

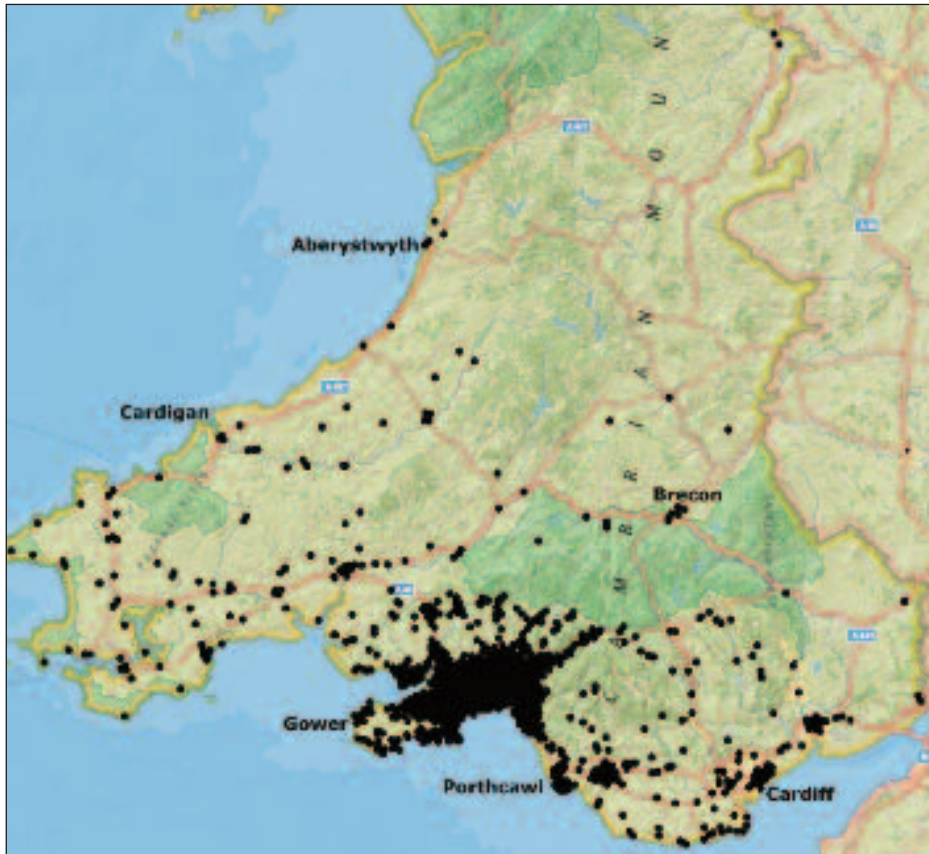
# Gower BIRD HOSPITAL



Keeping wildlife wild



Issue 17 2013/2014



## Where our patients come from

**I**NJURED, sick and orphaned wild birds and animals are brought to Gower Bird Hospital from all over South Wales.

Each dot on the map above represents at least ten wildlife casualties.

As you can see, many patients are from Swansea and the surrounding area

(Swansea has disappeared under the dots!) but we also receive patients from as far afield as Aberystwyth and Cardiff.

One of our supporters pointed out that each dot also represents someone who cares, as each wildlife casualty depends on somebody to arrange the trip to Gower Bird Hospital.

### It's a fact

£25 buys 2kg of mealworms to feed young and adult birds.

Cover picture: Adult shelduck by Steve Round

## Newsletter *no 17*

# Support where it's needed

FIRST a big 'thank you' to all our supporters. We really could not do the work we do without the help of kind people who support us again and again, year in, year out.

Almost 2,000 wild birds and animals are brought to Gower Bird Hospital every year. It costs around £60,000 to keep Gower Bird Hospital running for one year – an average of £35 per patient. Without your donations, there would be no wildlife hospital and these wildlife casualties would have nowhere to go for the specialist treatment they need.

Gower Bird Hospital has always been at the forefront of wildlife rehabilitation. Back in 1999 we already had CCTV fitted in all our aviaries and in 2000 we had started radio-tracking the birds and hedgehogs we released to make sure our rehabilitation

techniques were working.

Private veterinary practices, the RSPCA, RSPB, PDSA, National Trust, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, British Hedgehog Preservation Society and the Bat Conservation Trust all refer wildlife casualties to Gower Bird Hospital as they do not have the facilities to treat and rehabilitate wild birds and animals.

