

GOWER BIRD HOSPITAL

Reg. Charity No. 1053912



NEWSLETTER

2000

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

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

We hope we are improving our Newsletter year by year, but we'd welcome your feedback on this and your suggestions for what you'd like to see in future issues



Welcome to our Fourth Annual Newsletter.

Once again we've seen a record number of patients arriving at the Hospital - **well over a thousand patients in 1999.**

We are able to care for so many wildlife casualties because of the marvellous support of concerned members of the public such as yourselves. This newsletter shows you how your donations help us to help wildlife. **If you find a casualty, advice is on the back pages.**

YEAR	BIRD CASUALTIES	OTHER (mainly hedgehogs)	MAJOR OIL SPILL VICTIMS	TOTAL
1993	121			121
1994	430	54		484
1995	729	75	254	1058
1996	698	77	501	1276
1997	700	74		774
1998	848	152		1000
1999	1111	140		1251



Developments at the Hospital during 1999

The increasing number of patients meant that, as usual, we had to build additional aviaries last year. The garden at Valetta is filling up so it was decided to construct a block of three aviaries in the garden of a very experienced co-worker. This has the advantage of giving us an extra release site. The extra accommodation also gives us more opportunity to 'rest' aviaries and to clean and disinfect them between occupants.

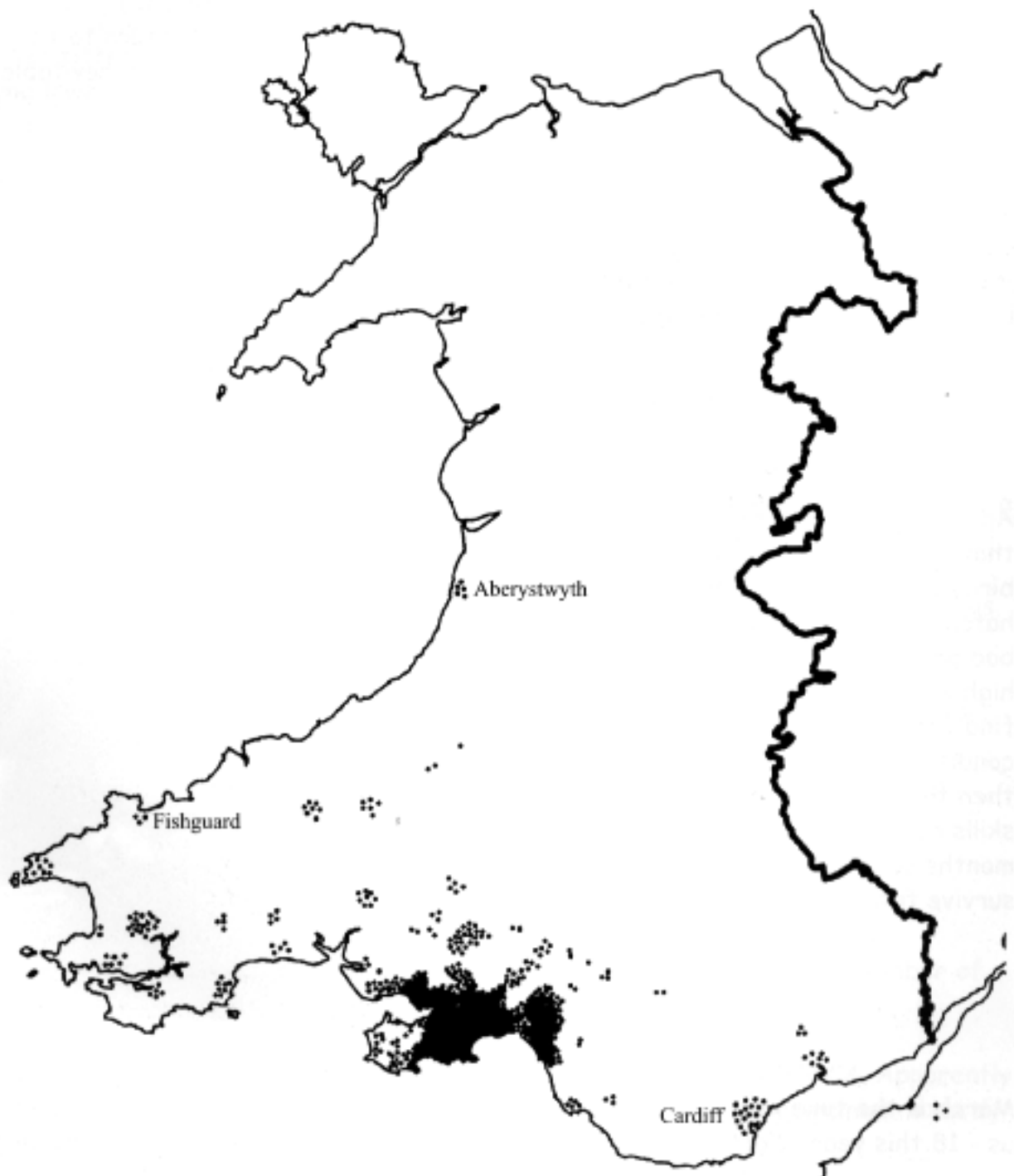
The trial use of CCTV cameras in one of our aviaries has been very successful (more about this later). This encouraged us to appeal for funds to extend the system. Our appeal had a very generous response and so we will be able to install a CCTV system throughout all our aviaries in the early part of 2000.

