

GOWER BIRD HOSPITAL

Keeping wildlife wild



Issue 14 2010/2011

£1.75

Coming in from the cold

REDWINGS migrate from Scandinavia to the UK to spend the winter in less cold conditions and are often seen feeding in flocks on fields and farmland.

Redwings are members of the thrush family and are easily recognised by the cream coloured stripe across the eye as well as the red patch of feathers under their wings.

Numbers of redwings have declined rapidly in the last few years and they are on the red list as a species in decline.

Redwings are not common admissions at Gower Bird Hospital (only four were admitted in 2007 and 2008) but during the "Big Freeze" in January 2010, 37 of these migrant visitors were brought to the Hospital in the space of two weeks.

All were very underweight and many had been caught by cats because they were already thin, weak and struggling to find food in the unusually snowy conditions.



SCANDINAVIAN VISITOR — A redwing.
Picture: Barry Stewart

Recipes for more birds

WE receive many phone calls asking for advice about feeding wild birds. Peanuts, sunflower seeds and fat balls are good staple foods during the winter.

Niger seed is especially good for goldfinches. Fat balls can be crushed and put on the ground for ground feeding birds such as redwings, or you can make your own bird cake using melted lard or suet

and adding crushed peanuts, sunflower seeds, wholemeal breadcrumbs and dried fruit.

Apples are also enjoyed by blackbirds, song thrushes and redwings. Fresh water is also important, not only for drinking, but also for bathing to keep feathers in good condition, providing insulation against the cold.

Newsletter no 14

Putting patients first

GOWER Bird Hospital became a registered charity in 1996. Every year we admit more than 1,600 patients and answer over 4,000 phone calls.

We are a relatively small charity, supplying an essential and unique service which is totally dependent on donations. Without your kind donations there would be nowhere for wildlife casualties to go for the treatment and rehabilitation they need.

All Gower Bird Hospital's patients are wild birds and animals – easily frightened by contact with people and in need of peace, quiet and privacy to recover quickly.

The Hospital cannot be open to the public to look around, as this would cause too much distress for our patients.

This is another reason why we need your support – we do not raise funds by putting our patients on display.

Gower Bird Hospital exists because of our supporters' kind donations and standing orders. Every donation helps and no amount is too small – thank you!

Karen + Simon

What's inside

Pages 4-5



A glimpse into the night-time life of our native owls

Page 8-9



You just never know who's going to turn up

Page 7

How we stay in touch with old friends after they've flown the nest



Page 10-11

Everyone's got a soft spot for these prickly customers



Published by Gower Bird Hospital. Designed and typeset by Eifion Jenkins ☎ 01834 813251.
All pictures © Gower Bird Hospital & Chinch Gryniowicz ☎ 01792 233649 .
Printed by AST Print Group, Cardiff ☎ 02920 497901.

*Growing up and
branching out*

Wise moves

TAWNY owl chicks are often found on the ground and brought to Gower Bird Hospital. We always try to return them to their parents as soon as possible - young tawny owls are quite mobile and often tumble to the ground, but are quite capable of climbing back up into the tree branches.

In fact "branching" is a term used when young tawny owls start exploring and venture onto the branches of the tree beyond the nest where the parents continue to feed them.

In April 2009, two were found at Burry Green and brought to us. They were both in good condition but very young - too young to be "branching".

While they remained at the Hospital, the lady who had picked them up was able to take us to the exact spot where they had been found and after some acrobatics up a ladder, Simon found the nest.

We quickly returned to the Hospital, where the chicks were fitted with BTO rings, and took them back to their nest.



BACK WHERE YOU BELONG — One of the chicks being returned to the nest.

Sadly, six months later, one of the tawny owls was found dead, probably hit by a car. We were able to identify it by the unique number on the BTO ring.

Although this was a sad outcome, it proved that we had done the right thing and the parents had successfully reared their brood. Hopefully its sibling has survived.

for young owls



ABOVE — Simon replacing the chicks in the nest.

RIGHT — Barn Owl nestlings. The easiest way to tell the difference between a tawny owl nestling and a barn owl nestling is to look at the eyelids - young tawny owls have distinctive pink eyelids.



Did you *know*?

UNDER the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 it is an offence to wilfully disturb nesting barn owls or to remove, damage or disturb their nests, eggs or young.