Your donations, standing orders and fundraising ensures that Gower Bird Hospital is here to provide veterinary treatment and rehabilitation for thousands of injured, sick and orphaned wild birds and animals. Every pound really helps – thank you!

*Kover + Simon*

## What's *inside*



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Rearing babies is one of our biggest challenges



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Meet the duck who brings up her babies in a burrow

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Keeping tabs on our standards of patient care



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All about you – the people who help make it happen



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# Intensive care and ...

# living to tell the tale

**E**VERY patient that is brought to Gower Bird Hospital is recorded. Details are written on a record card which has a unique number and stays with the patient while it is in the hospital.

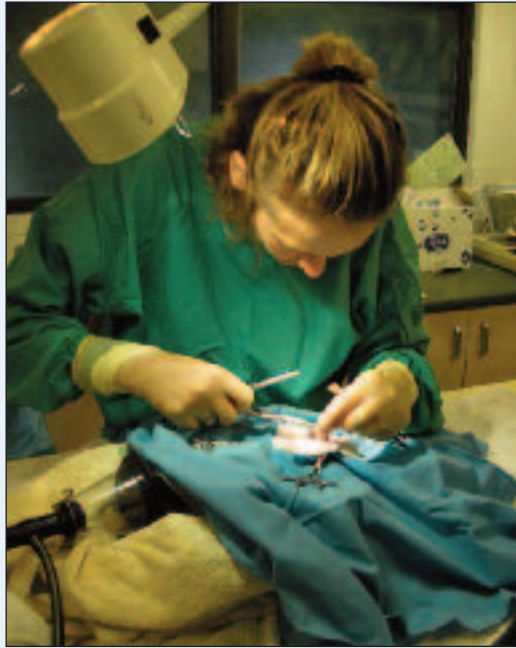
The species, date it arrived, where it was found, how much it weighs, who brought it in etc, are written in immediately and every day notes are kept on the card to record progress and any medication given.

Most of our patients are housed individually when they arrive, the exception being nestlings who need to be kept together to interact with each other and develop normally. Birds and hedgehogs are treated in separate units as the nocturnal activity of hedgehogs would disturb sleeping birds.

Gower Bird Hospital is a registered veterinary practice. Our vet, Brita Webb MRCVS, prescribes medication and uses our anaesthetic machine if a patient requires anaesthesia for further examination or surgery.

Birds can have diseases such as trichomoniasis which can be diagnosed by taking a swab from the mouth and throat and examining it under the microscope. Similarly faeces samples can be taken from birds or mammals and again examined under the microscope to look for parasites or other problems.

When a bird has recovered enough to go outside into one of our rehabilitation aviaries it may be sharing the aviary with other birds of the same species (for example, we may have three blackbirds from different areas in one aviary) so a temporary coloured ring is put on its leg so we still know exactly who is who and can release them back into their home ranges.



**DELICATE OPERATION:** Our dedicated vet Brita at work on a patient.

Hedgehogs move from “intensive care” to an outside rehabilitation pen. All the pens are numbered so again we know exactly which hedgehog came from where and can release them where they were found. Hedgehogs are always kept on their own as they can bully and even injure other hedgehogs if kept in unnatural confinement together.

## It's a fact

**£20 buys a bottle of antibiotic and a box of syringes.**



IN MAY 2012, this whimbrel was found on the beach in Barry. It was very thin with an infected wound under its right wing and was so weak it could not feed itself. After fluid therapy and a course of antibiotics it was strong enough to go outside into one of our rehabilitation aviaries.

Whimbrels feed by probing soft mud for invertebrates and small crabs. We couldn't

create a mudflat in the aviary, but lined the floor with a thick layer of soft earth and compost and scattered plenty of mealworms over it. Via the CCTV we could see the whimbrel probing the earth and, clearly appreciating our efforts, gobbling up the mealworms we provided along with earthworms and other morsels found in the earth. Ten days later it was fit enough to be released and flew off beautifully.



THIS cormorant was brought to us with fishing line tangled tightly around its wings and leg. Fortunately it was found before the line had cut too deeply into the flesh, once the line was removed, it recovered quickly and was released within a few days.

Cormorants are excellent swimmers and hunt underwater. The sharp hook at the end of the beak helps them to keep hold of a fish when they catch one. Their plumage is not completely waterproof, this gives them extra manoeuvrability and enables them to stay under the water for longer. After a successful fishing trip they are often seen standing and holding their wings out to dry. Discarded fishing line is practically invisible under water and cormorants often get entangled in line and hooks.