WHERE OUR PATIENTS CAME FROM IN 1999

In the map below we've inserted one black dot to represent each patient (and ran out of space in the Swansea area!).

Unfortunately we don't know the capture site of every single patient, so about one third of our patients aren't represented.

You can see that we had patients from as far afield as Aberystwyth & Bristol.



1999 - A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF GOWER BIRD HOSPITAL.



January / February / March

It's so quiet at the Hospital that it's difficult to remember how hectic it will become in just a couple of months time. During the whole of these 3 months only 114 new patients arrive and at any one time there's only about 15 or 16 inpatients. But does that mean we get a rest? - if only! All this breather means is that we get a chance to do the thousand and one other jobs necessary for the operation of a wildlife hospital. Like cleaning, maintaining and repairing the aviaries and equipment - constructing new facilities - getting on top of the paperwork - doing the accounts - completing the annual return to the Charity Commission - producing the Newsletter - updating our leaflet - and the inevitable fund raising activities!

This year's quiet period allowed us to put the finishing touches to the new flight aviary - an important new facility for larger birds. It also enabled us to install a CCTV system in one of the aviaries as a trial for the usefulness of CCTV observation.

We also made a start on the construction of 3 annex aviaries but the work got overtaken by the start of the fledgling season and had to be postponed.

An interesting feature of this time of year is that we always get a few weak, underweight birds of prey. These tend to be juvenile birds, hatched in the previous Summer, who have hit a bad patch during the Winter. Constant rain or high winds can make it difficult for them to find food. We feed them back to good condition before releasing them. Hopefully then they will be able to improve their hunting skills during the easier Spring and Summer months so that they'll be in a better position to survive future Winters.



March is the time when we begin the release of hedgehogs that have overwintered with us - 18 this year. Soft release pens are sited in suitable locations. The hedgehogs are

free to come and go as they wish, so they can return to the pen for a free meal or a safe bed whenever they wish until they become fully independent.

April



The number of patients arriving is starting to rise - 84 this month - and we start to get the first of the nestlings and fledglings. Obviously these first fledglings are of resident species - migratory species come later on. We get blackbird fledglings, for instance, right through from April to August (peaking in June/July) but swallow fledglings mainly in July.

As fledgling season arrives the treatment room is rearranged to cater for the nestlings and fledglings which arrive daily. We use large cardboard boxes with a lined plastic nest fitted to the inside. Heat lamps are hung above the boxes which can be raised and lowered to control the temperature. If a nestling falls out of the nest, it remains in the box under the lamp and doesn't get cold. A mesh lid allows the heat from the lamp through and twig perches, leaves and grass on the floor simulate a natural environment. An occasional fine spray of water keeps the humidity right. A hole cut into the side of the box and a tube of material fastened to it enables us to put one hand into the box to feed them without removing the mesh lid.

