

**GOWER  
BIRD  
HOSPITAL**

**NEWSLETTER  
1997/98**



## Welcome to our second Newsletter.

At present, we produce an annual newsletter which we hope will be more frequent in the future depending on time and funds. Once again, thanks to everyone for supporting us.

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.**

The founders of the Hospital, Simon Allen and Karen Kingsnorth, began providing ad hoc care to wild birds in 1984. Their efforts brought them an ever increasing number of patients until, by the early 1990's, it was clear that the tremendous amount of unmet need would soon overwhelm them and they began erecting purpose-built facilities in their garden.

**Gower Bird Hospital continues to provide a much needed service - 774 patients arrived during 1997, all needing care and attention.**



A mute swan receives treatment for an infected wound on its leg caused by discarded fishing line.

Coverphoto: This lapwing arrived with a badly bruised wing, which healed well. Thanks to our rehabilitation facilities , he was able to build up his muscle tone, before being successfully released.

## THE PATIENTS

People often ask what kind of birds are brought to the Hospital. Well, here is a list of the different species which arrived during 1997:

Barn owl	Great Crested Grebe	Parakeet
Black Headed Gull	Great Northern Diver	Peacock
Blackbird	Great Tit	Peregrine Falcon
Blue Tit	Greenfinch	Pied Wagtail
Budgie	Green Woodpecker	Racing Pigeon
Bullfinch	Guillemot	Razorbill
Buzzard	House Martin	Redwing
Canary	House Sparrow	Redstart
Chaffinch	Heron	Robin
Chicken	Herring gull	Rook
Coal Tit	Jackdaw	Shelduck
Cockatiel	Jay	Skylark
Collar Dove	Kestrel	Snipe
Cormorant	Kittiwake	Song Thrush
Crow	Lapwing	Sparrowhawk
Curlew	Lesser Black Backed gull	Starling
Dunlin	Linnet	Storm Petrel
Feral Pigeon	Little Auk	Swallow
Field Fare	Little Owl	Swift
Fulmar	Lovebird	Tawny Owl
Gadwall	Magpie	Tern
Gannet	Mallard	Treecreeper
Greater Black Backed Gull	Manx Shearwater	Tufted Duck
Goldcrest	Mistle Thrush	Wood Pigeon
Golden Plover	Moorhen	Wren
Goldfinch	Mute Swan	

**Casualties arrive throughout the year but our busiest time is Spring and Summer.**

New arrivals per month during 1997:

January. . . . 28	February . . . 15	March . . . . .23	April . . . . . 41
May . . . . .111	June . . . . . 152	July . . . . . 118	August . . . . 85
September. . 91	October . . . . 36	November . . 39	December. . 36

Gower Bird Hospital is never empty! Even in February, although only 15 birds arrived, the lowest number of inpatients was 6 and the highest 11. From May to September we were caring for between 20 and 55 patients daily.

## An explanation of some of the terms used in the following pages

### IMPRINTING

This is a learning process occurring very early in the life of young birds. From the moment they hatch, they begin to recognise and associate with their own species. After leaving the nest, this learning process continues as they acquire basic behaviour patterns, hopefully ensuring that they will be successful at finding food and a partner.

**Unfortunately, imprinting can also occur with a surrogate parent such as a human who is trying to handrear an orphaned bird.**

Birds of prey are particularly prone to imprinting problems: A buzzard was handreared and imprinted on his human carer, then foolishly released into the wild. When mating season arrived, he tried to mate with passers-by which meant sinking all of his talons into someone's head. The danger of imprinting is common to all birds and although the effect isn't as pronounced as with a bird of prey, it is always disastrous for the bird involved. **An imprinted bird is a hopeless case and is doomed to life in captivity - to cast it out into the wild and expect it to fend for itself is cruel, as it will slowly starve to death in a state of confusion.**

At Gower Bird Hospital we make every effort not to make this mistake.

### HACKING BACK

Orphaned young birds of prey need to be hacked back into the wild. (This applies to other species also, but the release of an imprinted bird of prey into the wild can have much more serious repercussions, partly explained above.) **It requires feeding the birds in a special aviary, but not allowing them to see any people.** In this way the birds don't associate people with food. When the birds are strong enough, the aviary is opened, allowing them to fly out. In the absence of parental guidance in hunting, we continue to put food in the aviary, so that the young birds can still come back for food if they haven't found any for themselves. As their hunting skills improve they will eventually stop relying on the supplement feeding, returning only occasionally for an easy meal. At this point they are capable of surviving in the wild.

### REHABILITATION

Rehabilitation ensures a bird has the skills and physical attributes to survive in its own natural environment.

### STRESS

Stress can kill. All wildlife has an **instinctive fear of people**; therefore treating wildlife is vastly different from treating domestic pets. Whilst a pet animal can be comforted by holding and cuddling, a wild animal can actually die from stress if held for too long. 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. The first treatment is always a warm, quiet, dark environment - a closed box - to alleviate shock.

## NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Thanks to your donations, the construction of **three new aviaries** made our hope of 96 into a reality in Spring 97.

The new aviaries are designed with a privacy feature for the birds to reduce stress and supply excellent perching and flying practice areas. Also incorporated in the design is an opening roof allowing birds to leave of their own accord and return for supplement feeding. When they are fit enough we open the hatch and the birds fly out at their own discretion - this greatly reduces the stress of catching the birds prior to release.



The extra aviaries are invaluable during fledgling season as the youngsters can remain outdoors whilst still being hand fed. The stimulation of the natural environment encourages them to learn to feed themselves much more quickly and the dangers of **imprinting** are considerably reduced. We found it was not humanly possible to keep up with the demand for worms (now we really know how hard parent birds work!) but ordering mealworms through the post helped solve the problem. During April, May, June and July our 127 (!! ) little orphans munched their way through mealworms at a cost of almost £200! They were also fed with universal bird food and as many natural sources as we could find.

Another project was completed in 97 and our first **portable hacking aviary** will be an essential piece of equipment in 1998. This aviary is essential for young birds of prey to be successfully **hacked back** into the wild. Initially they have to be hand fed, but since they very easily become imprinted on the carer it can be difficult or even impossible to release them into the wild. To overcome this, they need to be kept in an outdoor aviary with a feed chute. Food is dropped through the chute so that the bird doesn't see the person and doesn't associate people with food. When the bird is strong enough to attempt hunting for itself, the aviary is opened allowing it to fly free. Food is still supplied 'undercover' in the aviary whilst the bird develops its hunting skills, but it eventually becomes independent and successfully rehabilitated into the wild.



This portable aviary has been specially designed in sections so that it can be dismantled, transported to a suitable site and reassembled. This is important as not only do different species need different habitats, but releasing too many birds of the same species in one area can upset the natural balance.

## Easter 1997

On the Saturday of Easter weekend 97, the RSPCA brought a heron to us. It had been found on the bank of a river and it's legs were paralysed. Suspecting a trauma injury, we gave treatment for shock and settled the bird into the 'mammal room' overnight. (All our herons go into this room which provides complete privacy and is very quiet as they are extremely susceptible to stress.) The next morning we were hoping for a slight improvement but were amazed to see that the heron had completely recovered, standing and walking normally. The bird was in good condition so we immediately took it back to its capture site and released it - much to the relief of both the heron and ourselves. On our return, Simon started cleaning the room ready for our next patient and found a perfect egg! Obviously the poor heron had been egg-bound and after managing to lay the egg had quickly recovered.



But our Easter Story doesn't end there. On Easter Monday, our Easter Bunny turned up. His burrow had been destroyed by the digging of a JCB and he was the only survivor. Luckily he wasn't injured and soon started eating and gaining weight. He was transferred to a grass-floored run to keep him in as natural an environment as possible where he acted exactly like a wild rabbit, feeding at dawn, dusk and during the night and showing a remarkable turn of speed when alarmed! When big and strong enough, he was released locally.

## Through to Easter 1998 - The Storm Blown Puffin

On 7 March 98, a Puffin was found on the beach by one of the wardens at Pembrey Country Park. When he arrived at the Hospital, he was very weak, thin and his plumage was bedraggled and soaking wet. We put him in a recuperation pen with a heat lamp and offered him some whitebait.

Thankfully he was still strong enough to eat a few small fish and fell asleep in the warmth with a full stomach. He was kept inside for a couple of days to build up his strength and his feathers were gently sprayed with water to encourage him to preen. Preening is essential to keep feathers waterproof.

He was then transferred to the outside aquapen where he could swim and wash in the pool.

His first dip in the pool was worrying as he obviously wasn't waterproof and slowly started to sink - hypothermia is also a worry at this point as no waterproofing means there is no insulation against heat loss. Another concern was pollution - although we couldn't see any oil on his feathers, some contaminants like diesel are invisible. If this was the case we would have to refer him to a specialist bird cleaning unit.

The next day, his dip in the pool was more encouraging and we were relieved to see daily improvement. A week later he was completely waterproof, diving and swimming underwater with ease.

We released him at Skomer Island on 20 March.





## FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS

At present, Gower Bird Hospital has an intensive care unit in a residential caravan refurbished with twenty small pens, heat lamps and heat pads and a treatment area. Outside are two aquapens (aviaries with pools for water birds), two grass floor aviaries, two hard floor aviaries, a mammal room, two pens for hedgehogs and other small mammals and a portable hacking aviary.

### Test Flight Aviary:

During 1998, we hope to build yet another aviary designed to 'test flight' larger birds. The new aviary will be longer than our other aviaries, offering the chance of a reasonable flight distance making our job of assessing the birds more accurate. Gower Bird Hospital is fortunate in having skilled builders willing to donate their time, but the cost of materials will be almost **£1000.00**.

