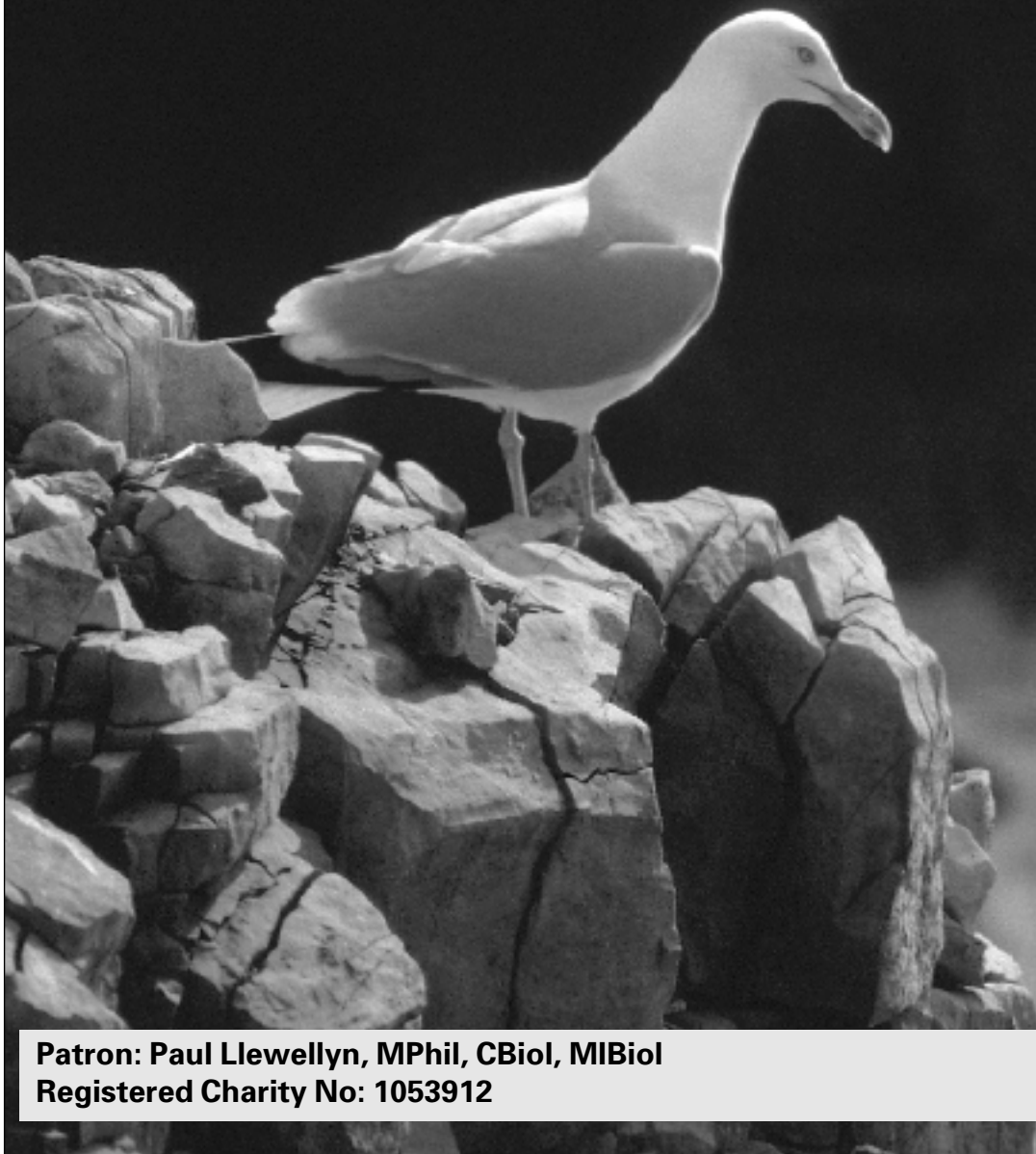


**News from**

# **GOWER BIRD HOSPITAL**



**Patron: Paul Llewellyn, MPhil, CBiol, MIBiol**  
**Registered Charity No: 1053912**

**2001**

---

# Welcome to our 5th annual magazine

**E**VERY year the Hospital sees major improvements to its facilities and 2000 has been no exception.

A great improvement made during 2000 was the purchase of Astroturf for the floors of our aquapens. Obviously the pools are concrete and the surrounding floor is concrete for easy cleaning.

