

GOWER BIRD HOSPITAL



NEWSLETTER 1999

Reg. Charity No. 1053912

THE PURPOSE OF GOWER BIRD HOSPITAL IS TO CARE FOR SICK, INJURED AND ORPHANED BIRDS AND ANIMALS WITH THE SOLE INTENTION OF RETURNING THEM TO THE WILD.

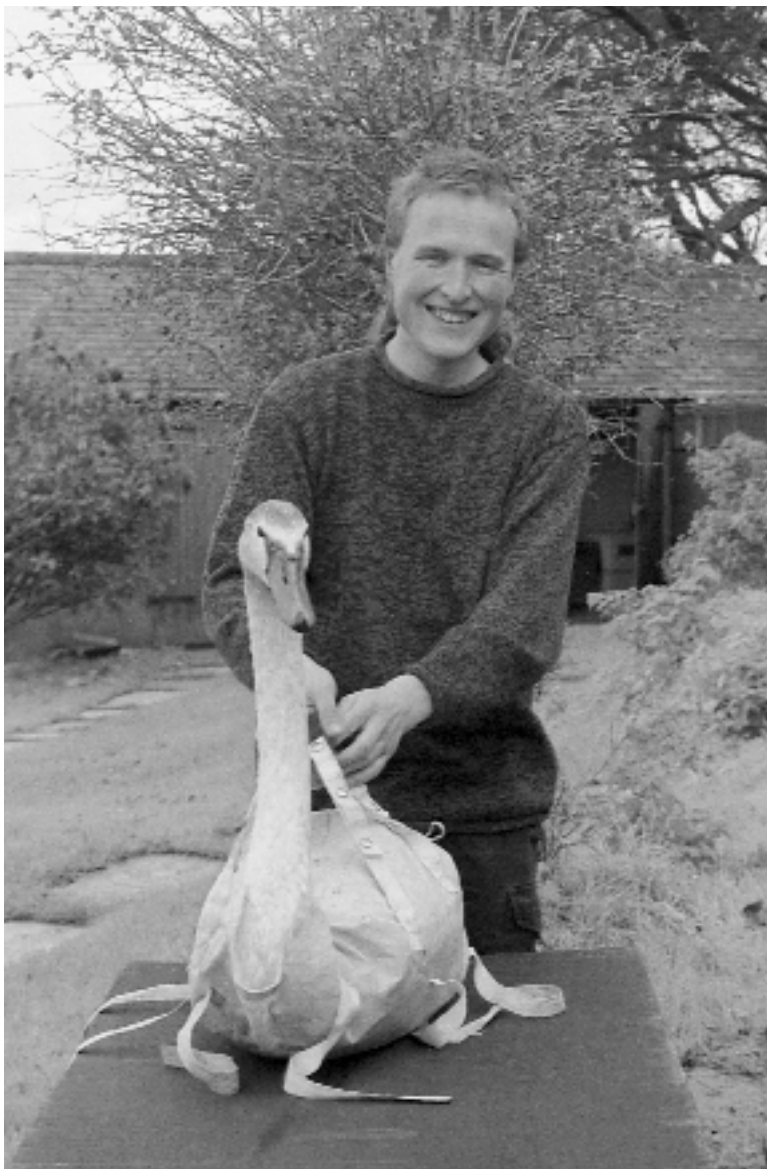
Welcome to our Third Annual Newsletter.

This Newsletter is free because we feel it is important to distribute information about wildlife and about our work. However, if you are able to donate something towards production costs it would be much appreciated.

We continue to have an increasing number of patients – **one thousand patients** arrived at Gower Bird Hospital during 1998 in various states of distress – and we continue to improve our treatment and facilities.

We are able to accomplish this because of the marvellous support of concerned members of the public such as yourselves. In the following pages you can see how your donations help us to help wildlife.

Something you will notice this year is that new technology is starting to play a role in our work. CCTV in the aviaries will be invaluable in assessing the condition of patients. The computer database will help us answer the many queries we get and answer our own questions. Radio tracking released birds will provide essential information about the birds helping us to assess our rehabilitation techniques.



However, despite the electronic revolution our work will always be very much a “hands on” affair.