# Cute or controversial

– everyone's equal here



**FAMILY FEELING** These blue tits are not related but quickly get used to their new family group. Inset, two weeks later and they are almost ready for release.

## It's a fact

- ❑ The oldest recorded blue tit was almost 10 years old.
- ❑ Young blue tits have yellow cheeks, adults have white cheeks.
- ❑ The front of a blue tit's head glows brightly under UV light, this could be how females choose their partners.

**B**ETWEEN six and seven hundred nestlings and fledglings of more than 60 different species of wild birds are brought to Gower Bird Hospital every year.

They include blackbirds, song thrushes, barn and tawny owls, blue tits, great tits, goldfinches, gulls, sparrows, robins, house martins and swallows to name just a few!

The most important thing to do if you find a young bird is get it to a specialist centre such as Gower Bird Hospital. If the bird can't be returned to its parents, it is vital that it is reared with species of its own kind to equip it with the social skills it needs to survive.

If a single nestling is brought to us, it is very likely that we already rehabilitating some of the same species so it can instantly join a "family" group. We never talk to the birds when we're feeding them as this minimises the chances of them associating people with food which would be a real problem for them when they are released.

We put a huge amount of effort into getting this right, from the initial hourly feeding in the incubators, to the move outside into the rehabilitation aviaries the youngsters need to develop their foraging and flying skills before they are released.

Every year around 30 blue tit nestlings are brought to Gower Bird Hospital. They always arrive in May and June – like many birds, the breeding season is timed to coincide with a plentiful supply of insects so the parents can feed their young. Blue tits will raise one to two broods and they lay large clutches of eggs, typically 10 to 12 but sometimes up to 16.



**FEEDING TIME** Left, one of our mistle thrush fledglings being fed in a rehabilitation aviary.

**TAKING A BREAK** We care for all species including feral pigeons.

**T**AWNY owl chicks are often brought to Gower Bird Hospital as people find them on the ground and think the parents have deserted them.

This is understandable as they look like helpless balls of fluff, but in fact this is normal behaviour for the chicks - they start exploring around the nest, clambering along branches and will sometimes tumble to the ground but are quite capable of climbing back up into the tree branches.

We always try to return them to their parents as soon as possible but sometimes we don't know where they were found – one chick was left in a box on a veterinary



**UP AND ABOUT** This young tawny owl is already able to fly reasonable distances.

surgery's doorstep.

If they can't be returned to their parents we set them up in one of our hack aviaries where food is supplied through a chute so they don't associate people with food. When the aviary is opened to release the tawny owls we still supply food for a while as they hone their hunting skills.

Our hacking aviary can be moved to different locations to avoid releasing too many owls in one place. In 2007 two barn owl chicks were hacked back to the wild at a local farm. After release, they took up residence in a barn owl box installed in an outbuilding and have bred successfully since.



# Secret life of the shelduck

**S**HELDUCKS feed on coastal mudflats eating mostly invertebrates, small shellfish and aquatic snails. Around 11,000 pairs of shelducks breed in the UK in the summer, in the winter migrants increase the population to around 61,000 birds.

The average lifespan is around 10 years but the oldest recorded shelduck in the wild was more than 24 years old.

The female has only one brood a year (unlike mallards who can have two or three broods every year) and usually lays eight to 10 eggs. Like most ducks, the female incubates her eggs in a nest some distance from the water.

Shelducks don't make a nest as such but use hollows in trees and burrows, most commonly rabbit burrows. In the nineteenth century, rabbits were an important food source for people and shelducks were persecuted as they competed with rabbits for burrows to nest in!

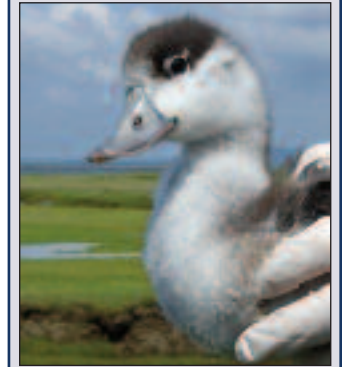
The ducklings are precocial – this means they can see, walk, swim and feed themselves within hours of hatching. They leave the nest almost immediately and need their mum to protect them from predators and guide them to the water and sources of food.

Once safely on the sea, youngsters will join up with other young shelducks to form a large group called a crèche, the crèche is then protected and supervised by the adult shelducks.



LONG LIFE A young shelduck.

