

# GOWER BIRD HOSPITAL

issue 11  
2007/2008

£1.75



## Grubs up!

**Inside  
stories**



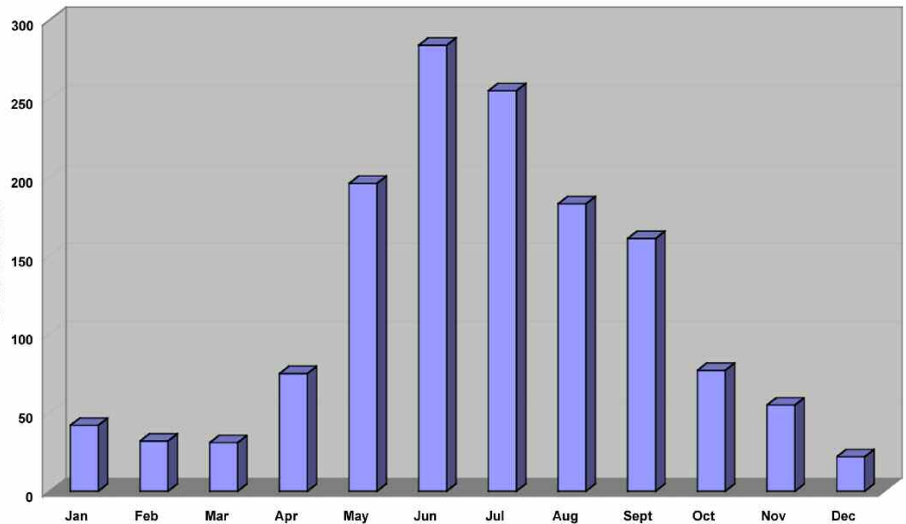
Patrons: Paul Llewellyn,  
MPhil, CBiol, MIBiol  
and Iolo Williams  
Registered Charity No: 1053912



A TOTAL of 1,435 wildlife casualties arrived at Gower Bird Hospital in 2006. As you can see from the chart, spring and summer are our busiest times and every hour of the day is spent looking after the patients. However, this doesn't mean we get a rest in autumn and winter! During the "quieter time" we give many presentations about our work, put our next magazine together, catch up on all the administration, get our accounts done, claim the tax from donations that have been Giftaided, submit our annual return to the Charity Commission and generally pull everything together to ensure the charity is run properly.

## Managing the workload

Wildlife Casualties Admitted per Month in 2006



# Spreading the word

**A**LL wildlife hospitals have a seasonal workload so autumn and winter are the best times for meetings, enabling us to attend symposia and other forums to discuss techniques and protocols with other wildlife rehabilitators.

Gower Bird Hospital has given presentations about projects carried out to improve the welfare of patients in temporary captivity and after release.

Many hospitals have now adopted our policy of housing hedgehogs individually after our studies of hedgehogs being overwintered in groups proved how the unnatural confinement led to stress and bullying.

Our house martin radio-tracking project proved that our hand-reared house martins not only survived but also integrated with the wild house martin community very successfully, and has changed protocols in other centres across the UK.

We also learn from and work with other organisations; meeting people and making contacts is an important part of sharing knowledge and skills.



## It's for you!

**THE Hospital answered more than 4,000 phone calls in 2006, mostly local calls but also calls from all over Scotland and England, a few from France, Saudi Arabia and some from the USA!**

**In August we were able to give advice to the Barbican Centre in London as they had found ducklings with no sign of the mum in their car park.**

**One phone call always sticks in our minds: "I'm doing a crossword, what is a South American bird, six letters beginning with C?" And yes, we were able to supply the answer: a condor.**



# Newsletter no 11

LOOKING back to our small beginnings in the early 90s we are very proud of our achievements and extremely grateful to everyone who makes a donation as without your support Gower Bird Hospital wouldn't be here!

Since 1996 more than 15,000 injured, sick and orphaned wildlife casualties, including more than 2,000 hedgehogs, have arrived at the Hospital needing specialised care and rehabilitation.

All the birds, hedgehogs and other small mammals that arrive at Gower Bird Hospital are wild creatures with a normal instinctive fear of people.

