

GOWER BIRD HOSPITAL



Keeping wildlife wild



Issue 15 2011/2012

£1.75

Welcome for a waxwing



SCANDINAVIAN VISITOR
— Hopefully this uncommon berry-eating waxwing is back where he belongs by now.

MORE than 20,000 patients (174 different species from large goshawks to tiny goldcrests) have arrived at Gower Bird Hospital in the last 15 years but we still get “firsts”.

In December 2010 our first waxwing arrived. Found in Swansea city centre and brought to us by the RSPCA, the waxwing had no obvious injuries and was a reasonable weight but was weak and somewhat subdued — possibly he had been hit by a car and was still dazed.

We set him up in one of our heated intensive care units with a mix of suitable food. For the first day he did not respond, but on the second day

started eating blueberries. He continued to recover and was soon fit enough to be moved outside to one of our rehabilitation aviaries. After 16 days at the hospital he was released and hopefully returned to Scandinavia the following spring.

Waxwings migrate to the UK in autumn to spend the winter in relatively warmer conditions and in spring return to Scandinavia to breed.

Their main food source is berries and they can be spotted in Swansea feeding on the whitebeam and rowan berries on Kingsway! However, they are still a rare sight so we were very pleased to have helped this little individual back into the wild.

Cover picture: Our first waxwing - © Barry Stewart

Newsletter *no 15*

Every little helps!

GOWER Bird Hospital has now been registered as a charity for 15 years. From humble beginnings, the hospital has grown and improved tremendously and this has only been possible because of the ongoing and generous donations from our supporters. More than 20,000 patients have arrived at Gower Bird Hospital since 1996.

During 2010 we admitted almost 2,000 patients — an increase of 25% on the previous year.

Local veterinary practices, the RSPCA, RSPB, National Trust, PDSA, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, British Hedgehog Preservation Society and the Bat

Conservation Trust all refer wildlife casualties to Gower Bird Hospital because of our excellent veterinary and rehabilitation facilities.

Without Gower Bird Hospital there would be nowhere for most wildlife casualties to go to receive the specialist treatment and rehabilitation they need. We are a relatively small charity providing an essential and unique service which is totally dependent on your donations.

Every pound really helps — thank you!

Karen + Simon

What's *inside*



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Top naturalist Iolo Williams helps spread the word



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The young ones

EVERY year hundreds of nestlings and fledglings are brought to Gower Bird Hospital – it's then our responsibility to hand-rear them and release them back into the wild.

We make every effort not to humanise these little individuals. Feeding is simple enough, but the most important part of the job is to keep human contact to an absolute minimum to allow the birds to develop as fully functioning wild birds.

As soon as possible these youngsters are transferred from the intensive care unit to an aviary outside where they can experience different weather conditions and start to forage for food for themselves.

Thanks to our post-release studies, radio-tracking released birds and fitting them with BTO rings, we are proving again and again that our methods work.



HAND TO MOUTH — Feeding the house martin chicks.

Many house martin nestlings are brought to us between June and September every year. As soon as they are feeding well from tweezers they are moved into special nest boxes in one of our aviaries.

House martins have up to three broods a year and the youngsters develop very quickly – as soon as they fledge from the nest they are capable of catching their own food.

We have radio-tracked some of our released house martins and found that they cope extremely well, instantly joining the local wild groups and behaving in exactly the same way as their wild counterparts.



ROAD TO RECOVERY — A song thrush fledgling.



These tiny long tailed tits were brought to Gower Bird Hospital when their nest was destroyed by a cat. They were kept in one of our heated nestling incubators and after recovering from the initial shock of their new surroundings started to take food from tweezers.

As soon as their feathers had developed they were transferred to one of our rehabilitation aviaries furnished with lots of twiggly branches. Via our CCTV system we could see them flying around the aviary and within two days they started pecking at the mini

mealworms and waxworms we had scattered in the aviary. At this point we stopped hand-feeding and they quickly became independent. We released them, fully fit and capable of feeding themselves, just three weeks after their arrival.