This young mute swan arrived with a wing injury. Luckily no bones were broken and after 3 weeks rest in our aquapen, his wing had healed well and he was released.

Swans are transported in a specially designed “swan bag” which reduces stress and prevents them from injuring themselves by struggling.

IMPROVEMENTS

Once again, thanks to your concern about wildlife and kind donations we have been able to improve our facilities.

We already use four aviaries, two aquapens, a privacy room, a portable hacking aviary and the residential caravan refurbished with intensive care facilities. This year we have been able to add eight soft release pens for hedgehogs and build a new flight aviary.

Whenever possible we release birds and hedgehogs at their original capture site as they would already know that area.

Juvenile hedgehogs however have not established themselves and have missed the education provided by following their mum around and therefore need the extra security of a safe base.



The **soft release pens** cost £70.00 each. These are invaluable as the hedgehog is able to use the nest box and is fed daily in the run. The small release door is opened and the hedgehog can leave the pen to forage around but return to the safety of a free meal and comfortable bed until he/she is completely independent.

The pens are easily moved from one location to another – very important as releasing too many hedgehogs in one place can put pressure on the local population.

The **flight aviary** is mainly used for birds of prey.

This is a large aviary, 5 metres by 7 metres, that allows a bird a reasonable flight distance – vital for building up muscle tone and making our job of assessing the bird's condition much more accurate.

It was built at a cost of just over £1000.00 with free voluntary skilled labour and a grant of £750.00 from WildAid.



The aviary is built on a slope with solid wooden walls and a mesh roof - a small portion of the roof is covered to provide shelter.

If the walls were mesh the bird would panic and try to escape by throwing itself at the mesh damaging its beak and wings. The solid walls provide privacy so the bird feels safer, reducing stress, while the slope allows the bird to see the surrounding landscape through the mesh ceiling when on the highest perches, again reducing stress.

The slope also builds up the important pectoral muscles – as the bird flies up from the bottom to the top perches, it has to put more effort into flying than if it was flying horizontally.

The faster the bird reaches peak condition the sooner it can be released.

FEEDING THE BIRDS

(costs £1000.00 a year!)

We never know what species of bird is going to turn up at the hospital so we have to keep a varied larder well stocked. Thanks to donations we were able to buy a large freezer in 1998 which is always full of every type of food.

- Our fish selection consists of WHITEBAIT, SPRATS and MACKEREL catering for **gannets, gulls, kittiwakes, fulmars, manx shearwaters, cormorants, herons, divers and grebes.**
- FROZEN CHICKS are bought in to feed **buzzards, sparrow hawks, owls, peregrine falcons, kestrels** and **hedgehogs** also enjoy some as a treat.
- WHOLEMEAL BREAD can now be bought in bulk and frozen (saving many trips to the shops) and is a staple for **swans, ducks, geese, jackdaws** and very useful for hand rearing orphaned **doves, pigeons** and **collar doves.**
- GOATS MILK can also be frozen and is used to hand feed orphaned **hedgehogs.**
- MICE, SHREWS, VOLES AND SMALL BIRDS are vital food for **barn owls, tawny owls** and **sparrowhawks.** Our neighbours very kindly bring us what their cats bring in! This not only supplies us with essential natural food but supplies the Mammal Society with important data as we identify and record each mammal for them before freezing it.
- MIXED CORN feeds **pigeons, doves, ducks, jackdaws** and **swans.**
- FINCH SEED, BUDGIE SEED, MILLET, SUNFLOWER SEED AND PEANUTS for the smaller birds such as **bullfinches, chaffinches, sparrows, greenfinches, bluetits, collar doves** and **wood pigeons.**
- BOGENA UNIVERSAL FOOD is a dry mix of berries and insects and much loved by **thrushes** and **blackbirds.**
- TINNED CAT FOOD is also bought in bulk to feed the **hedgehogs.**
- EUKANUBA PUPPY FOOD is in dry biscuit form which is good for **hedgehogs'** teeth and when soaked is also a useful supplement to the **fledglings'** diet.
- MEALWORMS AND WAXWORMS. During fledgling season we have a weekly delivery of mealworms and waxworms, providing plenty of meals for our orphans. Cleaning and feeding the mealworms is another routine daily task at the hospital ensuring a constant supply for the ever open beaks! When in the rehabilitation aviaries the **fledglings** are able to forage around in the leaf litter looking for the mealworms we have provided. This helps to teach them the skills they will need to find their own food when they are released. Mealworms are kept in stock all year round to feed adults such as **blackbirds, thrushes** and **robins.**
- DRIED LARVAE are soaked and fed to insectivorous **nestlings** and **fledglings.**

HEDGEHOGS

One hundred and thirty seven hedgehogs came to Gower Bird Hospital for care and attention last year.