They are easily frightened by too much contact with people and need as much peace, quiet and privacy as possible to recover quickly and be released back into their natural habitat.

Very young casualties would become tame (mal-imprinted) if handled too much and would not survive when released into the wild.

# We're still wild about wildlife

The welfare of our patients always comes first. Therefore the Hospital cannot be open for people to look around, as this would cause too much distress for the wild birds and animals.

We do not raise funds by putting our patients on display and depend on support from people who understand our principles and want to help us keep wildlife wild.

No donation is too small, every one is greatly appreciated and helps to provide the facilities and care our patients need.

Karen. SIMON

## What's inside

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### Pigeon poser

Getting to know the Columbidae family

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### Morocco bound

Gulls from here to Africa



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### Professional touch . . .

Stars of the small screen

**Cover picture:** Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*) with a beak-full of worms for feeding young.

Pages 12-13



### Read all about it

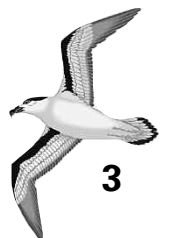
The secret life of hedgehogs

### Plus

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- ▼ Transatlantic travellers – back page

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# Meet the family Feral? It's

**F**ERAL pigeons are descendants of rock doves which live on coastal cliffs. Over many centuries, people have captured and domesticated rock doves. Mainly kept as a source of food, they were also bred to produce racing pigeons and fancy doves.

As their original habitat is rocky cliffs, escaped or released pigeons have adapted well to living in towns and cities. Large buildings provide many ledges for roosting and breeding.

Wild rock doves feed on seeds but feral pigeons have evolved to eat almost anything they find and food is readily available from people, either dropped as rubbish or fed as bird food.

Gower Bird Hospital is not "speciesist" and feral pigeons receive the same care and attention as other wild birds.

Wood pigeons are larger than feral pigeons and live in woodland, farmland, parks and gardens. A wood pigeon's feathers weigh more than its skeleton!

They are mainly vegetarian feeding on flowers, young leaves, seeds, grasses, seeds and berries and occasionally eat insects.

Wood pigeons living in parks and gardens are easy to spot and are much more at ease with humans than their country cousins, probably because many wood pigeons are shot in the countryside and a healthy fear of humans is essential for survival.



**ADAPTABLE** A feral pigeon.

## Rescue service

**WE** would like to thank the RSPCA animal collection officers and inspectors who collect and bring wildlife casualties (including feral pigeons) to Gower Bird Hospital – without the RSPCA, many patients wouldn't get here to receive the help they need. The Council of the RSPCA has awarded us the Elsie M J Evans Award in recognition of the outstanding work of Gower Bird Hospital.

## Visitor from *the east*

**COLLARED** doves are now very common birds living in towns, parks, villages and farmland. Originally inhabitants of Asia, collared doves have spread over much of Europe since the 1890s. They were first recorded in Britain in 1953 and there are now more than 200,000 pairs living here.



# not my fault



**UP CLOSE** Young wood pigeon and young feral pigeon. Right, a wood pigeon nest.



**PIGEONS** and doves are not the best architects in the bird world! Rock doves make their nests on cliff faces and feral pigeons use buildings and ledges in towns and cities.

Wood pigeons and collar doves nest in trees and hedges – nests are a scanty arrangement of twigs and are often blown onto the ground during storms and gales.

Many nestling pigeons and doves arrive at Gower Bird Hospital and we use a commercial substitute for crop milk to ensure they get all the nutrients they need at this critical stage of development.

## Mother's milk – and dad's too!

**Y**OUNG pigeons and doves are fed "crop milk" by their parents.

Crop milk is not regurgitated food, or milk as produced by mammals, but is a secretion from the lining of the crop and is a semi-solid substance looking like pale yellow cottage cheese.

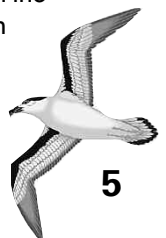
It's extremely high in protein and fat and low in carbohydrate. Many people mistakenly give young birds dairy milk which causes all sorts of problems as the birds cannot digest it.