## It's a fact



- ❑ £12 buys a bag of specially formulated duck crumbs.
- ❑ Shelducks have been recorded as far back as medieval times and there is fossil evidence of shelducks from 150,000 years ago.

## Going to sea – dangerous business of leaving the nest

**THE most dangerous time for ducklings is the journey from the nest to the sea as they often have to navigate through gardens and across busy roads.**

**This is when they are most likely to get taken by a predator or separated from the adult.**

**Almost every year, people bring young shelducks to Gower Bird Hospital.**

**Fifty-eight have arrived over the past few years – 31 of these were from Gowerton and Three Crosses, another 19 from other areas of Gower and eight from the other side of the Loughor Estuary.**

**Being precocial birds, they are relatively easy to rear as we set them up in one of our aquapens (aviaries with pools and heat**

**lamps), provide the correct food – and they do the rest themselves.**

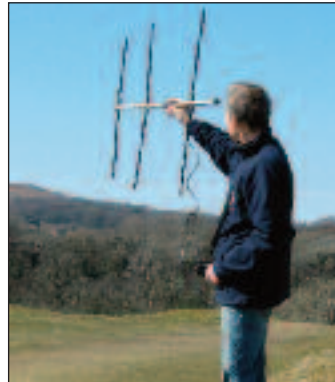
**Even very young shelducks, little balls of black and white fluff the size of tennis balls, are perfectly capable of swimming and diving under the water – an essential skill for avoiding predators.**

**Fortunately, they always seem**

**to arrive in small groups so they can develop their all-important social skills by interacting with one another.**

**As with all our patients, we keep human contact to an absolute minimum to ensure they do not become tame and will have the best chance of survival when released into the wild.**

# Tracking them down!



**KEEPING TABS** Above, radio-tracking in action, and left, house martins in one of our aviaries.

**O**UR success isn't measured by how many wild birds and animals are released, but by how successful they are when released back into the wild.

Radio-tracking seems commonplace now, regularly featuring on Spring and Autumn Watch on television, but our first radio-tracking projects started 13 years ago in 2000.

In 2003, Gower Bird Hospital was the first organisation in the world to radio-track hand-reared house martins. After all, if these birds simply died a few days later we would not only have wasted time and money, but more importantly would have caused a lot of unnecessary suffering.

However, our results were very encouraging and we have changed protocols in wildlife hospitals across the UK. For example, we released our hand-reared house martins as soon as they fledged from their artificial nests in our aviaries, while other hospitals kept young house martins in aviaries for a couple of weeks after they had fledged.

Our radio-tracking project proved that our house martins did fantastically well after release, instantly reintegrating with wild house martins and very capable of feeding themselves. Releasing these birds earlier not only frees up aviary space for other patients but also reduces the stress of captivity.

We have also radio-tracked hand-reared hedgehogs to ensure our rehabilitation techniques are working. Hedgehogs that normally would be kept in captivity over winter were released and radio-tracked in November and December – again they did very well so we could reduce their time in captivity.

However, radio-tracking is dependent on the life of the battery in the tag. Long term monitoring requires a permanent method of identification. We do this by fitting BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) rings on birds' legs, each ring has a unique number so we can identify individuals.

We have records of our hand-reared blackbirds breeding and doing well five years after release.

# *a measure of our success*



Gull photo by Mark Waldron

## It's a fact

£95 buys the BTO rings and the plastic numbered rings.

**R**EHABILITATED gulls are fitted with a BTO ring and a plastic ring. The plastic rings are much easier to read from a distance and we now have unique numbers on these (00Y0, 00Y1 etc). Already we are receiving reports from birdwatchers spotting our gulls.

In September 2012, Mark Waldron emailed us to say he had spotted a gull in Merthyr with a ring on its leg which read 01Y1. This was a young herring gull we had released in July 2012. It's really important that we get to hear about post-release survival and especially the behaviour of our rehabilitated birds. We asked Mark to keep us posted and this is a segment of his email diary:

### October

I've watched this gull fighting off other juveniles for food or prime feeding spots, it certainly seems healthy. Also it is not easy to approach – it is just as wary as any gull even when you try to entice it with bread!

### November

01Y1 was present in the same place on October 23 and 25. Today, November 14, 01Y1 was with a group of about 20 herring gulls. I watched it feed on an apple core while other gulls looked on before it went to preen and wash in the river.

I think these birds are feeding at Merthyr tip during the morning then coming down to the town centre midday to preen and bathe before roosting on the roof of the shopping precinct for the afternoon.