### Hedgehog Pens:

We also need to improve the design of our hedgehog runs. The hedgehogs are perfectly comfortable but the poor humans presently have to contort themselves through a small door in the top of the pen and crawl to the cub - all whilst carrying a saucer of fresh food, a clean bowl of water and the occasional medication. This daily exercise has improved the suppleness of our legs but is no fun, especially in winter wind and rain for weeks on end! We will be able to site these pens in volunteers' gardens as well as at the Hospital. This is important as releasing too many hedgehogs from one place can put undue pressure on the local hedgehog population. Hopefully the cost of the new pens will be only **£100.00** each.

### Observation Screens:

Another important task is to provide screens with small observation holes for all our aviaries. A common problem with injured birds is that they will give a false impression of fitness. **If they see you looking at them they will stand straight and tall because in nature a predator will pick out a weak specimen as an easy target. Once left alone, the bird will relax and slump back into a comfortable position, dropping the painful wing or taking the weight off an uncomfortable leg.** The screens will enable us to observe the bird more accurately. Closed circuit TV cameras would be an ideal solution and we will be looking into this alternative in the coming year. Meanwhile the screens will be a great improvement at a cost of around **£25.00** each.

### Portable Hacking Aviary:

We also need to build a second (and hopefully third) hacking aviary which cost almost **£1000.00** each.

# THANKS

We would like to thank the following for their generous donations in 1997:

**Care for the Wild  
PMC Animal Welfare Trust  
International Yachting Fellowship of Rotarians  
BP Oil  
Lloyds Bank**

Although we haven't the space to mention every individual who has given a donation or helped in some other way, we must especially thank **Len & Edna Murley, Mr & Mrs Higgins** and **Mrs Anfray** who have supported us since the Sea Empress oil spill.

**Jane Hitchman** raised funds for us by organising a sponsored swim.

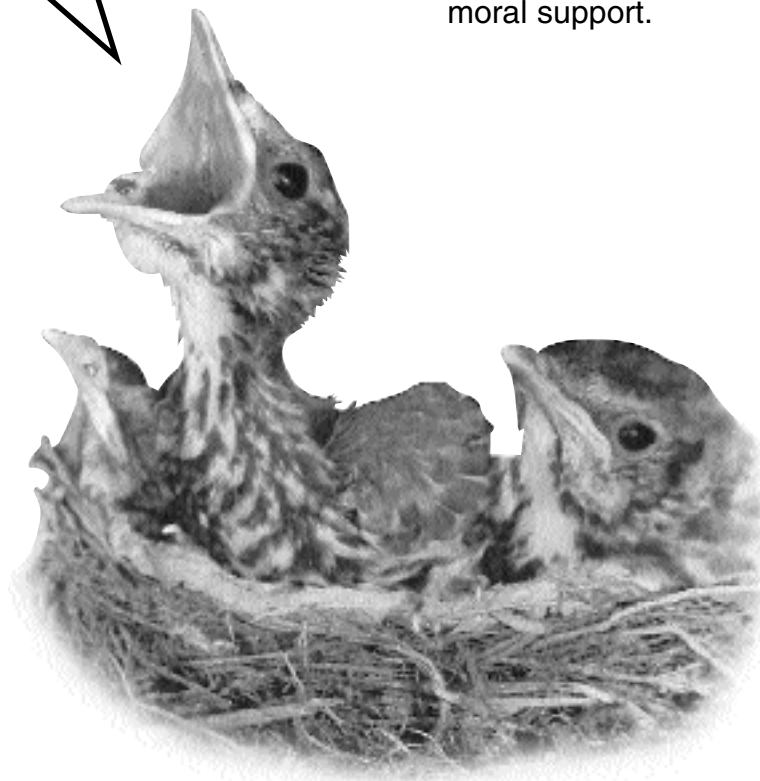
Considerable funds are raised by **Sylvia Gooding** and her partner **Alan** who donate a lot of their time by selling items donated to Gower Bird Hospital at car boot sales.  
**If you have any items we could sell please phone Sylvia on 01792 418710.**

**Mike Holmes** saves many nestlings every year. Very young birds are most difficult to handrear successfully, but Mike persuades his canaries to help out and they very obligingly feed an extra nestling or two when put in with their own youngsters.

**Kay of Hedgehog Hotline** in Cardiff is invaluable with her expert hedgehog advice whenever we have a problem.

**thank you !**

Also many thanks to **Paul Llewelyn** for sharing his specialist knowledge and giving us plenty of moral support.



# PLEASE HELP

Gower Bird Hospital is still operating from our garden. To support ourselves and the hospital we both work - Simon is an electronic engineer and Karen works night shifts at a local veterinary centre.

We would love to see a purpose built Wildlife Hospital and Rehabilitation Centre as there isn't such a facility in Wales.

## **AT PRESENT ALL WELSH WILDLIFE DEPENDS ON UNPAID VOLUNTEERS 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 the 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 optimistic!

The support we have received shows how many people care about wildlife and we would like to thank everyone who has made a donation to Gower Bird Hospital. Without your help, wildlife casualties would face a much bleaker future.

Please send Donations to:

### **GOWER BIRD HOSPITAL**

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