A Typical New Arrival



This little chap was found huddled and alone in the corner of a garden on the outskirts of Swansea. All attempts to find her family failed so she came to us. Fortunately we already had a group of ducklings of the same age that she could join — ducklings learn best how to be ducks by being brought up with other ducklings, whereas if they're brought up alone they'll become imprinted on humans. It's also important that they're the same age because bigger ducklings would attack a smaller one.



May

Patient arrivals are on a steep upward curve now - 150 this month - and the number of inpatients averages 35 throughout May.

On 25th May a nest containing 3 baby wrens was brought to us by the RSPCA. Apparently, children had found the nest and taken it home! The children couldn't remember exactly

where they had found it and as it could not be quickly replaced in its original position the nest of tiny birds was rushed down to us.

The heaviest of them only weighed 8.7 grams and the lightest 6.7 grams and they were about the size of a 10p piece. But they all had feathers starting to grow and were instinctively opening their beaks for food. But what to feed them? - and how? We had to improvise a feeding tool as our usual tweezers were too big for the tiny beaks and we even had to improvise on food until a rush order of special mini mealworms arrived the next day.

Fortunately there was more than one nestling - they would learn from their siblings and the danger of becoming too tame was greatly reduced. They were fed every hour from dawn to dusk, as well as attending to the other 30 to 40 inpatients.

On the evening of the 28th they fledged! They left the nest and explored their box furnished with twig perches, leaves and grass on the floor. Mini mealworms and fruit flies were put in the box amongst the leaf litter to encourage them to peck for themselves. Thanks to this natural environment only one was still needing to be hand fed by 31st and the heat lamp had been switched off.

They were transferred to one of our grass floored aviaries outside and 3 days later were completely independent and flying well. Apart from topping up the food, we left them well alone to help ensure that they'd be capable of finding food for themselves when released. They became very wary of us, which is always a good sign - if they were at all tame they would soon get into trouble in the wild.

They were released on 9th June in perfect woodland environment.



June

233 new patients this month and the number of inpatients rises to 80 at any one time. We're rushed off our feet, especially with the large number of fledglings requiring hourly feeds from 6 a.m. through to 9 p.m.



Housemartin nestling



During hot spells in the summer we often have seagulls (mostly herring gulls and lesser black backed gulls) suffering from food poisoning. Seagulls love to feed on our rubbish tips and a hot spell soon makes our discarded food waste pretty unwholesome. The gulls look paralysed - they can't use their legs and become very weak, often gasping for breath with half closed eyes. We tube feed them with Lectade (a body fluid replacement) twice a day. Between feeds they are not disturbed at all as they need all their energy to get better. As the gulls get a little

stronger we put them into a shallow bath of warm water for a few minutes. This takes the weight off their poor legs and if they start drinking by themselves we don't need to tube feed them which reduces stress. The bath also helps to keep their feathers clean. As they brighten up we offer whitebait or small sprats. Once they start eating they soon regain the use of their legs. They can then spend a few days in one of our aquapens, preening, washing and eating. As soon as they are flying strongly and their plumage is completely waterproof they are released - looking a lot better than when they arrived!



July

The peak of our activities. 248 patients checked in during the month and inpatient numbers rise to an average of 90. Every bit of accommodation is occupied. Whilst we spend all our time filling gaping beaks our wonderful neighbours rally round with food for us!

Swallows and housemartins build their nests from mud. This makes the nests vulnerable to collapse in adverse conditions. If this happens and it's impossible to relocate the nest, we have to take over the parents' job. We use plastic nests secured to the wall of an aviary and diligently feed the ever hungry youngsters with an insectivorous diet. When they fledge out of the nest we continue to hand feed for a few days, but also encourage flies into the aviary with rotting fruit and bits of meat. Soon the youngsters are zooming around the aviary catching their own food and on a suitably sunny day we open the release hatch and away they go.