We did originally try to limit ourselves to taking only wild birds but found there was nowhere else the hedgehogs could go. The nearest hedgehog hospital is in Cardiff and is already overstretched.

We have now been caring for hedgehogs for five years and, thanks to donations, we were able to improve our hedgehog facilities last year.

One sad case was a female hedgehog found last October in Sketty. She had been painted with metallic spray paint. All her spines and skin were coated in various shades of blue, purple and yellow. When the RSPCA brought her to us she was cold, in complete shock and an expression of terror frozen on her little face. She died a few hours later – a combination of the toxic paint and shock. It's hard to believe that people are capable of such thoughtless torment.

Hedgehogs also arrive with wounds from strimmers and garden forks. In the summer the wounds are often infested with maggots but with prompt treatment most of the hedgehogs make a complete recovery.

Another common accident is falling into swimming pools, drains or garage pits. Hedgehogs also get tangled in netting or discarded rubbish and of course they are often hit by cars when crossing the road.

When a hedgehog is ready for release back into the wild we use our specially designed soft release pens. We now have 8 of these pens sited in gardens from Pennard to Llandeilo ready for use. We are very pleased to have these portable runs, ensuring we don't release too many hedgehogs in one area.

WHEN DO HEDGEHOGS NEED HELP?

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 cardboard box lined with torn-up newspapers. If it feels cold add a hot water bottle (a plastic milk carton wrapped in an old towel makes an excellent disposable hot water bottle). Make sure the box has small air holes and a secure lid as hedgehogs are remarkable escape artists even when ill!

Then follow the instructions on the last page of the Newsletter to get the hedgehog to Gower Bird Hospital.

Hedgehog nests are often disturbed by people tidying their gardens. The frightened mother may then abandon the babies. The mother may also fall victim to any of the accidents mentioned above, leaving a nest of helpless hoglets. The baby hedgehog's distress call is a very high pitched whistle – very effective at attracting humans to their plight if mum doesn't respond!

Twenty eight orphans arrived last year needing hand feeding with goat's milk and round the clock attention. After each feed it is essential they "do their business". The natural mother would do this by licking and cleaning so we have to improvise using damp cotton wool. When very young , hedgehogs droppings are turquoise blue – a bit of a shock when you first see it but completely normal!



PROJECTS FOR 1999/2000

GOWER BIRD HOSPITAL RADIO TRACKING PROJECT began in May 1999.

We cannot emphasise enough that rehabilitation is the most important part of our work. Releasing patients that are not able to properly fend for themselves simply prolongs their suffering. After release into the wild it is very difficult to identify the bird. Tracking it will confirm whether it is surviving well and our rehabilitation techniques are working.

The welfare of the bird is paramount. The transmitters used are purpose made tags for birds – obviously very small, a blackbird tag weighs 1.6g. They are mounted on a tail feather to cause minimum inconvenience and come off with the feather when it is moulted. The initial species are song thrush, mistle thrush, blackbird and gannet. We feel it is vital to collect this information as it will help us to fine tune our rehabilitation techniques ensuring the birds receive the best possible treatment. We are cooperating in this research with staff and students of Swansea University.

Initially we are financing this project ourselves. However, once the research is up and running we will be in a position to apply for research grants. A full report of our findings will be produced at least annually and will be available to all interested parties – educational establishments, environmental groups and individuals.

CLOSED CIRCUIT TELEVISION CAMERAS – we are installing CCTV into some of our aviaries so that we can watch the birds' natural behaviour.

A common problem with injured birds is that they will give a false impression of fitness. If they see you looking at them they will stand straight and tall because in nature a predator will pick out a weak specimen as an easy target. Once left alone, the bird will relax and slump back into a comfortable position, dropping the painful wing or taking the weight off an uncomfortable leg.