Birds which regurgitate food for their young put their bills into the chick's beak to deliver food whereas crop milk is given by the chicks putting their beaks inside the

parent's mouth to receive it. Both male and female parents produce crop milk and share in the feeding and care of the young pigeons (squabs).

The squabs are fed pure crop milk for the first week or so then the parents start to introduce adult food, softened by spending time in the crop. At the end of the second week the squabs are fed entirely on softened adult food.

Columbidae (pigeons and doves), flamingos and penguins produce crop milk – although penguins don't have crops. The three families seem to have evolved this method of feeding for different reasons: In the case of pigeons and doves they are able to raise broods all the year round as their young are not dependent on an abundance of insects in spring and summer.





# Morocco bound

**E**VERY year Gower Bird Hospital admits many gull chicks from all across South Wales, a

large percentage of the gull chicks coming from the cities of Swansea and Cardiff.

Many of the birds are only days old when they arrive at the centre having been removed from their parents because of conflict of interest or unsuitable nest location.

The chicks quickly learn to feed themselves and are kept in large social groups to avoid humanisation. When all their feathers are fully developed and waterproof they are released at dawn at Swansea Bay.

To monitor the success of these birds we fit a British Trust for Ornithology ring to one leg and a colour ring to the other. The colour ring is blue with a white letter Y –

exclusive to Gower Bird Hospital. These colour rings are easily read from a distance, allowing several (hopefully many) sightings without having to physically catch the bird.

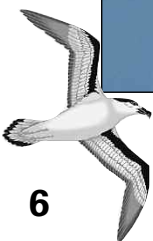
Bird watchers are able to report sightings via <http://www.cr-birding.be/> and we are all very excited when reports of our gulls come in from Portugal, Spain and even from the west coast of Africa.

This photograph taken in March 2006 by Arild Hansen, who was on holiday in Essaouria, Morocco, is wonderful.

The blue colour ring with the white letter Y is clearly visible and we can tell from the plumage that this lesser black backed gull was released in 2005.

Although we don't know exactly which gull this is without reading the individual BTO ring, it's still reassuring to know that the little handfuls of fluff that arrive at the Hospital are doing so well out in the wild.

**BIT OF FLUFF** A gull chick (above) and (main) our Moroccan tourist photographed by Arild Hansen.



**G**OWER Bird Hospital is a wildlife rehabilitation charity but we also work closely with other organisations such as the Veterinary Laboratories Agency, Swansea University and the Zoological Society of London in the surveillance of new and emerging diseases in wildlife.

Disease surveillance is very important for the health of our wildlife and for the health of the public. Some diseases are zoonotic which means they can be passed from animals to people and vice versa. Gower Bird Hospital plays an important role in the monitoring of such diseases.

One of the surveillance projects we have been involved in is West Nile virus, a disease which has caused 280 deaths in America between 2003 and 2006, this compares with 166 deaths across the world from "bird flu" in the same period.



**SORRY SIGHT**  
A wood pigeon suffering from trichomoniasis.

## Down in the mouth – a case of trichomoniasis

**IN 2006 Gower Bird Hospital received many phone calls because people were finding dead finches in their gardens and we also received reports of birds that looked puffed up and could be seen pecking at seeds but unable to swallow.**

**We suspected trichomoniasis but we had never seen it in finches before.**

**Trichomoniasis is not a new disease, and is commonly found in wood pigeons, feral pigeons, collared doves and birds of prey. Pigeon fanciers call it canker, falconers call it frounce.**

**We sent four dead greenfinches to the Veterinary Laboratories Agency who ruled out other infections such as salmonella and e-coli and through our own laboratory observations we were able to confirm trichomoniasis.**

**The particular strain is trichomonas gallinae and is a disease of birds – it does not affect people, cats or dogs.**

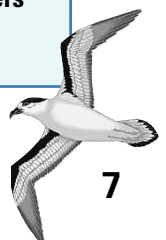
**The protozoan is a microscopic single-celled animal which can live in the intestinal tract or the oral cavity and crop of birds.**