August

A bit of relief at last. Patient numbers are dropping to more manageable numbers (120 arrivals and an average of 50 inpatients).

But there are always problems. During July and August we've been running out of whitebait and sprats to feed seabirds and we keep having to go on desperate missions to find suitable fish (sprats being out of season). Eventually we were rescued by Tuckers Ltd. who went to great trouble to get us what we needed, and they've been looking after us ever since.

Starting in July and through August we had our first student working on radio tracking of released birds. You had to feel sorry for him, up at the crack of dawn every day and out in all weathers. But it was also amusing to see him keep dashing off through the undergrowth waving his antenna. He was the object of a few scare stories around Sandy Lane at that time.



This is one of the blackbirds which were radio-tracked.

Around this time of year 'fledgling season' gets replaced by 'hedgehog season'. The treatment room is rearranged as we gear up for the arrival of prickly orphans.

From July through to November we get a steady stream of orphaned hedgehogs. Fortunately, those that arrive before the end of September usually have enough time to put on sufficient weight before hibernation, so our job is simply to fatten them up before putting them out into the soft release pens. Oh dear, when I said 'simply' I was forgetting that most of them are so young when they arrive that they have to be bottle-fed!



September



Very much the same sort of patient numbers as in August which is unusual. We'd expect the numbers to keep dropping.

Now that we've been running the Hospital for several years we can often predict what kinds of bird are going to arrive at a particular time of year. Such is the case with Manx Shearwaters.

Manx Shearwaters are summer visitors, breeding here mainly on the west coast of Britain during May or June. As autumn approaches they start their return journey of up to 5000 miles to spend winter as far away as the South American coast. Manx shearwaters are specialised birds. They fly and swim well but are not good walkers - they shuffle along. They can take off well from the side of a cliff or from water, but they do get into trouble if adverse weather conditions force them to land on an unsuitable site as they cannot run to launch themselves into the air. Manx shearwaters have been found in town centres and people's gardens, huddled in a corner unable to take off. Between September 5 and October 13, 26 arrived at Gower Bird Hospital.

Because they are specialised birds and are built to fly, they will lose their muscle tone very quickly in captivity so can only be kept for 2 - 3 days at most. They will not eat in captivity so our procedure is simple and fast. Force feeding with small sprats (done very gently and as quickly as possible to minimise stress), rest for a few hours to digest their food and release. We take them to the cliffs at Southgate where they fly from the edge back to the sea with obvious relief.

One sad case was a Manx Shearwater found in a garden. The person kept it in a rabbit hutch with a bowl of cat food in front of it "because the children wanted to keep it". After a week the novelty wore off and he phoned us for advice. When the shearwater arrived there was obviously little hope. It was very thin, the plumage was filthy with droppings and cat food and all muscle tone had gone. It was so weak it could barely lift its head. The kindest thing to do was to put it to sleep. If only the bird had been brought to us as soon as it was found it would have had a good chance of flying free with the other 25 we released.



October/November/December

Patient numbers start dropping to Winter levels - 82 in October, 51 in November, 25 in December. Time for us to complete the construction of the annex aviaries - remember us starting those back in March? Time for us also to catch up on correspondence and enter all our records onto the database.

So as not to be caught out again next year we fill the freezers to bursting with whitebait and sprats whilst they're in season.

Any hedgehogs which arrive at this time of year will almost certainly not reach hibernation weight before the onset of Winter so we have to prepare snug quarters for them where we can keep them supplied with food for the next few months.



REPORTS ON CCTV TRIAL AND RADIO TRACKING STUDY.



These studies were carried out by two Swansea University students, Laura and Carl, under the guidance of Paul Llewelyn MPhil CBiol MIBiol. Paul having had vast experience of behaviour study and radio tagging during his academic career.

The aim of these projects is to enable us to ensure that we're doing our best for the birds. The birds' welfare is always paramount.

At the time of writing, Laura and Carl are both preparing their final (60 page) reports, but we can give a summary of their findings here.