A fledgling may well be feeding himself quite nicely - but not when you're looking at him! Once we establish through the CCTV that the youngster is foraging for food, we can reduce the hand feeding sooner, thereby increasing his skills and giving him an even better chance in the wild.

CCTV observation enables us to assess our patients much more accurately and will greatly enhance our rehabilitation techniques.

GOWER BIRD HOSPITAL DATABASE

During our first year, in 1993, a total of 121 birds were treated at the Hospital. Each bird was issued an individual record card with a reference number.

Details are written on the card such as species, date of arrival, age, sex, capture site, weight on arrival, weight on release, category of injury, date of release etc.

This method was manageable as there weren't too many cards to handle if a query was raised.

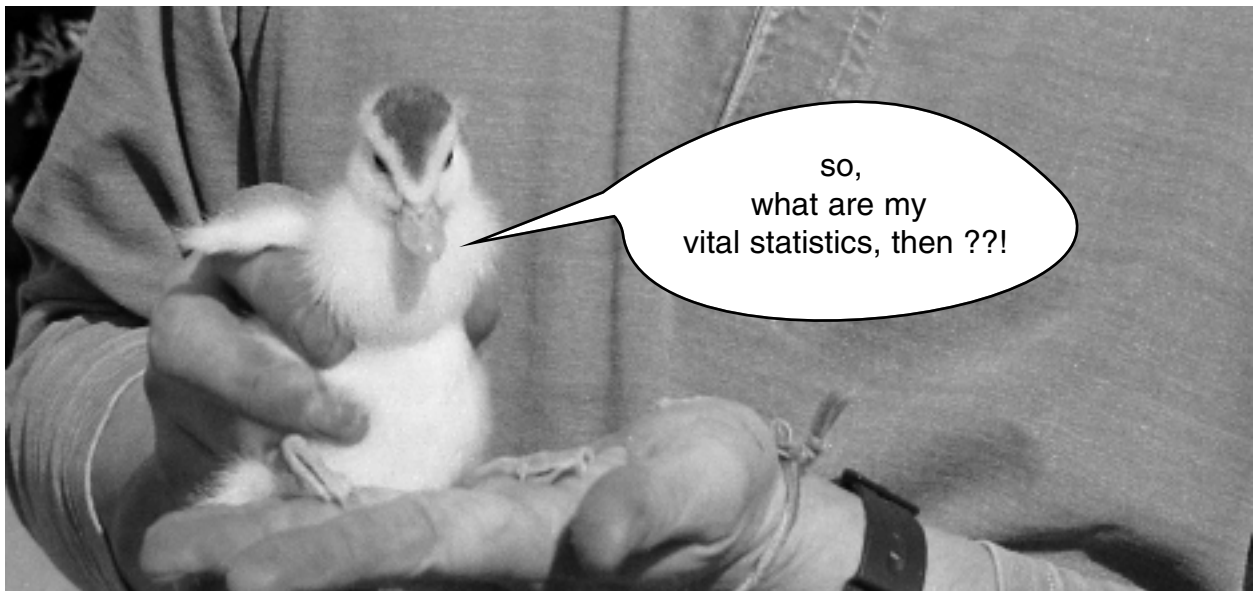
However since 1993 the yearly caseload has increased dramatically along with the amount of information held with each patient.

| YEAR | BIRD CASUALTIES | OTHER (MAINLY) HEDGEHOGS | MAJOR OIL SPILL VICTIMS | TOTAL |
|------|-----------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| 1993 | 121 | | | 121 |
| 1994 | 430 | 54 | | 484 |
| 1995 | 729 | 75 | 254 | 1058 |
| 1996 | 698 | 77 | 501 | 1276 |
| 1997 | 700 | 74 | | 774 |
| 1998 | 848 | 152 | | 1000 |

The annual figures have increased but communications with other environmental organisations require us to answer questions such as "Are you getting as many injured sparrowhawks as you used to?"

To physically sort through 4713 record cards is impossible and we have therefore established an on-site computerised database giving us easy access to all our information and enabling us to answer questions quickly and accurately.

Gower Bird Hospital now holds enough information to make a valuable contribution to statistics for research purposes.