**It is spread by direct contact between birds, such as parents feeding their young and courtship behaviour whereby the birds rub beaks and can also be contracted through shared drinking water and feeding stations.**

**Birds of prey which eat infected birds may become infected themselves.**

**It is a curable disease if diagnosed early, unfortunately by the time wild birds are weak enough to be caught and brought to the Hospital the disease is usually too advanced to respond to treatment but we do have some successes.**

**The best way to help is to keep water baths and feeders very clean and change water daily – rinse bird feeders and tables well after disinfecting.**



## A word from our new patron

# The profess

**W**E are very pleased that Iolo Williams, popular presenter of BBC Wales' "Iolo's Welsh Safari," is a new patron of Gower Bird Hospital alongside Paul Llewellyn.

When BBC Wales phoned to ask if they could film at Gower Bird Hospital, we were delighted as Iolo is an ambassador for Welsh wildlife.

It was obvious that his passion and commitment to wildlife is totally genuine – not just for the TV

cameras. Although none of us at Gower Bird Hospital are natural TV performers, working with Iolo is an absolute pleasure as his enthusiasm for wildlife conservation makes us (almost) forget about stagefright!

Iolo was equally impressed with the professional approach to wildlife rehabilitation taken at Gower Bird Hospital, ensuring that injured, sick and orphaned wildlife casualties are released back into the wild with the best possible chance of survival.



**SCREEN TEST** Iolo and the BBC Wales crew filming in the CCTV room.

## Volunteers welcome!



**FACELIFT** The updated CCTV room and, inset, as it used to be.

**GOWER** Bird Hospital is always very grateful and appreciative of the efforts of our volunteers. In 2006 we received a one-year grant from Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) to employ a volunteer and events co-ordinator.

This proved to be a steep learning curve but we have gained a great deal from the process and now have many new volunteers on board!

This meant that during 2006, as well as providing facilities for our patients we also needed to provide a new facility for our volunteers at the Hospital by renovating the CCTV room.

The CCTV room had always been a purely functional room with few comforts but, after a lot of work, is now an extra office area as well as a warm place to sit and have a well-earned cup of tea.

## The next be

**I**MPROVEMENTS are always being made at the Hospital. Two new aviaries have been built and designed to accommodate a variety of species.

In spring and summer the aviaries are furnished with small branches and twigs providing rehabilitation facilities for smaller birds such as song thrushes, blackbirds, starlings, sparrows and finches.

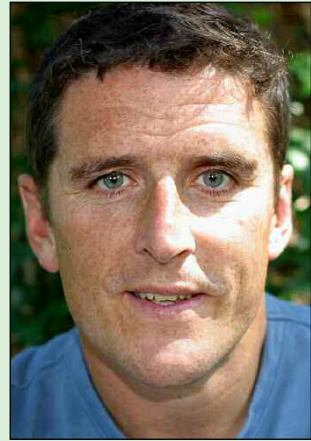
During autumn and winter we have more birds of prey such as buzzards and tawny owls arriving at the Hospital and the aviaries are rearranged with bigger branches to make suitable facilities for these larger birds.

Two of our original aviaries have been rebuilt at a cost of £3,000. These new aviaries are of a better design and face south to maximise the sunlight.





# Professional touch



Picture © BBC

“Gower Bird Hospital is a shining example to all wildlife rehabilitation centres. I’m a great admirer of their scientific approach – especially using the closed-circuit TV system to study the animals’ behaviour to improve welfare whilst in temporary captivity and the radio-tracking work following the progress of released patients.”

– Iolo Williams

# Best thing to nature

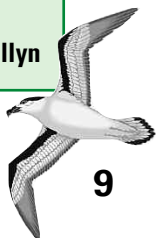


**NOW YOU SEE IT ...** The finished aviary complete with essential camouflage and CCTV cameras. Inset, the aviary under construction.



“I have known Iolo Williams for many years, he is a professional naturalist of considerable international reputation. I am delighted to have Iolo on board as a fellow patron as this reinforces the excellent quality of the ongoing work at Gower Bird Hospital.”