This first year the studies concentrated on blackbirds. Our blackbird fledglings were kept in the aviary fitted with cameras and Laura spent many hours watching video tapes of them. Briefly, these showed that for the first two days the fledglings were very busy eating, drinking, preening and exploring their new surroundings and, at the same time, interacting well with each other and establishing a pecking order. However, after 3 days they became aware of the restrictions imposed by the aviary and started showing symptoms of stress. What we have gained from this is a better understanding of the maximum number of blackbird fledglings that we ought to be housing in an aviary of this size and that to reduce stress in future we need to provide the aviary with even more features. For instance, two water baths instead of one and more perches (twiggy branches) offering many more vantage points. We will also try introducing new features every 3 or 4 days to make the environment more stimulating.

CCTV also reinforces our policy of never keeping a wild bird captive - even these fledglings who hadn't experienced the outside world recognised their lack of freedom.

Apart from being used for study purposes the cameras proved extremely useful in our day-to-day activities. An example of this is the **kestrel which arrived on 4th Nov.**

The kestrel was quite thin, but more worrying was a problem with his tail. It seemed "floppy" - possibly he had been hit by a car. Fortunately, he could still move it a little - a paralysed tail would be a fatal injury for such a specialised bird which hovers in the air before dropping onto its prey. With such a life-threatening injury it was vital that we were able to monitor his progress accurately, but we knew that peering at him through the wire would only have resulted in frightening him and adding to his already stressful

situation. So, after treatment for a few days, he was put into the aviary fitted with cameras. Fresh food had to be put into the aviary once a day and during this disturbance he put on the usual "brave face" - sitting upright on his perch and not showing any sign of pain. However watching him via the cameras told a different story. He chose to use the lower perches and spent a lot of time just sitting still for the first 3 days.

Fortunately, by the fourth day, we were able to observe some improvement. He was hopping up to higher perches and attempting short flights. Two days later we were watching him flying from high perch to high perch and also preening himself and bathing in the water bowl.

Three weeks after his arrival he had recovered and was released where he was found. Without the cameras we wouldn't have been able to monitor his progress so accurately.



The CCTV trial was a great success. The cameras proved themselves to be an invaluable tool in our work and by the end of March 2000 will have been installed in all our aviaries.

RADIO TRACKING is carried out to determine how successful our patients are after they've been released. Two of the blackbirds studied by Laura were fitted with radio tags (the tiny tags are mounted at the base of a middle tail feather and if they do not fall off of their own accord would come off with the feather during the autumn moult).

The blackbirds were released and our second student, Carl, patiently tracked their movements and recorded events. We were happy to hear that "our" blackbirds were fitting in well with the local population. They appeared to have friendly chats with some wild blackbirds and minor disputes with others. Interestingly, one headed west and the other headed east but both interacted well with their wild counterparts. Over a period of 3 weeks they explored their surroundings, stole raspberries from our neighbours gardens and established regular roosting sites. Carl was delighted when he managed to retrieve a dropping from one of the birds. Under the microscope it revealed the blackbird was also eating caterpillars, mayflies and other invertebrates so it was clear that it was successfully foraging.

A tense moment came at the end of three weeks. One morning our hearts fell as it became clear that one of the birds wasn't moving. The signal from the tag was pinpointed to the corner of a bungalow. We searched but couldn't find anything so found the owners and asked if we could look inside. When we explained why they said a blackbird had flown into the room through an open window and had panicked when they came in so they had opened the door and let it out. Our receiver was still insistently beeping and in the corner of the room we found a few feathers and our radio tag! Birds shed their feathers when stressed as a defence mechanism. We were very pleased to retrieve our tag and even more pleased to hear the blackbird was OK.

THANKS !

We'd like to thank the **RSPCA Animal Collection Officers and Inspectors** for their continuing support. The RSPCA bring wildlife casualties to the Hospital every day as the nearest RSPCA wildlife hospital is in Taunton, Somerset. Special thanks to Chief Inspector and Wildlife Officer **Romain de Kerckhove** who has helped us in so many ways.

Our thanks must go to **Paul Llewelyn MPhil CBiol MIBiol** who is always ready with expert advice and guidance. We are very pleased to report that Paul has agreed to become a Patron of the Hospital.