YOUNG barn owls are also brought to the Hospital every year. Barn owl chick behaviour differs from tawny owls, as they leave the nest only when they are capable of flying - if they fall from the nest they are in real trouble.

The parents will ignore a chick on the ground and continue feeding

remaining chicks in the nest.

As always we make every attempt to replace young barn owls back to the nest, but sometimes the nest is unreachable or unknown when we haven't been given details of where the birds were found. In these cases the young barn owls are placed into a rehabilitation programme.

Innocent victim of our litter



LITTER is always a problem for wildlife. This young gull was brought to us having been found with plastic twine wrapped tightly around one leg.

When the plastic was removed, it revealed a deep wound around the leg.

The gull was treated with pain relief medication and antibiotics to prevent further infection.

Within a fortnight, the leg had healed very well and when the youngster had developed all his feathers, he was released with a group of other gulls

CAN YOU SEE THE JOIN? — Before and after pictures of our young gull's injured leg.



Staying in touch



GULLS JUST WANNA HAVE FUN — Relaxing poolside at the Hospital.

GOWER Bird Hospital has a colour ringing scheme for gulls – the ring colour and lettering is unique to the Hospital and so far we have had 23 reports of “our” gulls not just from the UK and Ireland, but also from Spain, Portugal and Morocco.

This is always great news for us, as it proves that our rehabilitation techniques are successful and we have had no reports of gulls previously rehabilitated at the Hospital later causing a nuisance by harassing people for food.

Help across *the sea*

NOT only do reports of our patients have an international feel, we also get telephone calls from other countries.

A lady in South Africa called for advice about a colony of sacred ibis which were displaying worrying symptoms and we were able to suggest possible causes and tests to aid diagnosis.

Another call came in about a bird that had been caught by a cat. When asked if he was able to bring the bird to us, the caller said

he was ringing from Saudi Arabia and the bird concerned was a bee-eater!

When the crew of a ship in the North Sea telephoned because they were concerned about a gannet that had landed on board, the Hospital was able to advise them on first aid and care until they docked in Scotland and could seek further help.

Other enquiries have included a goosander from Geneva, hedgehogs from France and crows in Ireland.

Guess who's coming to dinner



ALL SORTS — Orphaned weasel being hand fed and (right) a long-eared bat.



POLECAT — yes, the thick glove is necessary!

MOST of the mammals treated at Gower Bird Hospital are hedgehogs (between 300-400 every year) but weasels, polecats and otters are also admitted.

These three species belong to the mustelid family, a group of mammals with well developed scent glands important during the mating season and for marking territories – it's their musky smell which makes them unmistakable patients at the hospital!

Weasels are the mammal equivalent of sparrowhawks –

carnivorous and supremely adapted to hunting their prey. Young weasels are efficient hunters by eight weeks of age.

A male adult weasel is about 22cm (9in) long including its tail, the female is smaller at 18cm (7in) long.

Weasels hunt smaller mammals such as mice, but they have been known to kill rats. In the wild, they rarely live beyond two years but those two years are packed full of activity!

Pole position

POLECATS are the ancestors of domestic ferrets and were heavily persecuted in the 1900s when their population shrank to a small stronghold in Mid Wales. A survey carried out by the Vincent Wildlife Trust and the Mammal Society has shown that the population is recovering and is now well established in Wales and Central England.

AN orphaned otter arrived in 2009 – the Hospital doesn't yet have facilities to rehabilitate young otters but we can assess and give first aid before transferring the patient to an RSPCA centre where the 12-18 month commitment of rearing and rehabilitating begins.

Gower Bird Hospital works closely with Swansea University, you too can help by reporting sightings of otters, mink, polecats, stoats and weasels (including road casualties) to the Conservation Ecology Research Team on 01792 295445 or email

d.w.forman@swansea.ac.uk.

Bats also are regular patients at Gower Bird Hospital and, since 2009, thanks to our expertise and experience with injured bats, the Bat Conservation Trust now refer Swansea callers to us.

During 2009, we were also able to help people worried about seals by directing them to their nearest Seal Rescue organisations.

Whatever the wildlife problem, contact us – we will do our best to help.

Hibernation



FACT FINDING — Simon in the lab.