The problem with a hard flat surface is that the birds will damage their feet having no natural surface to walk on. This damage can result in bumblefoot – a swelling of the foot. The infection can then travel into the bones of the feet and legs. This is a very painful condition, very difficult to treat and could result in the bird being permanently disabled.

To solve this problem we used to provide a soft surface for the birds' feet by using towels weighted down with tiles to stop the birds pulling them about. This meant removing soiled towels and replacing them at least three times a day. We washed the soiled ones as even donations of old towels couldn't keep up with the constant demand!

Astroturf is widely used in aviaries as it is easy to clean, light to handle and stays in place. It is easily cut to size and laid as a fitted mat. We purchased a small piece to see if it would work.

**THE purpose of Gower Bird Hospital is to care for sick, injured and orphaned wild birds and animals with the sole intention of returning them to the wild.**

**A big thank you to our supporters. Way back in 1993, 121 birds arrived during the year. Since then Gower Bird Hospital has grown and more than 7000 casualties have arrived at the Hospital for treatment. (Around 700 of these are hedgehogs.)**

**Thanks to your donations we now help more than 1,000 wildlife casualties every year – and we are still growing!**

When we saw the birds choosing to walk and sit on the Astroturf rather than the concrete we knew it was right! To clean the floor, the Astroturf is simply lifted out and replaced with a clean section. The dirty section is hosed down outside the aviary and is immediately ready for re-use.

This has made a huge difference to our work and we were lucky enough to get a grant to kit out all the aviaries at a cost of nearly £2,000. The birds appreciate it as much as we do!

*Karen and Simon*





Who's watching who? A jay checks out the premises from a clothes line.

## The secret life of our patients

**W**E now have CCTV installed in every aviary and aquapen and infrared cameras in the privacy room to see what our overwintering hedgehogs are up to every night!

Being able to observe our patients without being seen ourselves, is incredibly useful. In nature a predator will pick out a weak specimen as an easy target. If an injured bird can see you it will hide its injuries by standing straight and tall.

Once left alone it will relax and slump back into a comfortable position dropping the painful wing, closing a sore eye or taking the weight off an uncomfortable leg.

Stand next to an aviary and any species of bird inside, from feral pigeon to buzzard, will freeze or panic – not useful information when you're trying to assess its condition.

Observation through the cameras is fascinating and provides us with unique information. We can assess injuries by

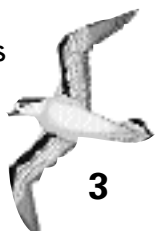
seeing if birds are limping, dropping a painful wing or looking lethargic.

Young, hand-reared birds can be observed interacting with other birds of their own species in the aviary to assess their social skills (bullying has been seen, alerting us that a weaker bird is in trouble).

Foraging behaviour can be monitored ensuring the birds have the skills to find food. Seeing an empty food bowl doesn't mean all the birds are eating well – there could be one or two not managing as well as the others.

Stress symptoms can be seen through CCTV. Repetitive behaviour such as hopping from twig to branch to ground to twig again is a sure sign that all is not well. Also "wall clutching" – huddling against the wall of the aviary and not moving – indicates depression.

The mental health of our patients is as important as their physical fitness.



# Saving lives in the hedgerows

**A**ROUND 25 per cent of the patients arriving at Gower Bird Hospital each year are young nestlings or fledglings. Birds have three stages before adulthood – nestling, fledgling and juvenile.

Most nestlings hatch and are cared for by the parents in the nest. Precocial birds such as ducklings are exceptions as they can run around and feed themselves as soon as they hatch.

Many nestlings become the victims of hedgecutting. May and June (peak nesting time) is a popular time to trim hedges resulting in all the hard work of the parents – courting, nest building, mating, incubating

the eggs, feeding the hatched babies – being destroyed with one swipe of the hedgecutter.

One nest arrived with seven tiny nestlings inside. It had been found on the ground with the babies scattered around it after a hedge had been cut. As we started to feed the little birds we noticed the different colour of the gapes (inside the beaks).

We actually had a robin's nest full of both robins and dunnocks. The hedgecutting had obviously disturbed more than one nest, scattering the nestlings on the ground.

If only hedges were cut earlier in the year this would save so many little lives.

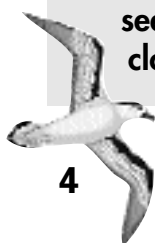


Bald nestlings being fed . . .



