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The Rehabilitator

B W R C N E W S L E T T E R



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A word from the Chair

Welcome to our 75th edition of The Rehabilitator! I hope you were sitting down when it arrived so that the shock of two in such close succession didn't make you fall down!

In this edition of The Rehabilitator we have two more articles based on our autumn 2019 symposium plus a case study of suspected salmonellosis in hedgehogs.

In case you missed the March edition, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, BWRC are making the following short-term changes to keep in closer contact with our members and hopefully facilitate cooperation in these difficult times.

- 'The Rehabilitator' will be shorter and much more frequent so that we can share up-to-date news and information with our members
- We are setting up a members-only Facebook group through which you can communicate with BWRC trustees and each other to share advice and moral support
- We will continue to work towards Symposium 2020 which has been booked to take place at Writtle University College in Essex on 21st November but will also book a back-up date for January 2021.

I am also pleased to announce the launch of a new type of BWRC membership for 2020-21, and the introduction of two new logos for use by individual members and associate organisations to display their willingness to engage with continuing professional development (CPD) – see page 19 for more detail!





BWRC has prepared a guidance document for wildlife rehabilitators in response to the COVID-19 pandemic which we hope might help now and in similar situations in future – if you have information or advice to add please contact us by e-mail.

If you have research, experience or concerns to share, please do write in to BWRC at bwrcouncil@gmail.com or by post to PO Box 8686, Grantham, Lincolnshire NG31 0AG.

*Terri Amory
Editor & Chair,
BWRC*





BWRC Advice on Wildlife Rehabilitation Protocols in case of Human Disease Epidemic.

(prepared in response to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic).

This advice is specifically for those working in wildlife rescue and rehabilitation in the UK and is based on experiences of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic to date (31st March 2020). It may be updated as more information is available and is also intended to act as a reference for planning mitigation measures for potential future human disease epidemics which cause similar societal disruption.

Contents:

- General advice regarding COVID-19
- Staff and volunteer management
- Fundraising and public events
- Stocking and sourcing of everyday supplies
- Receipt of animal casualties from the public/external sources
- Rescue/ collection of animal casualties
- Capacity and release of animals
- Veterinary consultations

Available from our website - www.bwrc.org.uk





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Free-ranging pet cats in the UK - villain or vilified?

Presented at BWRC Symposium 2019
in collaboration with Wild Things Rescue

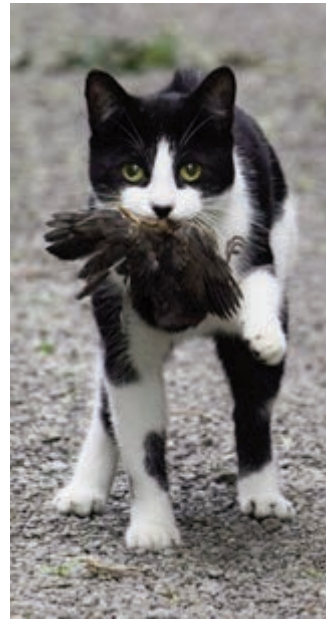
Saturday 16th November at Nottingham Trent University,
Brackenhurst Campus, Kindly Sponsored by RSPCA & Nottingham
Trent University

Reported by Terri Amory

Dr Phil Baker from the University of Reading introduced his presentation by talking about invasive species across the world and confirmed that IUCN data condemns feral cats as high on the list of offenders both directly and indirectly. Feral cats are reported to be responsible for 63 known extinction or extirpation (local extinction) events across the world (40 birds, 21 mammals and 2 reptiles) – only rodents have a worse record (Doherty et al., 2016). It comes as no surprise that cats are popular pets in the UK; they occur at an average density of greater than 200 per square kilometre and up to 1000 per km² in some areas. Hunting opportunities range on a spectrum from none for housebound pets,



through free-ranging pets and stray pets to feral cats. Some owners that choose to let their cats free range use collar-mounted antipredation devices, but these have been found to range in effectiveness down to as low as 32%. Cats in Bristol and Reading have been found to catch an average of 22 and 19 prey items per cat per year respectively. These figures form the basis for estimates of 160-200 million birds being predated by cats per year in the UK.



The ecological consequences of cat predation are not well understood yet but, as cats do not kill everything they catch, there are also animal welfare consequences to consider. Results from UK studies (Baker et al., 2005, Murray et al., 2010 and Thomas et al., 2012) provide data from which it has been calculated that an estimate of 7.2 – 21.6 million prey animals per year may be caught but not killed (outright) by cats.

