is limited and they are ALWAYS full.

**Comment From dgr**

Ed, are the eaglets old enough to know that they are eagles or will your people have to disguise themselves as adult eagles in order to work with them?

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

The good news is that these babies know full-well they are eagles. We won't need puppets or disguises. Eagles imprint on their species within the first couple of weeks. The reaction of the eaglets to the guy in the nest with them shows what they think of people---not much! We will avoid taming them or getting them used to people, but they know they are eagles, for sure.

**Comment From Fran**

Excluding these three, how many bald eagles are you treating for possible release back to the wild?

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

This has been a bad year for bald eagles. We have admitted somewhere between 12 and 14 birds, prior to these babies. Several of those died from their injuries. Several more had to be euthanized because their injuries would have prevented them from being released or placed in educational facilities. I think we have three or four still here as patients.

**Comment From tac**

Mr. Clark, do the chicks have a higher survival rate in captivity than in the wild, even with two parents?

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

Chicks raised in captivity definitely have a higher survival rate in captivity than in the wild, even with two parents. Here they are not exposed to predators and they will have a steady supply of

food, regardless of weather. Any illness or disease can be treated in captive birds, where wild eagles might die from an illness. This is one of the reasons DGIF wanted these eaglet to come here, because so many people care about them.

#### **Comment From Robyn in Washington**

Thank you for your information so far. My question is this, are the eagle cages totally enclosed from the elements and if so does the enclosure provide for the elements?

#### **Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

The eagle cages are not enclosed from the elements. Exposure to the weather is part of the rehabilitation process and why we keep as many of our patients outdoors as possible. The simulated nest we are creating will have some roof structure to provide shade and some protection from the rain, but not complete. These guys will get wet when it rains, hot when it's sunny, and cold when the temperature drops.....just like in the wild

#### **Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

Sometimes, non-releaseable wildlife can be placed in a zoo or nature center, since it cannot go back to the wild. In fact, there is a strong movement to use such creatures for educational exhibit, rather than capturing healthy wildlife. Often, the story of the animals' injuries can illustrate profound lessons about our relationship with nature and the environment.

#### **Comment From suzanne**

Why has it been a bad year for the eagles...what was the cause of the others for having to go to your facility?

#### **Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

We have had a lot of eagles brought in this year with collision injuries and some with poisoning. When I say "a bad year" , it is because so many of the eagles we have admitted could not be helped. We just had one this weekend that had to be euthanized because of the damage done to its wing by fishing line!

#### **Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

The question about why we are holding the eaglets until later in the summer is a good one. We will keep there here a longer than they would stay in their nest because even after leaving their nests, the parents feed them for another two to three months. With no parents, we need to provide that extended care in the large flight cage.

#### **Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

Regarding a family reunion with Buddy, I would have to say that it is not likely. Today is Buddy's third birthday, but the festivities have been overshadowed by the plight of his brother and sisters. We had pizza and cake anyway! It is just that we ate on the run---and we've been running all day!!!

#### **Comment From Sidigirl from PA**

I keep asking, and have been on all day viewing - how will we be able to find out how our babies are progresing.

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

As stated earlier, we will be posting regular updates about the babies on both our website, [www.wildlifecenter.org](http://www.wildlifecenter.org) and on our Facebook page, "Wildlife Center of Virginia". We also hope to have a webcam installed as soon as we can get the infrastructure in place to operate it. On our website has an RSS feed button where you can sign up for automatic notices about breaking news.

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

Many people have asked what they can do to help us care for these three eagles. Of course, since the Wildlife Center is a nonprofit organization, not a government agency, we depend on contributions for all of our operations. Anyone wishing to donate to the fund we have already established to help care for these chicks can donate online at the Wildlife Center's website, [www.wildlifecenter.org](http://www.wildlifecenter.org), by sending a check, or by calling our offices with a credit card number. All donations are tax-deductible.

Among the big expenses will be the webcam and the network support to enable the public to continue to follow these chicks as they grow. Streaming video takes a lot of bandwidth, so we are likely to have to increase our capacity from the present T-1 connection to something more robust. We will also probably have to use an off-sight bridge service so that all of the eagle lovers worldwide can log on. I'm not the technical guy, so I probably don't even know all the stuff we'll need to make this happen, but the folks at WVEC and DGIF are offering help to our IT folks. We have not had a lot of time to plan out that aspect of this drama, having only learned yesterday afternoon that the chicks were coming to us.

**Comment From VAwatcher**

Do you band the birds you release? For identification later?

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

These chicks are already banded, as you know. We do band all of the eagles we release, but not most of the other species. That is under discussion, however.

**Comment From bkj**

What are the WVC's biggest needs right now?

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

The Wildlife Center, by the way, is a teaching hospital for wildlife and conservation medicine, not just a wildlife rehab center. We train vet students from every vet school in the US and Canada, and both students and professionals from more than 40 other countries. We are actually in the process of planning a major technology increase, which was to have included webcams and virtual fieldtrips for students. These chicks may move at least one camera to the head of the list!

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

A lot of people are deeply invested in these birds and in their future. We understand that. However, we hope you will all understand that a flood of emails, such as we have received today actually can slow things down around here. We try to be responsive to everyone, but I have already answered over 200 emails about these eaglets this morning alone!! We encourage you to monitor the reports and read back through the blogs and such to find the answers to basic or background questions, before writing to ask us for general information. It is not that we mind your questions, but we are in the busiest season of the year in our hospital, so it really puts a burden on our staff to respond to every inquiry.