. . . And now they're growing well.

**FLEDGLINGS** have left the nest and although they cannot quite fly they are learning to forage and are strengthening their muscles by exercising while still being protected and fed by their parents. Once they have fledged they do not return to the nest – we often have to explain this to people on the phone trying to replace a fledgling in the nest just to see it hop out again! Always leave a healthy fledgling alone as its parents will be close by waiting for you to go.



# The tricks of the trade

**J**UVENILE birds can fly and feed themselves but often stay in a family group to learn the tricks of the trade from their parents.

During this period young birds will gain essential skills which will enable them to survive as adults. For example, song thrushes will smash snails' shells on a stone but this behaviour is taught to the young by the parents – it is not instinctive behaviour.

This is where our rehabilitation programmes really make a difference to the survival of our young patients. It is easy to keep a baby bird alive by feeding it, but it is absolutely vital to ensure it learns as many skills as possible before it is released to fend for itself.

Every year juvenile birds arrive which have been hand-reared by a well meaning person. A song thrush nestling was taken in by his finder. Being very cute, the bird was kept in a budgie cage and hand fed for weeks.

Other people were invited to feed the bird and he was used as children's entertainment. As he grew into a juvenile, the person rang to ask if we would take him on as he was now making a mess in the house with his droppings!

Psychological damage had already been done. The song thrush had never been outside to experience dawn and sunset and changing weather conditions. He wouldn't eat worms as he had been fed on cat food and biscuits so didn't recognise natural food.

He was still gaping for food although he was old enough to find food for himself.

Our first job was to introduce natural food into his diet and acclimatise him to the natural world in one of our rehab aviaries.



**This young duncock was found as a fledgling and hand-fed by his finder. Fortunately the lady quickly realised he needed more than just feeding to get him back to the wild and brought him to Gower Bird Hospital. He is pictured making good use of one of our rehabilitation aviaries and was released perfectly prepared for survival in the wild.**

During all the time that he was with us, only one person attended to him.

He had been subjected to many people over the previous weeks so by only having minimum contact with one person, we hoped this would help undo his general acceptance of people. Karen fed him in the morning and weighed him then left him all day with no handfeeding so hunger would stimulate his instincts to find food.

If he had lost weight Karen would feed him again in the evening. Using our CCTV system we could watch what he was up to in the aviary and could see him starting to forage. More thrushes of the same age arrived so he now had companions of his own species and this really made the difference between life and death.

As the days passed, he began to interact with them and started behaving more like a normal wild bird. The first time he flew away from Karen as she put food in the aviary was a great step forward! Once his behaviour was normal – foraging for food, flying away from us – he was released to enjoy life as a song thrush in the wild.



---

# Guillemot enjoys the wild life

**I**t is always best to raise young birds with siblings of their own species. They will imprint on each other, communicate and interact with each other, which greatly reduces the risk of them becoming too tame by imprinting on a human carer.

In July, when a baby guillemot arrived from Ramsey Island we knew the chances of Gower Bird Hospital receiving another baby guillemot were very, very slim! He had been found by the wardens at the bottom of a cliff with no sign of his parents.

To hand-rear such a specialised bird on his own would be pointless – there was no way we could teach him to be a guillemot and he would just end up a captive bird for the rest of his life, so we reached for the phone!

After three hours of calling other rehabilitation centres around the country we tracked down The South Devon Seabird Trust. Not only did they have guillemots undergoing rehabilitation, but the son of one of the workers was in Cardiff and would be returning to Devon the next morning.

This was our guillemot's best chance and some more phone calls later we had arranged his "taxi" via the RSPCA animal collection officers. He left us late that night with a full stomach



**Our guillemot ready for a holiday in Devon.**

and a pre-packed breakfast of whitebait.

