

Gower BIRD HOSPITAL



Keeping wildlife wild



Issue 16 2012/2013

£1.75

So why do we do it ...

SOME people ask us why we bother doing what we do – wouldn't it be better to let nature take its course?

Many of the patients admitted at Gower Bird Hospital are on the endangered Red List (see page 13), so each one we release plays its part in conservation of the species.

Every bird and animal that arrives at the Hospital is treated with one aim in mind – to release it as a fully functioning member of its species, able to integrate with its natural environment and equipped with

all the skills it needs to survive and breed in the wild.

Gower Bird Hospital has taken in more than 22,000 wildlife casualties and the reason for admission is always recorded using the National Wildlife Casualty Recording Scheme.

The majority of casualties are admitted as a result of human activities. As you can see from the table below, only 23% of birds and 36% of mammals are suffering from natural causes – the remaining 77% and 64% are directly related to the activities of people.

Reason for admission	Birds	Mammals (mainly hedgehogs)
NATURAL CAUSES – includes injuries from a natural predator, diseases (eg Trichomoniasis in birds, dental problems in mammals), congenital abnormalities, starvation in bad weather conditions etc	23%	36%
UNNATURAL INJURIES – includes road traffic accidents, garden tool injuries, entanglement in netting or fishing line, fishing hooks, flying into windows etc	28%	25%
ORPHANED – genuine orphans are rare, usually the nest is disturbed or destroyed when cutting hedges or clearing a garden	23%	22%
TRAPPED – in chimneys, cattle grids etc	1%	5%
CAT OR DOG BITES – birds are usually attacked by cats and hedgehogs by dogs	15%	5%
POISON/POLLUTION – excluding major oil disasters, mainly rat poison when bait or poisoned rodents are eaten by wildlife	2%	3%
OTHER – healthy fledglings unnecessarily 'rescued', hedgehogs picked up at night during a mild autumn by people mistakenly thinking they should be hibernating etc	8%	4%



Cover picture: Green woodpecker by Steve Round

Newsletter *no 16*

From small beginnings

WHEN we look back at our small beginnings and look now at what Gower Bird Hospital is doing, we are amazed at how much has been achieved.

We started by building two aviaries in our garden. Gower Bird Hospital is now a registered veterinary practice and has ten rehabilitation aviaries (two with water pools), two separate treatment rooms for hedgehogs and birds, 13 hedgehog rehabilitation runs, a staff/volunteer room, office and reception.

Almost 2,000 wildlife casualties are admitted every year. More than 100 different species arrive – from tiny bluetit nestlings to larger birds such as owls and buzzards as

well as many hedgehogs and other small mammals.

We are extremely proud of the progress of the Hospital, and two more aviaries are being built this year. It's not just the facilities that improve, we are always looking for ways to improve the care and rehabilitation of the wildlife casualties.

All this has been made possible by our supporters giving donations, regular standing orders and fund-raising – a huge thank you to you all!

Karel + Simon

What's *inside*



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Rearing babies is one of our biggest challenges



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Past and future – where do we go next?



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All about you – the people who make it happen



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Woodpeckers' tale

In June three green woodpecker nestlings were found on the ground in Clyne Gardens. One had already died and the two survivors were quite poorly. They were still very young with just a few feathers starting to grow.

Fortunately, the people who found them brought them straight to Gower Bird Hospital. The nestlings were immediately put into an incubator to warm them up and after a few hours they were strong enough to take some food.

Being very young they readily accepted hand feeding but were still weak and the first couple of days were a worry as we didn't know if they would survive, but by the third day both were feeding well. Nine days later, they had enough feathers to keep themselves warm and they were moved into a woodpecker nest box in one of our rehabilitation aviaries.

The aviary was furnished with branches and foliage to make their surroundings as natural as possible. We continued to hand feed them until they fledged.

Watching them via the CCTV, we could see them exploring their new surroundings and starting to peck at the mealworms we provided.

Green woodpeckers eat ants – lots of ants! Fortunately there was a large ant nest under one of our hedgehog runs which needed to be moved so we carefully took a large section and put it in the aviary.

Watching via the CCTV we could see the youngsters starting to take an



MAKING PROGRESS: One of our nestlings, who hopefully will grow up to be like the magnificent adult green woodpecker on our front cover.

interest in the new food supply, suddenly their natural instinct kicked in and they quickly ate the lot – hundreds of ants. This was a great relief as we were now confident they would recognise their natural food when they were released. We stopped hand feeding and put food through a hatch into the aviary to minimise the woodpeckers associating people with food.

Within a few days they were showing a good, natural fear of people and four weeks after they arrived they were released.