Today from my office window I could see around 150 to 200 herring gulls loafing there. Late afternoon they all head off to Ponsticill Reservoir to roost.

### February

Today was the first time I've had a chance to go looking for 01Y1 since mid-December. It's still present in the college car park, chasing jackdaws and other young gulls for any scraps they find.



# Taking the lid off our hedgehog homes ...

**T**HIS year, thanks to grant funding, we are very pleased to have replaced all our old wooden hedgehog rehabilitation pens with a new improved design made of recycled plastic. These new runs should last for many years with the added bonus of being very easy to clean.

Between three and four hundred hedgehogs are brought to the Hospital every year. They arrive suffering from injuries and illnesses and in the summer and autumn tiny babies are brought to us – usually because the nest has been destroyed by clearing “untidy” areas of the garden.



**ALL MOD CONS** Our hedgehog rehabilitation pens.

On arrival, hedgehogs are housed individually in large pet carriers in our hedgehog unit. We have 12 of these carriers, each adapted with a heat pad underneath should the hedgehog need extra warmth.

Faeces samples are examined under the microscope to check for parasites or any other problems. Wounds are cleaned and any antibiotics, pain killers or other medication is given. Their weight is also monitored daily as weight loss is also a good indicator of an underlying problem.

After treatment in our hedgehog unit, hedgehogs are moved into the outside hedgehog pens as soon as possible. They benefit greatly from being outside and not being disturbed by us.

The foraging area is lined with peat-free compost so the hedgehog can root around naturally. We supply food and water in the foraging area as well as dry leaves

and other nesting materials and the hedgehogs make a nest in the nesting area.

Being able to sleep all day in their own nests combined with the minimum disturbance from us, greatly reduces the stress of being in captivity. This means they recover more quickly and we are able to release them back into the wild as soon as possible.

Hand-reared baby hedgehogs also benefit hugely from the rehabilitation pens. As soon as they are weaned and don't need hand feeding we put them into the pens where they quickly become nocturnal.

We are always amazed at the beautiful nests even very young hedgehogs can instinctively make! Again, our “hands off” approach ensures these youngsters are fully independent and not tame giving them the best chance of survival in the wild when they are released.

THIS blonde hedgehog was brought to Gower Bird Hospital in 2008 as she was attracting too much attention! Because of her pale colouring she was very easy to see and people spotting her in late evening would pick her up and carry her around to show her to their friends. If she had just been left alone to carry on her normal routine she could have remained happily where she was, but she was just too conspicuous.

Although we always try to release our patients in the area they were found, this wasn't best for this hedgehog so we found an alternative release site on a smallholding with sympathetic people. As she is so easy to see in the dark, we often receive reports on her progress and, five years later, she is still doing well and enjoying her freedom. She has been seen with a litter of babies – all the hoglets were the normal brown colour while Sharon (her new nickname) is still a gorgeous blonde!



**It's a fact**

**£6 buys a bag of peat-free compost for a hedgehog rehabilitation pen.**

## Always ready to help an old friend!

WE always mark hedgehogs when they are released so that we can identify them if they get into trouble and are brought back to Gower Bird Hospital.

Hedgehogs are marked in two ways. Hedgehogs released in the immediate area of Gower Bird Hospital are microchipped (just like dogs or cats) and hedgehogs from further afield are marked with coloured heat-shrink tubing. The plastic tubes leave the pointed end of the spines exposed so the hedgehog doesn't lose any of its natural

defences. One of our hand-reared hoglets, released in September 2007, was found out in the daytime in April 2011 – more than four years later.

Hedgehogs have two, sometimes three, litters every year so she had probably already reared at least six litters of babies. After treatment for a severe case of lungworm, she made a full recovery and a month later was taken back to where she was found and released, fit, healthy and ready to raise another litter or two!

# And here's to you –

OUR supporters raise funds for us in all sorts of ways. In the last year:

- ◆ Sarah and Caroline raised a magnificent £430 running a stall at the Gower Show.
- ◆ Millie of Dunvant was quiet for two hours and her Sponsored Silence raised £44.
- ◆ Dawn's boot sale raised £50.
- ◆ Dianne from Llanelli organised a charity evening raising £205.
- ◆ Samantha of Pink Butterfly Brides raised £119 from carrier bag charges and a ladies' evening.