– Paul Llewellyn



# Catalogue of cruelty



**BALL OF FLUFF** Red kite chick.

**E**VERY patient admitted at Gower Bird Hospital is recorded and the nature of the injury, disease or reason for abandonment of young is noted.

What we have found is that only 20% of birds and 30% of hedgehogs are in because they are suffering from natural causes.

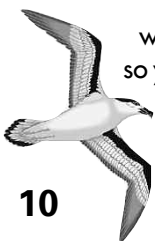
The rest are directly related to human activity: road traffic accidents, pollution, entanglement in discarded rubbish, attacks by domestic pets and destruction of nest sites are just some of the reasons patients turn up at Gower Bird Hospital.

Most of the time the trouble is caused by ignorance rather than direct cruelty but unfortunately there are also some cases which are just acts of cruelty.

One red kite chick was found lying in a field and brought to the Hospital by the RSPCA. There was a red kite nest in a tree near the field, but investigation showed evidence of people climbing up the tree and empty beer bottles were strewn around the base.

There was no sign of the parents, the chick had obviously been removed from the nest and the disturbance had frightened the adults away. There may have been two chicks in the nest and this one had been dropped on the ground as the perpetrators left the scene, but we'll never know.

The little chick was in reasonable condition weighing 71.5g and feeding was no problem. It was so young it would readily take pieces of defrosted day



## Three that got away

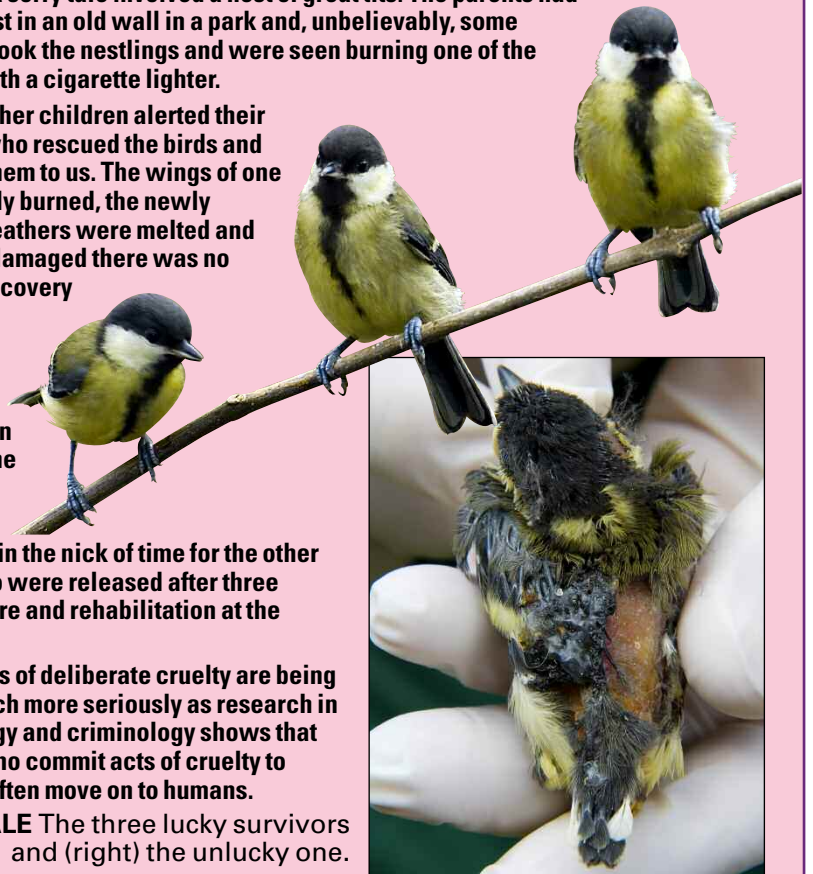
**ANOTHER** sorry tale involved a nest of great tits. The parents had built a nest in an old wall in a park and, unbelievably, some children took the nestlings and were seen burning one of the chicks with a cigarette lighter.

Luckily other children alerted their parents who rescued the birds and brought them to us. The wings of one were badly burned, the newly forming feathers were melted and so badly damaged there was no hope of recovery so we humanely put it to sleep rather than prolong the agony.