VERY young birds have no natural fear instinct and will open their beaks to ask for food as a response to any movement. This is fortunate for us as we have to become temporary foster parents.

However, continuing to hand-feed when the birds are capable of feeding themselves will result in mal-imprinting – the birds would become “humanised” and their chances of surviving in the wild are greatly reduced as they constantly look to humans for food

instead of becoming independent. Using CCTV in our aviaries enables us to watch from a distance and as soon as they start feeding themselves we stop hand-feeding.

The difference is remarkable, within just a few days the natural fear instinct kicks in and a bird that was begging for food just a few days ago will now fly away from someone walking into the aviary – exactly the behaviour we are looking for.

Born to be wild — cutie destined to be a hunter



THIS kestrel nestling was found alone on the ground in Penllergaer. How it had got there was a complete mystery.

Just like any other young bird, raising it on its own would result in a mal-imprinted bird that could not be released back into the wild.

Rescue centres are already inundated with tame birds of prey as well-meaning people make this mistake — the novelty soon wears off as the bird grows and changes from a cute baby to a large bird with sharp

talons that produces copious amounts of smelly droppings.

We started the search for young kestrels of a similar age as it is essential that young birds are reared with “siblings”. The only place rearing kestrels of a similar age was Mallydams Wood RSPCA Wildlife Hospital near Hastings.

The RSPCA arranged the transport and the kestrel was introduced to its new family where it made excellent progress and was released into the wild.

Owl-right in the end



Barn owls have very strong talons for catching their prey but (as with all birds) feet are also extremely important for preening feathers. The barn owl even has a special toe (see inset) with a serrated edge which is used as a comb!

TAWNY owls and barn owls are regular patients at the hospital. Around 70% have been hit by cars but during 2010's very cold winter, one tawny owl arrived from Penclawdd having been found in a chicken run.

He was very thin, weighing 313g and obviously struggling to find food in the harsh weather conditions. On arrival he was given rehydration fluids and kept warm in one of our intensive care units.

Within a few days he had started eating and was strong enough to be transferred outside into a large rehabilitation aviary. Three weeks later he was fit and well, weighing 456g and was released near where he was found.

A few days later we had a phone call from the lady who had originally found him to say she had found him in the chicken run again! This time he had flown off very strongly, none the worse for his experience.

Another first for the hospital

MORE than 3,000 hedgehogs have been admitted at Gower Bird Hospital since 1996. They are brought in suffering from diseases and injuries or as orphaned hoglets. Hedgehogs are thought to be declining and are now a species of conservation concern.

Simon's aiming to master a prickly subject

SIMON has started his master's degree by research at Bristol University. As with all our research, the welfare of the animal comes first – our studies are carried out without changing the normal care, treatment or rehabilitation of any of our patients.

One of the most important parts of the research is developing a new way to estimate hedgehog populations. The hedgehog lungworm only occurs in hedgehogs. This parasite is passed via hedgehog droppings to slugs and snails which are eaten by hedgehogs and so the cycle continues.

It follows that if this particular lungworm is found in slugs then hedgehogs must be in that area, so Simon is developing a method to find the DNA of the parasite in slugs.

At present, hedgehog numbers are estimated by sightings recorded by volunteers and the number of hedgehogs killed on roads. Finding



Picture: © Chinch Gryniowicz

HELPING HAND This baby being hand-fed is helpless now but pretty soon will be fending for himself in the wild..

slugs is a lot easier than finding hedgehogs so, if successful, this could provide a much more accurate way to estimate hedgehog populations.

When completed, this method could be used across the UK, one of the main benefits being the conservation of habitat used by hedgehogs. We would like to thank the People's Trust for Endangered Species and the Gower Society for sponsorship for this project.

BETWEEN May and October, baby hedgehogs or hoglets are often brought to the hospital. Usually the nest has been disturbed by people tidying that "scruffy bit" of the garden.