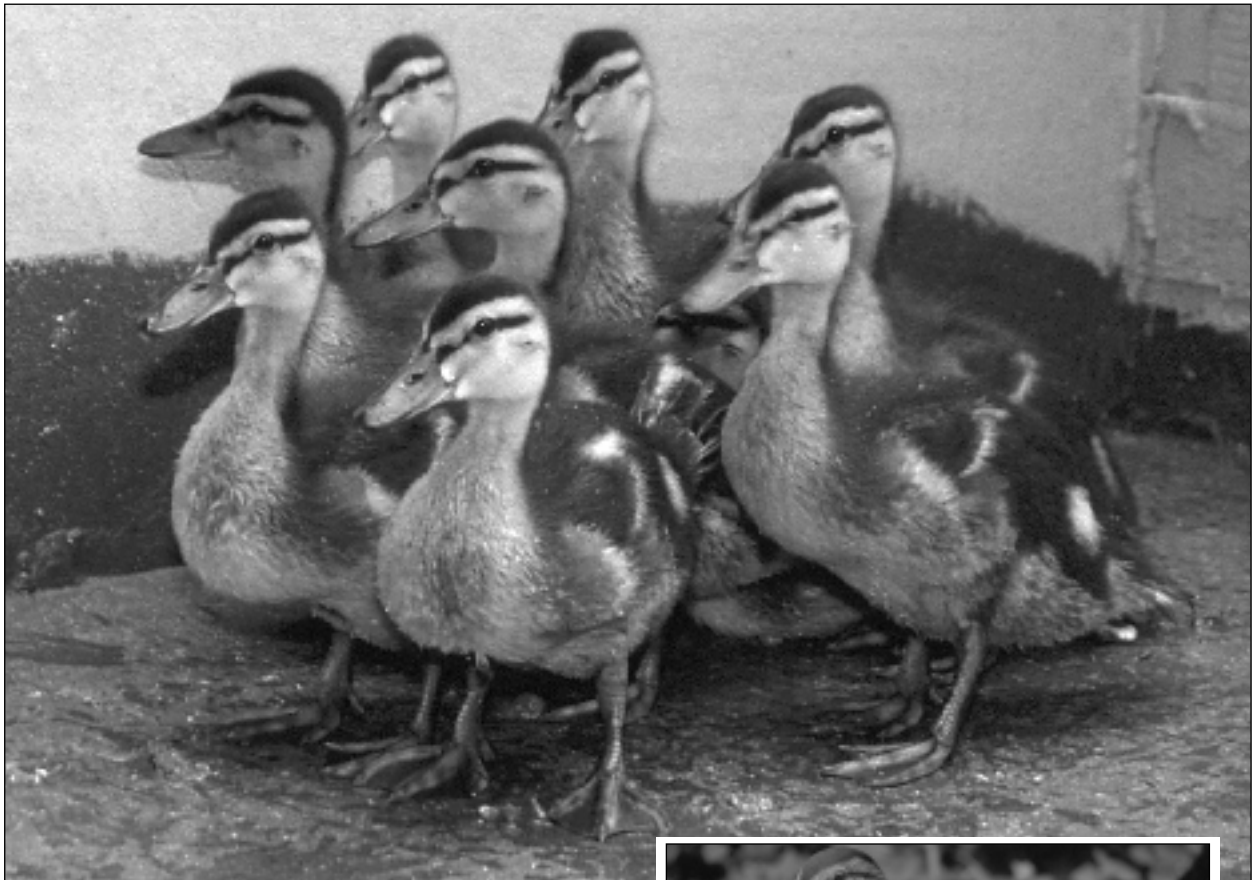
The Swansea driver set off early the next morning to meet the Cardiff driver who drove the guillemot to Cardiff to catch his lift (and have his breakfast) and he arrived in Devon at 3pm to be introduced to his new foster family of guillemots. He was released in October with his group.

Much better than being kept in a cage for the rest of his life!



---

# Our not-so-ugly ducklings



**We don't really want our photo taken – please go away! Right – six weeks later, a healthy, strong young duck.**



**E**VERY year orphaned or abandoned ducklings arrive – tiny little handfuls of fluff! Some are genuine orphans like the ones found huddled around their dead mum's body on a canal bank.

Others were separated from their mum while she was leading them to the safety of a lake or river.

As said earlier, these are precocial birds, able to feed themselves immediately so our main job is to provide a safe, warm and interesting environment. Shallow dishes of water and duckweed to dabble in, mealworms to encourage foraging and chick crumbs to ensure their nutritional needs are met.

Although we don't have to spend much

time feeding them, this is offset by the mess they make and the time spent cleaning!

In their natural environment they keep themselves clean on open water but in a confined space the mess builds up very quickly. It is vital to keep them clean because if the ducklings get their plumage matted with droppings or food it can damage the feathers as they grow, resulting in a non waterproof duck.

Apart from not being able to swim a non-waterproof water bird can die of hypothermia as the insulation properties of the feathers are lost.