**Rescue** had been in the nick of time for the other three who were released after three weeks care and rehabilitation at the Hospital.

**These acts of deliberate cruelty are being taken much more seriously as research in psychology and criminology shows that people who commit acts of cruelty to animals often move on to humans.**

**SAD TALE** The three lucky survivors and (right) the unlucky one.



old chick as its natural fear instinct hadn't yet developed.

The biggest problem was that if we continued to feed it, it would become humanised (mal-imprinted) and would never be able to be released back into the wild where it should be.

We contacted the Red Kite Trust trying to find out if there was anywhere it could be raised with company of its own kind so it would have a good chance of being released as a fully functioning red kite – the longer it stayed with us the smaller the chance became.

Fortunately Tony Cross, project officer of the Welsh Kite Trust, came to its rescue and after some research discovered a pair of red kites rearing a single chick of about the same age.

Five days after arriving at the Hospital, our chick was put into the nest and thankfully the adults took on the role of foster parents and raised both chicks successfully.

# Chicks ain't always what they seem

**I**n mid-August a lady rang to say she had found a young peregrine chick on the ground.

We would have been surprised if it was a peregrine as it was past their breeding season but we have learned never to assume anything until the patient arrives – young pigeons are often brought in as “birds of prey” because they look so odd as youngsters with huge beaks!

Insect eating swifts are also often mistaken for birds of prey because of their feet. Someone once rang to ask what to feed a young hawk, we persuaded them the best action was to refer it to us as soon as possible and it arrived the same day via the RSPCA.

It was in fact a young bullfinch! Thank goodness we hadn't advised them over the phone how to feed it ...

The lady who had found the young “peregrine” arrived at the Hospital and we were surprised and delighted to see a juvenile cuckoo. This was only the second cuckoo to be admitted at the Hospital.

It was in quite a sorry state, weighing only 58g – half its normal weight. It was so weak, it went straight into the “intensive care” unit, in heated accommodation with a plentiful supply of mealworms and water.

After a few hours of peace and quiet it had perked up but was still too weak to feed itself, but thankfully took some mealworms and waxworms from tweezers. After two days it was feeding itself and on the fourth day was strong enough to go outside into one of our rehabilitation aviaries.

Watching through our CCTV we could see it was eating well and getting stronger every day. Their favourite food is caterpillars but the waxworms and mealworms we provided made a good substitute.

Fourteen days later, the cuckoo was looking for a way out of the aviary and was released weighing 110g,



**HAPPY ENDING** Cuckoo on the road to recovery.

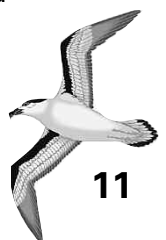
a much healthier weight and strong enough to have an excellent chance of survival.

If we had kept it in captivity any longer the unnecessary stress would probably have caused it to lose condition again, so we always try to keep the temporary captivity to an absolute minimum.

Cuckoos are migratory birds, most of the European cuckoos coming from East Africa in spring. The adults make the return journey around August and the juveniles follow a little later. The juveniles resemble sparrowhawks with grey brown plumage, barred underparts and yellow legs – they even have the same white patch at the back of the neck.

This is probably useful as a defence from other larger birds. Cuckoos can also eat hairy caterpillars avoided by other birds as their stomach lining can be shed and renewed protecting them from the irritating hairs.

Numbers of cuckoos have declined since the 1980s. Cuckoos lay their eggs in other birds' nests, particularly dunnocks, meadow pipits and reed warblers and a decline in the host species will result in a decline of cuckoo numbers.



# Be our friends!

**H**EDGEHOGS arrive at Gower Bird Hospital throughout the year. Last year was interesting as the unusually mild autumn and early winter was a great help to youngsters born late in the year who were able to continue finding natural food (beetles, worms and other insects) and gain enough weight to hibernate.

There has been much publicity in the media about declining hedgehog numbers but it is very difficult to accurately count hedgehogs in the wild.

The best approach to conserve numbers is to ensure there is enough habitat for them to be able to find food, make nests, breed and hibernate – if everyone had a hedgehog friendly garden, numbers would surely increase!