Some hoglets are genuine orphans, the mum may have been killed on the road. Hunger will make the hoglets leave the nest and they are often found in the open squeaking for their mum.

As with birds, we keep human contact to a minimum when hand-rearing hoglets. We have

radio-tracked hand-reared hedgehogs when they are released and have found that they manage very well, finding food and building nests just as efficiently as their wild counterparts.

In the wild, youngsters are fully weaned and independent at just six weeks old. Because of this quick development female hedgehogs can have two or possibly three litters in one season. The male hedgehog plays no part in rearing the youngsters, the female does all the work including building the nest!

Hog watch

HEDGEHOGS of all ages are brought to us, either sick or injured. The most important thing to remember is that hedgehogs are nocturnal



animals and any hedgehog out in daylight hours is in trouble. Even hedgehogs that appear to be bright and walking well are usually just on the edge of succumbing to illness and can die within days without proper diagnosis and treatment. If you find a hedgehog out during the day please ring us.

Water's the
stuff of life

Pool time is

MANY different species of birds arrive at the hospital and our eight rehabilitation aviaries can be modified accordingly.

We also have two specialised aviaries with pools for water birds. All birds need water to wash and keep their feathers in good condition but our pools are especially vital for water birds.

Sometimes patients take a couple of days to get to Gower Bird Hospital and it's always gratifying to see water birds dive straight into the water to wash and drink.

CCTV is installed in all our aviaries and often we will all stop for a couple of minutes to watch a new arrival washing furiously in the pool, obviously delighted to have a bath!



Picture: © Chinch Gryniecicz

VITAL WATER Gull chicks like this one will be ready for release in about six weeks. As their feathers develop they need access to water to wash and preen, ensuring their plumage is fully waterproof when released.

not just for fun



FRIENDLY VISITOR Kittiwakes are one of the gentler species of gull.

It's the
truth



GANNETS, with a wing span of up to two metres, are one of the largest birds needing our aquapens to recuperate.



End of the line

DISCARDED fishing line and tackle is a huge problem for water birds. As well as the obvious danger of sharp barbed fishing hooks, the line itself can tangle around wings and legs. If the line isn't removed quickly, it can stop blood circulation as well as causing deep infected wounds.

If you see fishing line on the beach or on river banks please pick it up and dispose of it safely – well wrapped and put in the bin. Be careful of any sharp hooks.

The heron pictured left was lucky – the line

for hooked gull

tangled around its foot was attached to the ground and a member of the public spotted its distress. We were able to remove the tangle of hooks and lures, the heron made a full recovery and was released a few days later.

The gull on the right wasn't so lucky. The visible hook was deeply embedded inside its mouth and it had swallowed two other hooks which had lodged deep in its throat. The hooks had been embedded for weeks and the gull sadly died from a combination of infection and starvation.



Expert help means it's

Gower Bird Hospital is fortunate to have supporters and volunteers who are experts in their fields



Picture: © Barry Stewart

BARRY STEWART BSc is an environmental consultant and BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) ringer and has a seemingly endless knowledge of the natural world from birds to insects and plants as well as an endless ability to share all he knows!

He is a BSBI (Botanical Society of the British Isles) recorder and committee member of Gower Ornithological Society and Glamorgan Moth Recording Group. Barry supervises Gower Bird Hospital's ringing project.

Visit Barry's blog www.goweros.blogspot.com which provides an amazing resource for people interested in sharing wildlife sightings in Swansea, Neath, Port Talbot and adjacent areas.

AS always, we would like to thank our vet, Brita Webb MRCVS, for giving her time so generously.

At Gower Bird Hospital we have a well-equipped veterinary unit including general anaesthesia facilities and a dispensary.

Brita is able to anaesthetise birds and animals requiring surgery and prescribe medications as necessary. Brita never charges for her time, saving the hospital thousands of pounds every year.



SAFE HANDS Brita is pictured right operating on a hedgehog.

nothing but the best



Picture: © Dan Forman

LEFT Dr Dan Forman.