Which way is the sea? Seagull nestlings.

**NESTLING** and fledgling seagulls arrive at the Hospital during the summer months. Attracted by our rubbish and food waste, many seagulls have adapted to nesting on town buildings. When the young fledge from the nest, instead of finding themselves on an open rocky coast or beach they land on the streets below. People walking about and traffic discourage the parent birds from tending to their young and they are often found huddled in doorways looking lost and confused.

## Sparrowhawks shot from the nest

**I**N Trallwn, during July, someone shot at a nest of sparrowhawks killing two of the nestlings and leaving two still alive on the ground. The survivors were brought to us and thankfully no injuries were found despite their ordeal.

They were almost at fledging stage which was fortunate for us – at this point the parent bird brings food to the nest and drops it in for the young to help themselves. This meant we wouldn't have to hand feed them.

They were kept in the treatment room and food was dropped into the replacement nest. Sure enough, they took the food and ate it themselves – this meant we could put them straight into our hacking aviary.

From the hacking aviary the sparrowhawks could see the surrounding countryside but couldn't see Simon sneaking up and popping their food into the aviary through a small hole. This is vital as the sparrowhawks should never associate humans with food as they would become tame – imprinted.

After two weeks their feathers

had grown enough to enable them to fly. Simon opened the aviary just before dawn (having given them a substantial supper the night before).

As dawn broke they flew out of the aviary into the branches of a tree close by – as they would naturally do. We continued to put food out for them daily on top of their empty aviary while they started taking longer and longer flights.

For the next couple of weeks, they came back for their supplementary food every day, just as in the wild their parents would be still feeding them until they had perfected their hunting skills. Their visits became more infrequent as they became increasingly independent.

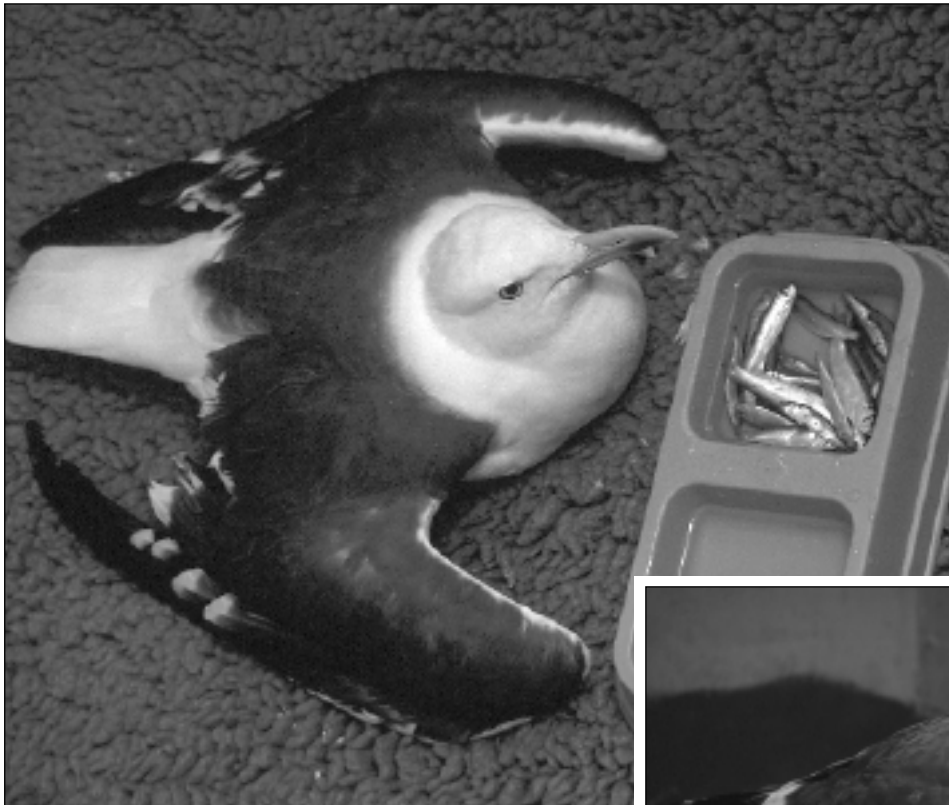
It was good to see their first rather clumsy flights becoming more and more confident. We didn't see them at all for a few weeks.