Hedgehogs love gardens that are not overly manicured. A lawn is good for foraging for worms, a gently sloping pond – or simply a shallow bowl – for drinking water, hedges (of course!) for cover, nesting material and more food, and that scruffy bit in the corner



that's not disturbed too often is excellent for having babies and hibernating in the winter.

Sheds sitting on blocks so they are raised a few inches off the ground are very popular nesting sites. And of course, no slug pellets!



**ONE OF OURS?**  
Microchips help keep track of hedgehogs.

## On track

**HEDGEHOGS** from Pennard and the area surrounding Gower Bird Hospital are microchipped before being released back into the area they were found.

It costs £10 to chip each hedgehog but as we are able to identify individuals, the project is providing invaluable information about their natural history and long term survival.

Hedgehogs from further afield are marked with coloured plastic sleeving on a few of their spines. These coloured markings can last for up to four years as the hedgehogs' spines are moulted and replaced.



*Now he looks just my type ...*

**HEDGEHOGS** are nocturnal mammals. If you see a hedgehog out in the day there is usually something seriously wrong and it will need specialised help as soon as possible. Unfortunately, people do sometimes pick a hedgehog up and keep it in a box for a few days before

contacting us, by which time it can be too late for treatment. Just because a hedgehog is eating, it doesn't mean its going to survive – please phone us for advice. (Oh, and if you see a hedgehog reading a magazine, do contact us immediately!



# Can I have a hedgehog to live in my garden?

**P**EOPLE often ask us for a hedgehog to live in their garden. We always try to release hedgehogs back into the area where they were found so we rarely need to “find a home” for a hedgehog.

Sometimes hedgehogs arrive and we don't know where they came from, for instance when someone finds a hedgehog and takes it to their vet but no details are taken of where the animal was found and it is subsequently referred to us.

Sometimes a hedgehog's home has been destroyed if extensive building work is going on. In these cases we release the hedgehog in an area where we know hedgehogs are already present and doing well.

If there are no hedgehogs in an area, there is usually a good reason why they are not there. If you have badgers nearby you are unlikely to see hedgehogs. Badgers are a hedgehog's major predator as their strong front claws can open up even a curled hedgehog.

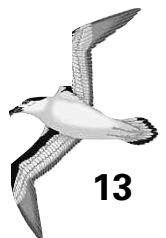
Or there may not be a suitable habitat for hedgehogs – they need plenty of dried leaves in the winter to make their winter nest or hibernaculum. Marshland or bracken covered common land is not suitable for hedgehogs.

Hedgehogs are popular little creatures, but they are also wild animals. An average hedgehog will travel surprising distances and needs an area of about 20 football pitches to lead a happy natural life.

There will be other hedgehogs in the same area but they all need to range across large areas.

We have done extensive studies on the behaviour of hedgehogs in temporary captivity at Gower Bird Hospital and results have shown that they do get very stressed, even when housed in a 20-foot square aviary with natural grass and earth flooring, spending most of their time looking for a way out.

This is why we don't put hedgehogs into walled gardens – the hedgehog's happiness comes first.



# Thanks

## This is how you *do it* ...

▼ **Kids power:** Vicky from Llanelli was brave enough to supervise a sponsored doughnut eating session by her sons and their friends – Nicholas, Scott, Jordan, Kieran, Jack and Little Scott raised £83 by eating doughnuts without licking their lips!

▼ **Mr and Mrs Hicks** of Bishopston very kindly donated a computer, monitor, scanner and printer which has been in constant use in our new

volunteer room and Mr Godsall of Climate Air-Conditioning & Refrigeration, Swansea, came up trumps with another donation of a brand new fridge!

▼ **James de Kerckhove** made a Christmas collection of £18.24 and the First Townhill Brownies raised £65.50 which they donated specially to help us care for hedgehogs.

▼ **Thanks also to Bishopston Ladies Choir** for their donation

of £50, Helen Radcliffe for £133 raised by a sponsored walk on Gower and to the District Nurses of Murton, Gower, West Cross and Norton for the envelope of coins (£25) which we found in our letterbox at Christmas!