THERE are three species of woodpeckers in the UK, greater spotted, lesser spotted and green.

Green woodpeckers are the largest and can live for 15 years or longer.



Lift-off for skylark



SKYLARKS are remarkable little birds, well known for their beautiful song. Skylarks nest on the ground and this skylark fledgling was picked up by a dog on Cefn Bryn on Gower.

The dog's owner was obviously upset and brought the bird straight to Gower Bird Hospital. Fortunately, there were no injuries and the bird was in good condition, obviously being well fed by its parents.

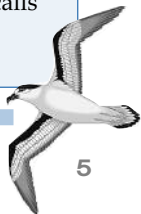
When we admit any patient we always record the details of where it was found, so we were able to take it back to almost the exact spot on Cefn Bryn and

release it back to where it belonged.

Many people think that if you have touched a fledgling the parents will abandon it, but this is not true.

The parent birds have invested a huge amount of time building a nest, incubating the eggs and feeding the young birds and don't give up that easily. Just like human parents can pick out their child's voice in a playground, birds can identify their own youngsters easily.

We have witnessed this on many occasions when returning unnecessarily rescued fledglings – the youngster calls and the parents answer almost immediately.



What to watch for



BIRD WATCH: The blackbird on the left still a nestling, the feathers haven't fully developed and bald skin can still be seen. If you find a nestling it will need help as the nest has probably been destroyed or a predator (usually a domestic cat) has found the nest. The bird on the right is a fledgling blackbird and it is perfectly normal to see these fledglings hopping around the garden. The parents are on duty and if they see danger (usually a domestic cat again) they will give a sharp alarm call signalling all the fledglings to get under cover and keep still until the danger has hopefully passed.

MANY blackbird fledglings are unnecessarily 'rescued' by well-meaning people.

Blackbirds have two or three broods every year and the youngsters develop very quickly. Between three and five eggs are laid and they hatch after around thirteen days.

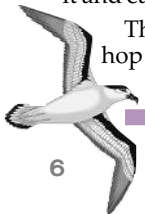
Both parents feed the nestlings and within 14 days they have grown enough feathers to keep warm. The youngsters now 'fledge' – they leave the nest probably to lessen the chances of a predator finding it and eating all the young.

The fledglings can't quite fly, they hop around and each one will tuck

itself into the undergrowth. The parents continue to feed them – they will call, the youngsters reply and the parents know exactly where each fledgling is.

It is at this point that people see them and assume the young bird is abandoned when nothing could be further from the truth. As well as being fed, the fledglings are exercising which helps build up their muscles and they will be capable of short flight within two or three days.

They quickly learn to feed themselves and are independent within three weeks of leaving the nest. Often, the female will start incubating the next clutch of eggs whilst the male is still feeding the first youngsters.



Creatures of the night

HEDGEHOGS are nocturnal creatures, but it is surprising how many people don't know this. But maybe not so surprising when you look at the way hedgehogs are portrayed in the media. They appear in adverts, children's programmes and even nature programmes, awake and running around in daylight hours. The fact is, 99% of hedgehogs out in the daytime are sick or injured. Try counting how many times you see hedgehogs portrayed on television as awake in the day – at the time of writing we spotted six in one evening.

Can I have one for my garden?

It's the hedgehog FAQ ...

PEOPLE often ask us for a hedgehog to live in their garden.

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 carried out 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 30 metre square aviary with natural grass and earth flooring,



Picture: Chinch Gryniewicz

WE CARE: Hedgehogs arrive suffering from all sorts of injuries and diseases. This hedgehog had a fungal infection of the skin causing him to lose his fur and spines. After treatment from our vet he made a good recovery.

spending most of their time looking for a way out.

This is why we don't put hedgehogs into walled gardens – the hedgehog's well-being comes first. We always try to release hedgehogs back into the area where they were found so we don't often need to "find a home" for a hedgehog.

However if we do, we will release the hedgehog in an area where we know hedgehogs are already present and doing well.

Information about how to encourage more hedgehogs into your garden can be found at www.hedgehogstreet.org



Putting the pat

ALL Gower Bird Hospital's research is carried out with the bird or animal's welfare as the most important consideration. We study what is happening at the Hospital and never compromise a patient's well-being.

Gower Bird Hospital was one of the first wildlife hospitals to use CCTV to observe the behaviour of wild birds and hedgehogs while in temporary captivity. By 2000 all our aviaries were fitted with CCTV and this made a huge difference.

In the wild a sick or injured bird will be picked out as an easy target by a predator. If the bird sees a potential predator, it will try to disguise any weakness – standing on a sore leg or lifting a painful wing – to appear healthy.