Hedgehogs *in trouble*

HEDGEHOGS are nocturnal animals - seeing a hedgehog out in the day at any time of year should ring alarm bells that something is wrong.

Even those that appear lively and are running around need rescuing — they can seem OK for a day or so and then suddenly collapse and die.

If you see a hedgehog out in daylight hours it will need to come to the

Hospital as soon as possible.

All our patients are screened for parasites and hedgehogs seem to have a particular problem with lungworm.

Simon has looked at thousands of faecal samples and will look at thousands more! In 2010, Simon starts a Master's degree by research at Bristol University studying the effects of lungworm in hedgehogs.

— a winter's tale

HIBERNATION is all about conserving energy. As the weather gets colder, the hedgehog's food supply of beetles, worms etc becomes more difficult to find.

By hibernating, the hedgehog uses as little energy as possible until the warm weather and abundant food supplies return in spring.

Hedgehogs make a nest using dry leaves and hibernate in the centre of it, completely hidden from view. The nest is very important as it has to insulate the hedgehog throughout the winter.

The insulation also maintains a constant temperature in the nest, even when an occasional mild spell raises the outside temperature. Dry leaves are essential for good insulation.

The hedgehog chooses a suitable site in a dry, undisturbed area - under a shed, for example - then collects nest material in its mouth and carries it back to the nest.

A good nest will be made of lots of dry material such as twigs, leaves and



even plastic bags, with the centre being a ball of closely packed leaves up to four inches thick.

During hibernation, the hedgehog's body temperature drops and heart and breathing rates slow down. The hedgehog wakes up every week or so, then slows down into hibernation again.

To survive hibernation, the hedgehog needs good fat reserves. The white fat (under the skin, like bacon fat) provides the energy to keep the hedgehog alive during hibernation.

Brown fat is also stored (mainly around the shoulders) and this brown fat is used to generate heat to wake the hedgehog up.

It's the *truth*

A curled-up hedgehog in the open in daylight is not hibernating, it is simply too ill or injured to make it back to its nest.

Keeping our distance with feathered friends



HANDS OFF — Song thrush fledgling.



AT A DISTANCE — Robin fledgling.

AS with all young birds, minimum human contact is very important. As soon as the nestlings have enough feathers to keep themselves warm, they are moved into nestboxes in an outside aviary.

It is vital that they are in as natural an environment as we can provide – they see the sun rise and set, changing weather conditions and they can see insects flying in and out of the aviary.

We continue to hand feed the youngsters – not talking to them is very important as we want to minimise their association with people as much as possible to give them the best chance of survival when released.

The CCTV in all our aviaries

enables us to see when young birds are starting to feed themselves and at this point we stop hand feeding.

This is another reason why our hand-reared youngsters have an excellent chance of survival when released – we make every effort not to “humanise” baby birds.

Song thrush and blackbird fledglings are often unnecessarily rescued. These birds leave the nest before they can fly. The youngsters will hide in shrubs and bushes but the parent birds know exactly where they are and will continue feeding them.

After just three or four days the youngsters will be able to fly quite well. If you are concerned about a fledgling please ring us for advice.

Meet our aerial acrobats — masters of life on the wing

Spring and summer are the busiest times at the Hospital – at peak times more than 100 patients of different kinds of species are in residence. Our continuously improving facilities and techniques ensure our patients spend as little time as possible in captivity (saving resources as well as reducing stress) and have the best chance of survival in the wild after release.



MASTERS OF THE SKIES — Swallow (above), house martin (right) and swift (below).

HOUSE MARTINS, swifts and swallows are specialised birds, designed to feed on the wing, catching hundreds of flying insects every day.

All three species migrate to South Africa in the autumn and return to breed in Britain in the spring.

House martins typically nest on the outside walls of buildings, whilst swallows and swifts build their nests inside buildings.

Every year, nestlings of all three species arrive at Gower Bird hospital, sometimes due to natural causes and at other times when people have deliberately destroyed nests.

We have a constant stream of nestlings arriving starting in May and ending only in



September. As far as we know, we are the first rehabilitation centre to radio-track house martins.

We were able to follow “our” house martins for 15 days, watching them flying, feeding and integrating with the local house martin community.