- ◆ St Paul's Church, Sketty, held a Pet Blessing Service and donated £26 to Gower Bird Hospital.
- ◆ The Environment Agency's charitable tuck shop in Llandarcy donated £150.
- ◆ Bryncoch Environment Group donated £40.
- ◆ Bishopston Comprehensive School Eco-Club donated £26 from their plant sale.
- ◆ Tawe Vets in Sketty raised £200 from a raffle and book sales.
- ◆ Animal Doctors of Clydach raised £185.



◆ Helen was part of Team 3 Peaks raising funds by walking up the Welsh Peaks – Pen y Fan, Snowdon and Cader Idris. Despite picking the wettest June on record they achieved all three climbs and Helen raised £105 for Gower Bird Hospital. Thank you Helen! The team is pictured at the top of a very foggy Cader Idris.

If you would like to organise a fundraising event for Gower Bird Hospital, no matter how small or large, we would be delighted. We can help with leaflets, sponsorship forms, publicity etc – please contact us.

Gower Bird Hospital is not open for visitors to look around, all our patients are wild birds and animals with a natural fear of people. They need as much peace and privacy as possible to recover quickly and be released back into the wild. We do not raise funds by putting injured or sick wildlife on display and we depend on donations from people who understand our principles and want what is best for injured, sick and orphaned wildlife.

# our fantastic fundraisers



Gower Bird Hospital also received grants and donations from

- ◆ The Gower Society
- ◆ The Jean Sainsbury Animal Welfare Trust
- ◆ Pennard Community Charity
- ◆ The Walker 597 Animal Trust
- ◆ Swansea Development Fund
- ◆ The Royal Pigeon Racing Association

“ We would like to thank all our volunteers who do everything from cleaning to office work, taking minutes at meetings to helping at fundraising events. A special thank you to Dawn for taking illustrated talks to many groups to promote the work of Gower Bird Hospital. If you would like an illustrated talk for your group please contact us. ”

## In memoriam

- Jean Hebden
- Mrs Muriel Harries
- Mr Richard McDonnell
- Mr Dempster
- Mr & Mrs Viv and Joan Howells
- Mr Nutman
- Mr & Mrs Bert & Sylvia Martin
- Mrs Rosie Jones
- Mrs Pamela Tuckwell
- Mrs J E A Stone
- Mr W F Hendley

## Leaving a lasting legacy

GOWER Bird Hospital is a relatively small, local charity which would benefit greatly from legacy donations.

Legacy 10 is a government scheme to encourage people to support charities in their wills. If you decide to leave 10% or more of your estate to charity, inheritance tax reduces from 40% to 36%. (Inheritance tax only applies to estates exceeding £325,000 in value.)

Gifts left to Gower Bird

Hospital in wills are, and will be, an important source of income ensuring we can continue to care for wild birds and animals – any amount, large or small, will be deeply appreciated.

We always feel honoured to receive donations in lieu of flowers, or in memory of a loved one, and grateful that Gower Bird Hospital is thought of at what must be a sad time for relatives and friends.

Look for the donation form included in this leaflet



# Keeping wildlife wild

⚡ Gower Bird Hospital is a shining example to all wildlife rehabilitation centres. Using the latest techniques and with dedicated, knowledgeable staff, they are at the forefront of wild animal care in Britain

**Iolo Williams**  
broadcaster and naturalist



A HUGE thank you to all our supporters – it's thanks to your kind donations that Gower Bird Hospital is here to provide care, treatment and rehabilitation for thousands of wildlife casualties. We would also like to thank everyone who brings injured, sick or orphaned wildlife to Gower Bird Hospital.

The best way to transport wild birds and animals is simply a closed cardboard box. Make sure there is plenty of ripped newspaper or an old towel in the box to support the patient – slipping about on bare cardboard is very stressful for an already frightened bird or animal. It's best not to put water in the box as this will most likely get spilled resulting in a wet, cold patient. Keeping the patient dark while travelling also minimises shock.

● 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.

## Keeping wildlife Welsh!

SOME handy Welsh names for our wildlife:

Whimbrel	<b>coegyflinir</b>
Cormorant	<b>mulfran</b>
Blue tit	<b>titw tomos las</b>
Mistle thrush	<b>brych y coed</b>
Feral pigeon	<b>colomen</b>
Tawny owl	<b>tylluan frech</b>
Shelduck	<b>hwyaden yr eithin</b>
Herring gull	<b>gwylan y penwaig</b>
House martin	<b>gwennol y bondo</b>
Hedgehog	<b>draenog</b>

## 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

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