**Comment From Heidi in NH**

Mr. Clark, How many eagles can the 200' flight cage accomodate, and do they ever fuss among themselves if in crowded place? Thank you

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

Our Facebook page is a great place to share questions and thoughts because there is a group of people who can answer questions, so please sign up there.

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

We seldom put more than a couple eagles in the 200' cage and most fights are over food, so we put it in different spots for each bird

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

The question was asked about habituation of the birds to airplanes. Yes, they definitely get too used to being around planes, trains and cars. That is the problem. The US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Defense Department are working hard to come up with solutions, but the birds don't seem to get it.

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

The question came up about the cost of the webcam. The cameras we plan to use are about \$1,500 each. There is a housing in which they are mounted, but I don't know how much they are. The real expense is in the cable network, servers, and especially the Internet bandwidth needed. We estimate that the full installation of cameras in our facility will be at least \$45K. Just getting one up and running will be a lot less, but still pretty expensive. WE have people coming tomorrow to work on that and give us the price!

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

We are still getting a lot of interest in supporting the Wildlife Center with both funds and supplies. We have a "Wish List" on our website for the things we need and equipment we hope to acquire. However, the best way to support our work is through your contributions. You can donate online at our website, or by sending a check. You can even make planned monthly donations that are billed automatically to your credit card, if you wish. A lot of that info is on our website, [www.wildlifecenter.org](http://www.wildlifecenter.org)

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

I hope that once the babies are settled in, we can repeat this live chat, when things are a little less frantic around here. I literally walked out in the middle of a TV interview to carry the eaglets into the building, then was online with you folks before I could finish! You come first.....well, right after the birds!

**Comment From Ed in PA**

Do the animals you treat come locally or world wide?

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

The question came up about whether or not we'll have camera moderators. Honestly, I don't have an answer for that because the question is coming on us so quickly. I would guess that we will, but I don't know enough about what will be involved to state that with any assurance. We are open for suggestions and will certainly be consulting with folks who are more experienced than we are.

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

the question came up about our Facebook address. Here it is:<http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/wildlifecenter>

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

A question was asked about the region from which our patient come. We get animals from the entire state of Virginia, though simple cases are usually referred to community based groups. We get all the eagles, as I said, but we also get most of the very serious orthopedic cases or those requiring extensive treatment. We have four fulltime wildlife vets on staff, and someone on call 24/7.

**Comment From Kate**

Can people volunteer time at the center as a way to help out? Thank you for taking your time to answer questions.

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

There are laws that prohibit the interstate and international transport of animals for care, but we also do telemedicine and online consulting for veterinary and wildlife rehabilitation professionals worldwide!

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

Information about volunteer opportunities can be found on our website, as can info on our classes and training programs. We hold a wildlife care conference every November, as well. There are a lot of ways to get involved with us, even if you do not live in Virginia.

**Comment From DSmith, MD**

Would the students be able to send cards and well wishes to the center for the eaglets, or would that be too overwhelming for the staff to have to deal with at this time?

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

We would love to have cards and greetings from the student or others who would like to support our work and the care of the eaglets. Honestly, it is knowing that so many people care about what we do that keeps us going. Without the support of people like YOU, we could not do what we do.

**Congowings:**

The Wildlife Center of Virginia's address: P.O. Box 1557, Waynesborol, Virginia 22980.

**Comment From Linda (CT)**

Would you provide live animals that they might hunt in the flight cage, like squirrel or whatever so they might learn to hunt them as well during the extended time when they would be learning to hunt if they were released in the wild?

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

Actually, if folks would like to get involved, they can also "adopt" one of our educational animals. That info is online as well.

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

The question about providing live animals to train the eaglets is a sensitive one, since many people find it hard to justify deliberately feeding one animal to another. However, we sometimes do put live fish into big water tanks to give the eaglets an awareness that sometimes they have to get wet to get fed.

**Comment From Hillary**

Isn't there a way to reroute planes to avoid accidents such as this one. This seems to be a problem that could perhaps be avoided

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

I think we are almost out of time and I know there are many unanswered questions. They were coming in faster than we could deal with them. However, if folks are interested, I would be happy to do this another time, or even on a regular basis until the babies are ready to be released.

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

As far as rerouting planes, I'm afraid it would make no difference. Most of the airplane strikes we get are right over the runways, not out over the rivers or marshes. There is just no reasonable way to move the airports, and in certain areas the airport provides good habitat because there are few people living around them. But, we still look for answers.

**Congowings:**

Thank you Mr. Clark - we really appreciate the time you have spent here today to answer questions and concerns. We would love for you to come back once the dust has settled and give us a personal update on the eaglets - thank you!!

**Ed Clark, Wildlife Center of VA:**

Unfortunately, I have to get on to the rest of my day and the piles of emails that have accumulated in the last 90 minutes. Thank you to everyone who logged on and shared their thoughts. There is a lot of anger and frustration at this unfortunate turn of events but honestly, nobody deliberately did anything wrong here. The eagle hit the plane, which was an accident. The state decided the chicks needed to be pulled from the nest, which was an imperfect solution among a bunch of other imperfect options. We are all doing our best to make this work for the eaglets. With your support we'll have as happy an ending as we can make happen.