▼ **Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA)** grant funded the employment of our volunteer and events coordinator and volunteer expenses for one year.

**S**INCE 1996 more than 15,000 patients have arrived at Gower Bird Hospital – that's 15,000 reasons why we need your help!

We would like to thank everyone who makes a donation to Gower Bird Hospital. It costs around £45,000 to keep the Hospital running every year, which is a comparatively small amount for the work we do.

Many people send their donations by cheque, if you prefer to donate using a credit or debit card you can do this via our website [www.gowerbirdhospital.org.uk](http://www.gowerbirdhospital.org.uk) Monthly or annual standing orders are a great help as they give the charity a regular income.

**No donation is too small and every one is much appreciated.**

If you would like to raise funds for us, please get in touch. We can provide leaflets, magazines, sponsorship forms and anything else you may need.



**NEVER TOO YOUNG** Hannah, winner of our "Guess the Hog Family Names" at our stall at the Gower Show, with her sister Katherine.

Picture by Leisa Forrest



# to you . . .

## This is how you *do it* ...

▼ We also receive donations from people selling things on Ebay and donating a percentage of the sale (from 10% to 100%) to Gower Bird Hospital. If you can support us this way please follow the link for "selling for charity" on Ebay's home page. Sarah, our Ebay volunteer, is still selling items donated directly to the Hospital and sales have raised over £900 so far. If you don't want to sell on Ebay yourself, small (easily posted) items such as ornaments and jewellery are welcome.

▼ Gower Bird Hospital collection boxes are now in many shops, garages and post offices around Gower and Swansea raising more than £2,000 a year. If you know somewhere that would be happy to have one of our collection boxes on their counter please let us know.

▼ We are also extremely grateful to the Jean Sainsbury Animal Welfare Trust, the Gower Society, the Llysdinam Trust, the Beryl Steadman Animal Welfare

Trust and the Pettifor Trust for grants and donations.

▼ A special thank you to Jo and Malcolm of Bishopston Post Office for donating part of the proceeds from the Brandy Cove greeting card published by them.

▼ And, as always, special thanks to Jan and Pete of Pine Needles at the Heritage Centre, Parkmill, for promoting Gower Bird Hospital and helping in so many ways throughout the year.

## And these are some of the reasons *why* ...

**HOMELESS** This starling's nest was destroyed by building work. Food was obviously the first thing he needed but raising young birds isn't just about feeding. The starling was able to join a group of starlings of the same age already being rehabilitated at the Hospital. He learned how to forage for natural food and interact with others of his own kind. Human contact was kept to an absolute minimum and, along with the others, he developed into a healthy bird – both physically and mentally.

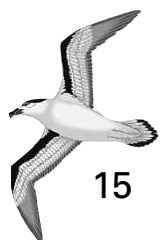
Three weeks later he was released as part of a social group, ready to join the wild starlings with all the skills needed for an excellent chance of survival in the wild.



**HOPING TO GROW**  
Song thrush nestlings in paper nest (above)



Great Tit fledgling calling for food (left)



# Transatlantic travellers



Picture © Gower Bird Hospital

**M**ANX shearwaters can live for many years. One Manx shearwater was caught in 2003 and had been rung as a nestling in 1953 – the bird was 50 years old, fit and healthy and getting ready to breed again!

Every September we get ready for young Manx shearwaters to start arriving at the Hospital. They breed on islands on the west coast of Britain.

Around 90% of these birds breed on British islands, 50% on the West Wales coast alone. They arrive at the breeding grounds between April and June where both male and female dig out a burrow.

The female lays one egg which is incubated for 52 to 54 days and the chick is then fed by both parents until it has enough fat reserves to leave the burrow and make its first journey to South America.

At this point it weighs more than an adult, the parents leave the chick and hunger is the trigger for it to leave the burrow and start its epic 3,000-mile trip.

Some go astray and end up inland and are then found by people and brought to Gower Bird Hospital.

These birds will not feed in captivity. If you do find a grounded Manx shearwater, the best way to help is to get the bird to us as soon as possible.

## Getting in touch

**Tel: 01792 371630**

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

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