Every year we apply for funds from charitable trusts. We'd like to thank the following bodies who responded to our appeals last year:

The G C Gibson Charitable Trust - General funding.

Jean Sainsbury Animal Welfare Trust - Funding for the annex aviaries.

RSPCA - Funding for CCTV system.

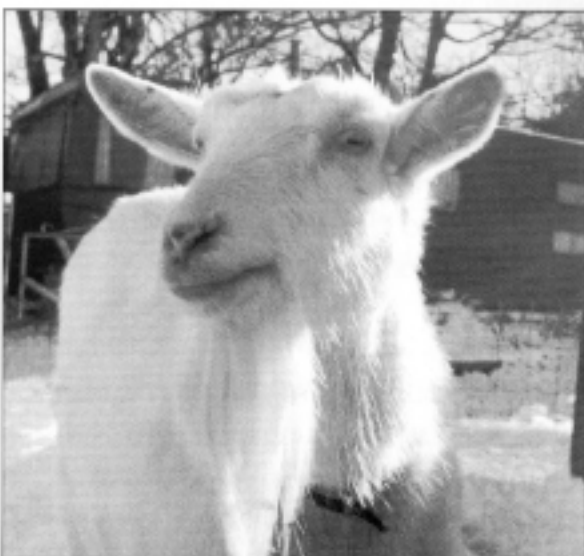
Pennard Community Charity - Funding for CCTV system.

WildAid - Funding for CCTV system.

Montagne Jeunesse - General funding.

Thanks also to: The quiz teams at the **Plough and Harrow, Murton** who chose to make their charitable donation to us last year, and the **Bridgend Spiritualist Church** who donated the proceeds of a raffle.

A special thank you to everyone who has given a donation. Your donations really do help. It's the support of the public which keeps us going - and not just financially! It's heart-warming to speak to people genuinely concerned about an injured sparrow, or apologising because the bird is "just a pigeon". Gower Bird Hospital treats every patient with as much care as possible, regardless of species.



We think BLODWEN deserves a special mention. She supplies us with the milk necessary for hand-rearing orphaned hedgehogs (cow's milk is indigestible to them). Blodwen has become something of a mascot to the Hospital. She is now 12yrs old and doing very nicely, thank you!

We were saddened to hear of the death of Howard Higgins, one of our most steadfast supporters. Mrs Higgins very kindly included our name as a beneficiary for donations in lieu of funeral flowers.



IF YOU'D LIKE TO HELP:-

- We now have our own collecting boxes and we'd be grateful if you could find suitable sites for them.
- We'd welcome donations of goods (not clothing) for our car boot sales.
- If anybody wants to do a car boot sale (or any other fund raising event) on our behalf, then please do go ahead (but, if you are going to use our name, you must get our written permission first).

- Could anybody donate us some land? - preferably a farm or smallholding!
-- This is a joke, of course, but, nevertheless, we would love to see a purpose built Wildlife Hospital and Rehabilitation Centre in this part of Wales.

Gower Bird Hospital is still operating from Karen & Simon's garden. To support themselves and the Hospital they both used to work - Simon as an electronic engineer and Karen night shifts at a local veterinary centre - but Karen has had to stop working because of the increasing workload at the Hospital.

At present, virtually all Welsh wildlife depends on unpaid volunteers like this for its welfare. Unfortunately, if the volunteer becomes ill, or has to retire, or dies, the facilities are usually lost along with the experience and dedication of the person. A solution to this problem would be a building and grounds owned by the charity which could employ staff and safely carry on without being dependent on one person.

Another advantage would be the increase in voluntary helpers - much easier in a designated building than in someone's own home. This would ensure that knowledge and experience could be passed on to as many people as possible.

Obviously this is an enormous target to raise funds for, but we are ever optimistic!

!! STOP PRESS !!

Now your taxes can come to us!