One day in early autumn we heard a familiar cry, looked up and there were two sparrowhawks flashing through the air. We threw some food up onto the aviary but they didn't take it – they were quite capable of getting their own, thank you!





**ADULT** birds need our rehabilitation facilities as much as the youngsters. Although they already know how to survive in the wild, after a period of convalescence, they need the aviaries to build up their muscle tone before release. Different species need different aviaries.



**Left – A “flat” lesser black-backed gull unable to stand.**

**Below – The same bird a few days later, looking a lot better.**



## Casualties of human waste

**A**ROUND 20 per cent of our patients are freshwater and seabirds who need to use our aquapens. These are pools with sheltered areas enclosed in large aviaries.

Many seagulls arrive at Gower Bird Hospital suffering from various injuries and illnesses. During the hot summer months they will often get food poisoning from feeding on our waste tips.

They appear paralysed – no movement in their legs, just lying on the ground sometimes unable even to lift their heads. We call them “flat” seagulls.

A few days of treatment (body fluid replacement) and peace and quiet soon gets

them back on their feet and then they need our aquapens to wash and preen in the water – essential for bringing back their plumage to waterproof condition.

The aquapens also give them space to fly. This ensures their muscle tone is built up again before release. If alarmed they will vomit any food they have eaten.

Observing them through our CCTV system allows us to keep a close eye on their progress without frightening them by peering into the aviary.

The more food they keep down, the faster they will regain body condition and the sooner they can be released.



---

# Halfway home for hedgehogs

**A**LTHOUGH we started as a bird hospital we also care for an increasing number of mammals. Gower Bird Hospital treats around 150 hedgehogs every year.

Other mammal casualties include squirrels, bats, wild rabbits, a badger and even mice and voles.

More than 700 hedgehogs have arrived since 1993.

Many of these are very young hedgehogs separated from their mother because the nest was disturbed or the mother has been killed.

These are then hand-reared and when

independent released into a suitable environment using our soft-release pens.

These are specially designed runs with sleeping quarters and access to natural ground for foraging and collecting dry leaves for nest making.

When the hedgehog is big enough, the release door is opened allowing them to explore the outside world but also to return for free meals and a safe bed for the day.

After a few nights of exploration and returning to base they become completely independent and leave home for their new life in the wild.



## Helping hand for a hedgehog.

**O**LDER and adult hedgehogs often arrive with illnesses such as enteritis and pneumonia or injuries caused by dog bites, garden tools or road traffic accidents.

They also get trapped in drains or in steep sided garden ponds, entangled in netting or plastic can holders.

One hedgehog arrived in a very bad state having been beaten by children with sticks. He was rescued by a very brave young boy and brought to us by the RSPCA.

Although badly shocked and bruised he survived and was released in a safer location.



---

# Surviving the winter months

**A**S autumn approaches, hedgehogs born later in the year will run into trouble. A hedgehog needs to weigh around 500g to have enough fat reserves for surviving hibernation.

If they are not fat enough to hibernate they will carry on searching for food. As the weather gets colder and food is in short supply, they have to use more energy looking for food than they actually store by eating.

These little hedgehogs are often found desperately foraging in daylight hours and may often have chest infections or enteritis requiring treatment. On arrival at the Hospital they are often so dehydrated that they have to be given body fluid replacement to drink and in severe cases need subcutaneous fluids when they are too weak to drink.

Once treated, kept warm and fed on a mixture of cat food, cat biscuits and mealworms (don't forget – cow's milk is not a good food for hedgehogs) it doesn't take long for them to reach their target weight for hibernation.

People often ask if we will release hedgehogs in their gardens. Our first question is always: "Are any hedgehogs there already?"

If not there is usually a good reason. Apart

**WE have been inundated with requests for hedgehogs. This year we hope to start a proper placement scheme including site visits to assess suitability. If you are interested give us a ring. (Thanks to all our existing hedgehog people!)**



**A hedgehog in the daisies.**

from food availability, their most important needs are plenty of deciduous trees and hedges.

A hedgehog can survive during the warm months of the year building day nests to sleep in, but as winter approaches, plenty of dry leaves are vital for the hiberniculum – the nest to hibernate in. Without a good hiberniculum the hedgehog will die of cold.

If it wakes there will not be enough food to survive. For this reason we always release in areas where hedgehogs are already established.