Wildlife has a natural, instinctive fear of people, so walking up to an aviary to look in instantly frightens the bird and it will try to hide any pain or discomfort.

Watching via the CCTV, we can see the bird relaxing as the person moves away and the painful wing will drop down, or the injured leg will be lifted and often the head will drop and the eyes close as the bird feels safe again – a totally different view of the patient, giving a true assessment of its condition.



WHAT AVIARY? Our rehabilitation aviaries are camouflaged to give

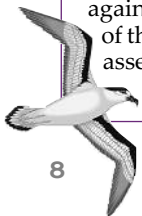
WE also record hours of CCTV footage which provides students from Swansea University with projects and helps us improve conditions for wild birds and animals in temporary captivity.

A huge leap forward in hedgehog welfare was a recent Gower Bird Hospital study of hedgehog behaviour. Following the usual practice of keeping several hedgehogs together in a large room, we were puzzled by wounds found

on the sides of the hedge

The CCTV showed a huge bullying by wild hedgehogs avoided for most of the time but unnatural, confined space with no means of escape.

This resulted in unaggressive behaviour by hedgehogs mistaking the presence of other hedgehogs as a challenge – we discovered



patient first



extra privacy to the birds inside. Inset: Inside one of our aviaries.

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mystery wounds were actually bite wounds inflicted during hours of abnormal stress levels. We now always house hedgehogs individually to avoid this problem.

Post-release monitoring is also an essential part of our work. When we release a patient, how do we know if it is surviving in the wild?

BTO rings and coloured number rings are fitted to birds, hedgehogs are micro-chipped or marked with

Owl *watch*



SHORT eared owls do live in the UK but more are seen during the winter when birds from Russia, Iceland and Scandinavia come to Britain to avoid the harsher weather.

Short eared owls hunt during the day and have a broad wingspan of over a metre wide, ideal for swooping across open areas such as marsh and grassland searching for voles. The ear tufts are only displayed when the owl is defending itself, otherwise they lie flat against the head.

This short eared owl was brought to Gower Bird Hospital after being hit by a car. It was badly bruised but fortunately hadn't broken any bones. After three weeks in one of our rehabilitation aviaries it was released fit and well.

coloured heat-shrink sleeving. This means we can identify them should they be brought back, but the only way to be absolutely sure of what's happening for the first few weeks after release, is to follow them using radio-tracking.

Blackbirds, starlings, tawny owls, gulls, house martins and hedgehogs have been radio-tracked with the results showing that our rehabilitation methods are extremely successful.



How it all began ...

GOWER Bird Hospital's sixteenth birthday is an excellent opportunity to look back at what we've achieved so far and make plans for the future.

Gower Bird Hospital started in the 1980s when Karen and Simon began caring for wild birds, hedgehogs and other small mammals.

In 1996, the Sea Empress oil disaster suddenly put Gower Bird Hospital at the centre of the rescue effort on Gower and help appeared from everywhere.

During this emergency close links were forged with the RSPCA, National Trust, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and the



PROUD MOMENT: Karen and Simon receiving the Elsie M J Evans Award for outstanding kindness from the chairman of the RSPCA council in 2007.

RSPB which are still strong today. This was also the year that Gower Bird Hospital became a registered charity.

... and where we'd like it to go

THE Hospital is run from Karen and Simon's home. Charities which run from private homes are sometimes at risk because if anything happens to the owners, the charity is likely to suffer setbacks, or even cease to exist, and all the hard work of the founders can be lost.

Without Gower Bird Hospital there would be nowhere for most wildlife casualties to go.

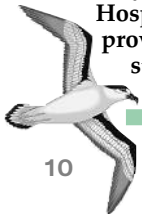
Everyone involved with Gower Bird Hospital is aware of the vital service it provides and wants it to become a stable, sustainable and ever

improving charity.

The first step is to raise enough funds to purchase land and buildings.

As well as the veterinary unit, aviaries and facilities that already exist, we are hoping to establish a new wildlife rehabilitation centre which will also include better facilities for staff and volunteers, a visitor centre and an education centre for all ages.

Alongside donations, fundraising and grant funding, legacies will play an important part in securing the future of Gower Bird Hospital.



It's the *truth*

MANX shearwater will not feed in captivity. If you do find a grounded Manx shearwater, the best way of helping it is to get the bird to the Gower Bird Hospital as soon as possible to receive the specialised care it needs.

Transatlantic travel

EVERY September we get ready for young Manx shearwaters to start arriving at the Hospital. Manx shearwaters breed on islands on the west coast of Britain. Around 90% of the world's population 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. Once hatched, the chick is fed by both parents until it has enough fat reserves to start its first journey to South American waters.