From 6th April 2000 the Gift Aid scheme is to be simplified and the minimum limit for Gift Aid donations is to be abolished. **This means that, providing you pay income tax or capital gains tax, we can reclaim your tax on any size of donation you make to us.** All we need is your full name and address and a declaration (written or oral) that the donation is to be treated as Gift Aid.

A DONATION OF £10 CAN BE WORTH £12.80 TO US.

Also, **Companies** will no longer have to donate 'tax paid'. They can donate the full amount they wish to give and then claim tax relief when calculating corporation tax.

It seems we have a spare page, so we thought we'd like to tell you about:-

THE YOUNG SWAN WHO HAD A LUCKY ESCAPE!

Autumn can be a hard time for juvenile birds trying to establish themselves in a territory. In October a juvenile swan which had reached the end of its tether was brought to us by the RSPCA. Going by the swan's condition it was clear that, not only had it been chased away by its parents, but that it had also spent some considerable time unsuccessfully looking for unoccupied territory of its own. Eventually its plight became apparent when it landed on a road outside Llanelli (it's believed that swans sometimes mistake roads for rivers or canals, especially when the road surface is wet).

The RSPCA were called and the Officers arrived just in time. When they got there they found two unsavoury characters lurking around with hammers in their hands. Their explanation was that they were going to build a pen to keep the swan safe !??!

When the swan arrived here he was starving and in such a state of shock that he was completely flat. After rehydrating him we left him for the night spreadeagled on the floor of a cub with a heat lamp on to keep him warm. We wondered what we'd find in the morning, but, as is so often the case with birds in deep shock, a night in a warm, dark, quiet place was all the treatment he needed and we found him alert and eating the food which we'd left for him.

We kept him for a further two weeks to feed him back up to his proper weight and condition. We then managed to find a release site where there was a good chance for him to establish himself.



WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND INJURED / SICK WILDLIFE

If you find an injured bird or hedgehog you can often save its life simply by putting it into a cardboard box. All wildlife has an instinctive fear of people. Putting an injured wild bird into a cage with nowhere for it to hide and constantly looking at it will rapidly put it into a state of shock and shock can kill. The first treatment is always a warm, dark, quiet environment - a closed box lined with torn up newspaper - to minimise shock.

For the provision of warmth, a plastic bottle wrapped in an old towel makes a disposable hot water bottle and can be transported with the patient. A bird in a dark box will not feed and a bowl of water can be dangerous - if the bird gets wet, it can become very cold and die.

If you have a bird that has flown into a window it could simply be stunned. Leave it well alone in the box for about 3 hours (or overnight if you found it late evening). Close the curtains in the room and open the box. If the bird is flying well simply open the window, draw back the curtain and it will fly out. If not, put it back in the box.



Many fledglings are unnecessarily "rescued" by well-meaning members of the public. It is easy to mistake a perfectly normal, healthy fledgling for an abandoned baby. Young birds will leave the nest before they can fly properly giving a "helpless" impression, when in fact they are still being supervised and fed by their parents. If a person approaches the baby bird the parent birds take cover but the fledgling will easily be caught. People then assume the fledgling is abandoned and take it away to be cared for while the parent birds are watching from their hiding place!

If you do find a fledgling, it is best to leave it well alone for a few hours (that means out of sight) and return to check later on. If the fledgling is in a public place such as alongside a path, replace it a few feet away, under some cover if possible, to lessen the chance of someone else picking it up.



HEDGEHOGS

Hedgehogs are nocturnal creatures so **any hedgehog seen in daylight hours is usually in trouble**. It could be suffering from an injury, starvation, dehydration or an illness. Put the hedgehog in a cardboard box lined with torn-up newspapers. If it feels cold add a hot water bottle (see above). Make sure the box has small air holes and a secure lid as hedgehogs are remarkable escape artists even when ill!

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

HOW TO GET THE PATIENT TO GOWER BIRD HOSPITAL:

Phone the RSPCA on 08705 555999 (national rate). The RSPCA bring injured wild birds and hedgehogs to *Gower Bird Hospital* as the nearest RSPCA Wildlife Hospital is in Taunton, Somerset.

OR

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

OR

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

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