THANKS

We would like to thank the **RSPCA Animal Collection Officers and Inspectors** for their continuing support in the day-to-day activities of Gower Bird Hospital. We used to collect many injured birds ourselves, but as the number of patients increased, of course the workload at the Hospital increased as well. We found it was becoming physically impossible to spend hours on the road collecting injured birds and hedgehogs, as all our time was taken up with caring for the patients already here. The RSPCA bring wildlife casualties to Gower Bird hospital every day, as the nearest RSPCA Wildlife Hospital is in Taunton, Devon.

In January 1999, we were very pleased to receive a grant of **£2000.00** from the RSPCA as well as financial help with the food bills.

Special thanks to Chief Inspector and Wildlife Officer Romain de Kerckhove who has helped us in so many ways.

During 1998, we also received grants of **£2000.00** from the **G C Gibson Charitable Trust** and **£750.00** from **WildAid**. Every year we apply for funds from charitable trusts and, hopefully, we will be lucky again this year.

Thanks to **Paul LLevellyn** MPhil CBIol MIBiol, who is always ready with expert advice and guidance and plays an important role in our radio-tracking project.

Thanks also to:

The Framing Machine, Newton Road, Mumbles, Swansea who print our newsletters and leaflets and give us a very generous discount.

Swansea Fishermen Ltd, Prince of Wales Dock, Swansea for giving us a good deal on our fish.

Mr and Mrs Higgins and Veronica Fanthorpe who hold a twice yearly bazaar at Port Eynon, Gower and donate part of the proceeds to Gower Bird Hospital.

The children of **Ysgol Cymraeg Pontardawe** who collected money for us.

Our **volunteers** who run car boot sales to raise funds – any bric-a-brac we could sell is most welcome; please phone us.

A special thank you to everyone who has given a donation.

Your donations really do help.

It's the support of the public which keeps us going – and not just financially!

It's heart-warming to speak to people genuinely concerned about an injured sparrow, or apologising because the bird is "just a pigeon". Gower Bird Hospital treats every bird with as much care as possible, regardless of species.

A pigeon gets as much attention as a barn owl!



WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND INJURED / SICK WILDLIFE

If you find an injured bird or hedgehog you can often 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 lined with torn up newspaper – to minimise shock.
Don't forget small airholes for ventilation !**

For the provision of 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 3 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.

Fledglings.

Many fledglings are unnecessarily “rescued” by well-meaning members of the public.

It is easy to mistake a perfectly normal, healthy fledgling for an abandoned baby. Young birds will leave the nest before they can fly properly giving a “helpless” impression, when in fact they are still being supervised and fed by their parents. If a person approaches the baby bird the parent birds 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 (that means out of sight) and return to check later on. If the fledgling is in a public place, such as alongside a path, replace it a few feet away, under some cover if possible, to lessen the chance of someone else picking it up.

HOW TO GET THE PATIENT TO GOWER BIRD HOSPITAL:

Phone the RSPCA on 0990 555999. The RSPCA bring all injured wild birds and hedgehogs to Gower Bird Hospital as the nearest RSPCA Wildlife Hospital is in Taunton, Devon.

OR

Take the patient to your **nearest vet**. There will be no charge for wildlife and after treatment the vet can then call the RSPCA to transport the patient to Gower Bird Hospital.

OR

If you have transport **phone us**. We usually meet people at the Gower Inn, Parkmill as we are so difficult to find. If you get our ansaphone leave your number and we'll ring you back. We are busy with the birds and hedgehogs but check the ansaphone every hour.

GOWER BIRD HOSPITAL IS ENTIRELY DEPENDENT ON DONATIONS.

- £ 5.00 feeds a hedgehog for two weeks.
- £ 10.00 buys enough mealworms to feed two fledglings for a week.
- £ 20.00 provides two heat lamps to keep patients warm.
- £ 100.00 buys a closed circuit TV camera.

We give our time voluntarily and receive no wages from the Hospital.
All donations go directly towards the Hospital's running costs.

If you would like to give a donation to help us to help wildlife, please make cheques payable to Gower Bird Hospital. **Every donation helps.** Thank you.

GOWER BIRD HOSPITAL

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