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 migration.

Some go astray, especially if there are strong westerly winds, and end up inland. They are then found by people and arrive at Gower Bird Hospital via vets, the RSPCA and members of the public. We normally expect between 20 and 50 Manx shearwaters in September – numbers rise



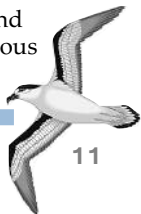
LONG DISTANCE TRAVELLERS: Manx shearwater.

if we have strong winds.

In September 2011 hundreds of birds were washed up on Newgale beach in Pembrokeshire due to exceptionally strong winds. Karen and Simon were called to assist the RSPCA and examined and assessed over 500 Manx shearwaters (all in five hours) before they were taken to the RSPCA's wildlife hospital in Taunton.

When the new Gower Bird Hospital is built, we will have the facilities to cope with large scale local disasters, saving the birds from the added stress of transport to a bigger wildlife hospital further afield.

After the initial rush, Manx shearwaters continued to arrive at Gower Bird Hospital for the rest of the month and we admitted 91, breaking our previous record of 53.

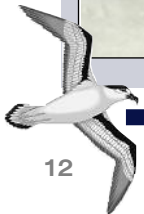


Before ... and after



PICTURES THAT TELL THE STORY: These two herring gulls were brought to us by the RSPCA. They were both entangled in the same fishing line and hooks. The juvenile had line wrapped around its body with hooks embedded in the skin while the adult had hooks stuck in its beak and feet as well as line tightly tangled around its body. We were able to remove all the hooks and line and treat the injuries successfully. Both gulls made a full recovery and were released together.

PICTURES: N Manley, RSPCA





Bird on a wire

INNOCENT VICTIM: The RSPCA also rescued this jackdaw which had become entangled in netting. Thanks to the prompt actions of the person who called the RSPCA and the RSPCA officer who rescued it, no permanent damage was caused by the netting. Within a few days the superficial wounds had healed well and we were able to release the jackdaw back into the wild.

PICTURE: N Manley, RSPCA

Red, amber and green

BRITISH wildlife (including plants, insects, animals and birds) can be split into three categories of conservation importance called the red, amber and green lists. Red is the highest priority with species needing urgent action.

Red list: population has declined by at least 50% in the last 25 years. Includes: Cuckoo, lapwing, herring gull, skylark, song thrush, starling, house sparrow and hedgehog.

Amber list: population has declined by 25 to 49% in the last 25 years or less than 300 breeding pairs in the UK. Includes: Manx shearwater, green woodpecker,

gannet, kestrel, oystercatcher, snipe, woodcock, swift, swallow and house martin.

Green list: population is stable or declined by less than 25% in the last 25 years.

This is a very brief summary, for more information please look at the RSPB or DEFRA websites.

Gower Bird Hospital does not exclude any species. Every species is treated with the same respect and care – a jackdaw or feral pigeon gets the same respect as a lapwing. After all, who would have thought that house sparrows and starlings would be on the red list?



And here's to you ...

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

- ◆ Sarah and Caroline raised £305 at a boot sale.
- ◆ Dawn of Cwmbwrla held a jumble sale raising £100.
- ◆ Newton Primary School pupils Katie, Olivia, Mutsa and Maisie ran a cake stall at Castellamare Restaurant raising £76.
- ◆ Nicola of Southgate raised £200 by selling greetings cards.
- ◆ Val and Pam raised £90 by selling home-made pickled onions at Williams Pet & Garden Supplies in Gowerton.
- ◆ Lynn and Janet sold echium plants and seeds raising £78
- ◆ The Rock and Fountain Pub in Skewen donated £250 from their pub quiz.

- ◆ Tawe Vet Group in Sketty raised £236 by running a raffle.
- ◆ Dianne of Llanelli raised £220 by organising a charity evening

£1,555 in total – a huge thank you to you all!

- ◆ A special thank you to Kate of Gower Cottage Brownies who always helps us with a donation of delicious chocolate brownies for raffle prizes at events.
- ◆ We are also grateful for grant funding and donations from the Jean Sainsbury Animal Welfare Trust, The Gower Society, Pennard Community Charity, Pettifor Trust, Walker 597 Animal Trust and the Royal Pigeon Racing Association.