ORPHANED POLECAT

Another member of the mustelid family, which includes otters, badgers, weasels and stoats.

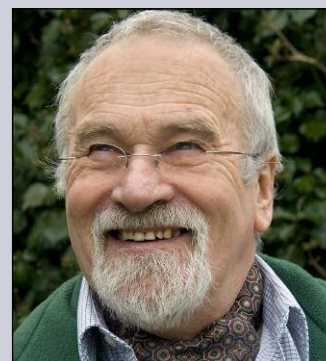


DR Dan Forman of Swansea University is an expert in many fields of ecology and is the county recorder for mammals. He is particularly well known for his work with otters, polecats and water voles.

We always receive excellent feedback from students about Dan's enthusiasm and his ability to stimulate interest and

debate about the natural world — Dan was honoured with the Distinguished Teaching Award for exceptional achievements.

As well as always being on hand to advise us, Dan donates the proceeds of his talks to Gower Bird Hospital. A very interesting and informative talk about otters on Gower raised more than £200 for us.



Appliance of science

A SPECIAL thank you to Paul Llewellyn MPhil, CBIol, MBiol (pictured left).

Gower Bird Hospital's first patron, Paul has nurtured us from the very beginning. His advice and guidance ensures that Gower Bird Hospital provides excellent care and rehabilitation based on an awareness of the individual's natural history and ecology.

This ensures that all welfare needs are met and that our work is backed up by good science.

And here's to you ...

KEEPING WILDLIFE WILD is our motto and Gower Bird Hospital depends on the generosity of people who understand our principles.

All our patients are wild birds and animals – easily frightened by contact with people and needing as much peace, quiet and privacy as possible to recover quickly.

The hospital cannot be open for visitors to look around as this would cause too much distress for our patients and is another

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

Each patient's treatment and rehabilitation costs an average of £35.

We would like to thank The Gower Society, Pennard Community Charity, Jean Sainsbury Animal Welfare Trust, Pettifor Trust, Royal Pigeon Racing Association and Walker 597 Animal Trust for their continued support.

A special thank you to

- ◆ Bryncoch Environment Group for their very kind donation of £250.
- ◆ Aberdare Boys Comp School organised various events raising a total of £358.
- ◆ Dianne of Llanelli who raised £200 by hosting a charity evening.
- ◆ Steven Powell's Sponsored Porthcawl Xmas Swim raised £50.
- ◆ The Ryan Hook-a-Duck Team raised more than £400 for Gower Bird Hospital at Pennard Carnival.

Feeling twitchy? Name these birds



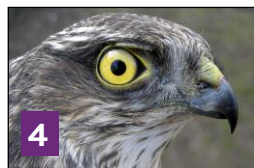
1



2



3



4

Answers

1, Great spotted woodpecker. 2, Siskin (juvenile). 3, Sparrowhawk. 4, Razorbill.

Wildlife enthusiasts just can't get enough of Iolo

I OLO Williams has been a patron of Gower Bird Hospital since 2007.

Iolo was kind enough to offer an illustrated talk on The Wonderful Wildlife of Wales to raise funds for Gower Bird Hospital.

Even Iolo was overwhelmed by the response – the 300-seat lecture theatre at Swansea University was filled to capacity, but we had to turn more than 100 people away as there were simply no more seats!

Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the evening which raised over £1,300. Our apologies to those who didn't get in on the evening – Iolo has promised to do another talk for us and this time tickets will be available in advance so everyone can get a seat.

How to help

YOU can help by sending us a donation or setting up a standing order. If you would like to organise a fundraising event for Gower Bird Hospital, we would be delighted. Please let us know and we will provide any help we can. For example we can provide leaflets, sponsorship forms etc.

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



INSPIRATION Iolo and Ben, one of the youngest members of the audience. Iolo's enthusiasm for and knowledge of wildlife is an inspiration to everyone from nine to 90!

Keep an eye out ...



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

Without your support ...

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 like to thank everyone who brings a wildlife casualty 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.

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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