People sometimes ask for a hedgehog to get rid of slugs in the garden. Hedgehogs do not stay in one place though. Throughout the summer they will have general areas but will make several day nests and may sleep at different nest sites each day.

They can travel up to five miles a night, so releasing a hedgehog in your garden is no guarantee it will stay there. Research has also proved that slugs and snails are not their favourite food.

Although they do eat them, they enjoy beetles, worms and other invertebrates too. Therefore, an organic, wildlife friendly garden which encourages existing hedgehogs to visit more frequently, will help solve a slug and snail problem.



---

# Projects 2001

**B**ACK in the early 1990s a residential caravan was converted into an area where patients could be admitted and assessed. This has become the hub of the Hospital's work.

It is fitted with heat lamps and heat pads and can hold up to 20 birds or hedgehogs needing special care before going outside into the rehab aviaries.

Any new patient is admitted here first, weighed and then given a record card containing details of species and treatment. The original kitchen area is still the main food preparation area and a large freezer stores different foods so that we always have appropriate food for each species.

The room holding the patients can be closed off to provide the maximum peace and quiet to aid recovery.

However, time has taken its toll and the floor is beginning to give way and some small leaks have appeared this year. We have repaired parts of the floor but really need to replace the caravan with a stronger structure.

A different design would also make the working environment easier. (one example is the sink area in the caravan – if someone is washing up they are standing in the way of someone else coming from the treatment



**Please let me stay in the treatment room – I'm not big enough to go outside yet!**

area resulting in the "single file shuffle"!)

Storage could also be greatly improved — cleaning materials, transport boxes, swan bags, feeding bowls, tinned food, sacks of corn, towels, medication etc — are presently stored in three small cupboards.

Our initial estimate of cost for this area around £5,000 but a new treatment room will provide much better facilities for our patients and volunteers and last for many years. Let the fund raising begin!

**More hungry mouths to feed – house martin fledglings.**



---

# Thanks – and thanks again!

**T**HANKS to everyone who has given a donation. Gower Bird Hospital depends on donations to carry out its vital work. Due to popular demand (honestly – and thanks!) we have included a standing order form so you can donate a small amount monthly if you prefer.

If you would like to give a donation, but the form is missing, cheques can be made payable to Gower Bird Hospital and our address is on the last page.

Please include your address so we can thank you! If you want a standing order form please ring and we'll post one to you.

Collection boxes are now available – if you would like to place one in your local shop/pub we would be very grateful.

Thanks to the RSPCA Animal Collection Officers and Inspectors for their support. The RSPCA bring wildlife casualties to Gower Bird Hospital almost every day. Without their services many of the patients wouldn't be able to reach us.

Gower Bird Hospital has a great team of

**WE also raise funds through boot sales and welcome donations of items such as books, bric-a-brac, china, jewellery (but not clothing, thanks).**

**We plan to hold a charity auction in the near future, so anything you'd like to donate but think is too good for a boot sale will still raise funds for us.**

**Thanks to everyone who came to our "Tea & Fortunes Afternoon" last year. It was great fun and we raised £520!**

volunteers. Obvious Hospital needs are veterinary skills, carers to clean and feed, also research students studying pre- and post-release behaviour.

For maintenance and building projects we can call on plumbing, electrical and electronic engineering, carpentry, building and gardening skills.

Our fund raising volunteers include event organisers, photographer, caterers, fortune tellers, musicians and boot sale organisers!

Administration and office work are involved in all areas of our work and thanks to everyone who helps.

**IF you would like to organise a fundraising event for us, we would be delighted.**

**Please let us know, so we can give you permission to use Gower Bird Hospital's name and provide any help we can. For example, if you would like to run a sponsored event, we could print the sponsorship forms for you.**

**Or, you could nominate Gower Bird Hospital as the charity to receive the proceeds from your pub quiz, school activity or other fundraising event.**

**ANY OTHER IDEAS - RING US FOR A CHAT !**



## Natural star quality on Pet Rescue

**MANY** people have seen Gower Bird Hospital featured on Pet Rescue on Channel 4. When the TV crew approached us about filming we were very hesitant – nobody wanted to be on TV! However, we decided we couldn't turn down this opportunity to publicise our work and gave them permission to film on the condition that the patients' welfare came first.

The TV crew was never less than five people - camera, sound, presenter, director and assistant – and it was pretty intimidating at first (and a bit worrying when we were all in the caravan wondering if the floor would hold the weight!). They filmed off and on from March to September and we got a real insight into the world of TV. Two hours of filming would result in two minutes of actual TV programme.