HIDDEN REWARDS:

Two of our volunteers, Martin and Dawn. Martin said: "It began in 2006 when I took an injured sparrow to the Bird Hospital. On an impulse I asked if there was a vacancy for a volunteer. I have little knowledge of the care and welfare of birds and animals, but I was employed as an office administrator for many years. And so for the past six years I have volunteered at Gower Bird Hospital twice a week and given some assistance in the maintaining of records. I like to think that I have been of some help and in return I have gained friendship. Real friendship is a gift and cannot be bought. I will continue to enjoy my work as a volunteer as long as I am able."



How you can help

CAN you knit or sew or cook? Some of our supporters make items for us to sell at events to raise funds, if you would like to help please contact us.

A huge thank you to the Gower Bird Hospital volunteers who do everything from cleaning to office work and helping at events and Brita Webb MRCVS, our veterinary surgeon, who so generously donates her time free of charge.



Those who wish to pet and baby wild animals love them. But those who respect their natures and wish to let them live normal lives, love them more

Edwin Way Teale

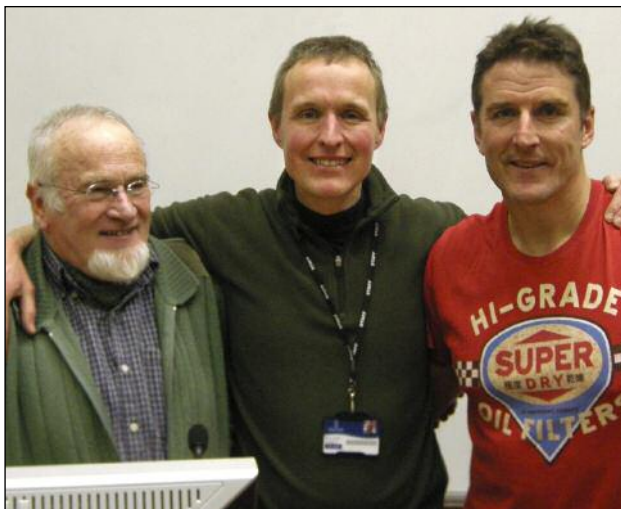
1899–1980, naturalist, photographer and Pulitzer Prize-winning writer

Everyone's wild about Iolo

FEBRUARY saw another sell-out talk by Iolo Williams which raised £2,400 for Gower Bird Hospital.

Everyone thoroughly enjoyed Iolo's talk about Welsh wildlife which was educational, inspirational and hugely entertaining.

Iolo is a wonderful ambassador for wildlife and we are all looking forward to seeing even more of him on TV including BBC's Spring and Autumn Watch series.



UNITED EFFORT: Simon with our patrons Paul Llewellyn and Iolo Williams.

Why our patients are not to be disturbed

PEOPLE sometimes ask if they can look around the hospital but this is not in the best interests of our patients.

Injured and sick wildlife casualties need as much peace and privacy as possible which enables them to recover more quickly.

Youngsters that are being hand-reared also benefit as they are not over-exposed to people, ensuring that they do not

become tame and giving them the best chance of survival in the wild.

All our aviaries are camouflaged so even we cannot see in when we are working around the hospital – the complete opposite of a zoo where animals and birds are on display.

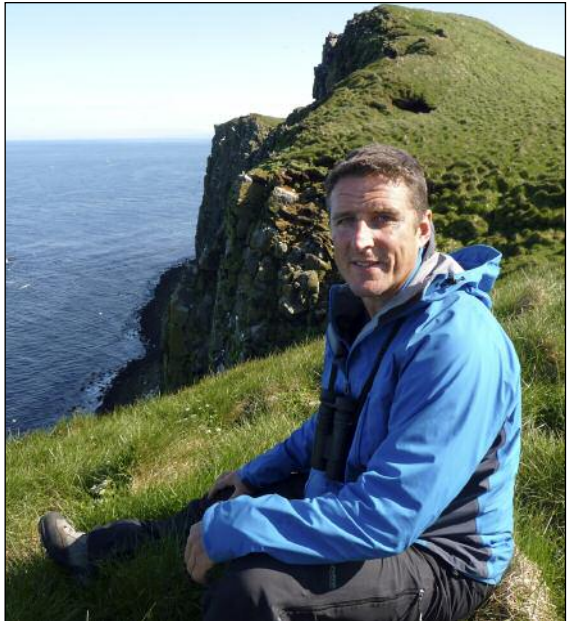
When the new hospital is built there will be a visitor centre where people can see patients via the CCTV system.



Keeping wildlife wild

For 16 years now, Gower Bird Hospital has been carrying out vital conservation work that has helped rehabilitate thousands of wild birds and mammals. Using the latest techniques and with dedicated, knowledgeable staff, they are at the forefront of wild animal care in Britain. Here's to the next 16 successful years!

Iolo Williams



● 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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Registered Charity No: 1053912