Everyone's welcome



ALL SORTS — A feral pigeon, a goldcrest and a buzzard chick.

GOWER Bird Hospital gives every species of bird the same respect, care and treatment – from feral pigeons to red kites.

Many species that used to be considered “pests” such as starlings and house sparrows are now on the

red list as endangered species. More than 170 different bird species, ranging from tiny bluetits to larger birds such as buzzards and herons, have come through our doors, all needing the specialised facilities and expertise which the Hospital provides.

Nothing but the best

THANKS to your donations, the Hospital has a well equipped treatment room including anaesthetic facilities, so that our patients can receive highly qualified and expert veterinary care. We would like to say a special thank you to our veterinary surgeon, Brita Webb MRCVS, for so generously donating her time and expertise to Gower Bird Hospital.

Working at Gower Bird Hospital is very rewarding. It is wonderful to deal with these wild species and to be able to help them. I hope your donations will enable the Hospital to continue growing, as the need for it increases every year.



Picture: Bruce Webb

Money, money, money *and it's thanks to you*

A HUGE thank you to all Gower Bird Hospital supporters. More than 18,000 wildlife casualties have arrived at Gower Bird Hospital since 1996.

It currently costs around £50,000 per year to keep Gower Bird Hospital running – an average of £30 per patient.

Your support also helps greatly when we are applying for grants. Gower Bird Hospital applies for grants every year and grants are usually given to charities which are well supported by members of the public.

Due to the economic recession, grant funding was considerably less in 2009 (making your donations even more appreciated), but we are extremely grateful for funding received from the **Gower Society, Pettifor Trust, Jean Sainsbury Animal Welfare Trust, Pennard Community Charity** and the **Royal Pigeon Racing Association**.

Many thanks also to the “eBayers” who kindly donate a percentage of the sale price of their items to Gower Bird Hospital – these donations raised more than £600 in 2009.



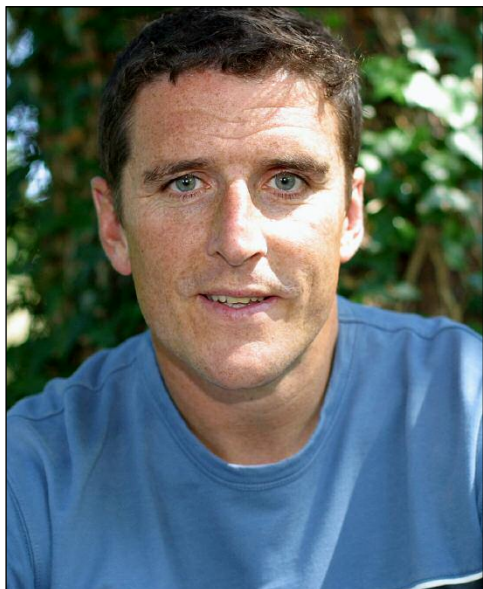
GREAT EFFORT — We would like to thank all at Tawe Vet Group Swansea for raising a fantastic £550 for Gower Bird Hospital.

Keep an eye out ...



Look for the donation form included in this leaflet or just fly along to www.gowerbirdhospital.org.uk

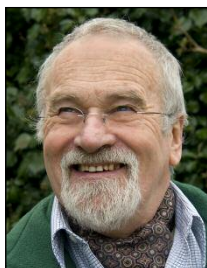
A word from our patrons



*Gower Bird
Hospital is a
shining example
to all wildlife
rehabilitation
centres*

Iolo Williams
Broadcaster and Naturalist

*I am delighted
to have Iolo as
a fellow patron
as this
reinforces the
excellent
quality of
ongoing work
at Gower Bird
Hospital*



**Paul Llewellyn MPhil, CBiol,
MBiol**

● If you would like to send us a donation but the form is missing from this magazine, please make cheques payable to Gower Bird Hospital and send to the address below, or if you would like to donate by card, you can do this securely via our website. Please include your name and address for our mailing list.

Getting in touch

Tel: 01792 371630

A phone call is always greatly appreciated prior to the admission of a wildlife casualty

Gower Bird Hospital, Valetta, Sandy Lane, Pennard, Swansea SA3 2EW

Website: www.gowerbirdhospital.org.uk

E-mail: info@gowerbirdhospital.org.uk

Registered Charity No: 1053912