Our patients were the real stars and Blodwen the goat did a guest spot! We were touched to receive letters and donations from people in England who had seen the programmes – and well done to the Post Office for delivering letters addressed simply "Bird Hospital, Gower Peninsula, Wales".

## A question of privacy

**P**EOPLE often would like to have a look around the Hospital but this really isn't in the best interests of our patients. Wild creatures are very easily stressed (even more so when they're sick or injured) and need as much peace and privacy as possible to aid their recovery.

We ourselves spend as little time as we can with the birds and animals to minimise stress. The CCTV system was installed for this reason.

During the summer months people will often turn up unannounced expecting to be shown around. We do our best but we are not a zoo or wildlife park as some people seem to think!

During busy times even half an hour spent talking to an unexpected visitor means that the work of the Hospital gets behind schedule.

However, we do understand that people are interested in our work and we would like to talk to you, so we are piloting a visiting scheme this year.



**The shy type – a grey wagtail.**

Setting aside a particular time for a visit means we can schedule it into the Hospital workload.

However, this is still at an experimental stage – and our patients always have priority – but if it works we will send you more information as soon as we get the details finalised.



---

# What to do if you find injured or sick wildlife

**I**f you find an injured bird you can save its life simply by putting it into a cardboard box. All wildlife has an instinctive fear of people. Putting an injured wild bird into a cage with nowhere for it to hide and constantly looking at it will rapidly put it into a state of shock – and shock can kill.

The first treatment is always a warm, dark, quiet environment – a closed box with torn up newspaper – to minimise shock. To provide warmth, a plastic bottle wrapped in an old towel makes a disposable hot water bottle and can be transported with the patient. A bird in a dark box will not feed and a bowl of water can be dangerous – if the bird gets wet, it can become very cold and die.

If you have a bird that has flown into a window it could simply be stunned. Leave it well alone in the box for about three hours (or overnight if you found it late evening). Close the curtains in the room and open the box. If the bird is flying well, simply open the window, draw back the curtain and it will fly out. If not, put it back in the box.

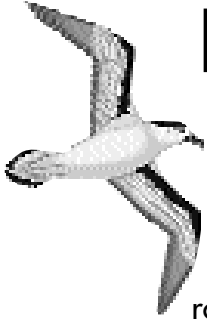
Many fledglings are unnecessarily “rescued” by well meaning people. It is easy to mistake a perfectly normal, healthy fledgling for an abandoned baby. Fledglings have left the nest but can’t quite fly properly, giving a “helpless” impression, when in fact they are still being supervised and fed by their parents. If a person approaches the young bird the parents take cover but the fledgling will easily be caught.

People then assume the fledgling is abandoned and take it away to be cared for while the parent birds are watching from their hiding place! If you do find a fledgling, it is best to leave it well alone for a few hours and return to check on it later on. If the fledgling is in a public place such as on a path, just replace it a few feet away, under some cover if possible, to lessen the chances of someone else picking it up.

Hedgehogs are nocturnal creatures so any hedgehog seen in daylight hours is usually in trouble. It could be suffering from an injury, starvation, dehydration or an illness. Put the hedgehog in a box with torn-up newspaper as bedding. If it feels cold add a warm (not too hot) bottle. Make sure the box has small air holes and a secure lid as hedgehogs are remarkable escape artists, even when ill!

“How to get the patient to Gower Bird Hospital” is on the back page.





# How to get a patient to Gower Bird Hospital

**I**F you have transport, phone us. We usually meet people at the Gower Inn, Parkmill as we are very difficult to find and the road to us is so rough. We are often busy with the birds, hedgehogs and other animals and sometimes can't answer the phone immediately – if you get our answerphone leave a message and we'll ring you back as soon as we can.

**OR** take it to your nearest vet. You will not be charged for taking a wildlife patient to them and after treatment the vet can then call the RSPCA to arrange transport to us.

**OR** Phone the RSPCA on 08705 555 999. The RSPCA bring injured wildlife to Gower Bird Hospital almost every day. During the busy months they will bring patients to us three or four times a day.

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

**Tel: 01792 371630**

**Fax: 01792 371412**

**e-mail: [gbh@valetta.u-net.com](mailto:gbh@valetta.u-net.com)**

**Registered Charity No: 1053912**