Amongst the wildlife rehabilitation and veterinary community it is accepted that survival rates for ‘catted’ birds is poor without antibiotic treatment; However Phil’s studies in Bristol and Reading provide questionnaire data showing that cat owners who recovered live prey from their pets always released the prey animal without seeking treatment from a vet or wildlife hospital. It is, of course, difficult to investigate survival rates for untreated animals because it would not be ethically acceptable to release injured prey animals untreated, but RSPCA data showed that only 22% of birds

admitted to rescue centres survived to release. Pigeons were the least likely to survive and an average 'suffering' time from discovery (by a members of the public) to death or euthanasia was estimated to be three days (Baker et.al., 2018).

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Avian Crime - RSPCA Issues and Perspective

Presented at BWRC Symposium 2019
in collaboration with Wild Things Rescue

*By Geoff Edmond, National Wildlife Officer Coordinator for the RSPCA
Inspectorate. (Reported here by Terri Amory, edited by Geoff Edmond.)*

Examples of crimes against wild birds – deliberate and inadvertent - include illegal killing of birds of prey, trapping of songbirds including finches for the songbird trade, air rifle and crossbow injuries, entanglement in netting and litter related wildlife issues.

The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) launched a three-year National Wildlife Crime Policing Strategy in 2018 with Badger persecution, Bats, CITES, Freshwater Pearl Mussels, Raptor persecution and Poaching as its priorities. Concurrently the NPCC also launched a Rural Affairs Strategy to tackle Wildlife and Rural affairs, Livestock offences, Equine crime, Poaching, Fly-tipping and farm machinery, plant and vehicle theft. The strategy embraces working with external partners, new training opportunities and the



potential for engagement with community-based organisations.

The illegal trapping of wild birds has long been an overlooked problem. Taken from their natural habitat and shut in tiny cages these birds can suffer immeasurably physically and mentally and often die shortly after being captured. Primary targets are often goldfinch, greenfinch, bullfinch, linnet and redpoll, and occasionally buntings such as the yellowhammer. It is illegal to take these from the wild under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and occurs in both rural and urban areas. The practice often involves home-made cage traps or mist nets, and even birdfeeders with birdlime - an adhesive-type substance applied to perches as shown in this photo.

In one example case in 2018 the Police and RSPCA attended an address to find 12 goldfinches, all having been taken from the wild. The occupant admitted using cage traps to take wild birds. The aviary was



Trapped blue-tit (Cyanistes caeruleus) on a bird feeder. By kind permission of Geoff Edmond & RSPCA



not clean nor in an appropriate state for the birds, and one had an open fracture to the left tibia and could not use this leg. This person pleaded guilty to offences under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and a further trapping offence under the Pests Act 1954. They had previously been prosecuted for keeping wild birds and possessing cage traps and were disqualified from keeping birds for five years, fined £360 and ordered to pay costs of £350.

In another case in East London in February 2019; forty bird cages were discovered including 8 captive goldfinches. This led to the investigation of three further addresses in Essex involving a total of over 200 more birds including yellowhammers, siskins, linnets and a bullfinch. In all eight men were given fines in court.

Wild birds of prey are persecuted by trapping, shooting and poisoning, and even those apparently injured in road traffic collisions can reveal unexpected signs on examination such as air rifle pellets or shot.

In February 2018 North Yorkshire Police Launched ‘Operation Owl’ – a joint initiative with the RSPB and RSPCA alongside the North York Moors and Yorkshire Dales National Parks to raise public awareness and encourage reporting of raptor crime – of which North Yorkshire has more confirmed incidents than any other English county. In 2019 this was expanded nationally, and it is hoped it will be repeated annually as a wildlife crime awareness raising event.



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Shooting of domestic and wild animals with air rifles is an all too common problem for the RSPCA, including cats, squirrels, gulls, pigeons and waterfowl. 767 reports of animals shot with air rifles were recorded across England and Wales in 2018, with incidents being most common in the summer months. Counties with the most recorded incidents were Greater London (38), Greater Manchester (36), Kent (35), West Midlands (33) and South Yorkshire (28). Reports of these type of incidents rise in the summer months - but are these figures just the tip of the iceberg?

Herring and lesser black-backed gulls seem to be particularly vulnerable species, even though they have both been removed from Natural England's general licenses due to declining nesting populations (60% and 48% declines respectively) elevating the Herring Gull to red IUCN conservation status. Media headlines such as "Seagull Debate", "Gull Wars", "Seagull Attacks", "Seagull Muggings" can reflect the view and impression that gulls are an urban menace. In one case last year a man was convicted for kicking and trampling an injured lesser black-backed gull to death. The conviction was supported by CCTV footage, and the perpetrator was sentenced to 12 weeks imprisonment with £115 victim surcharge.

Gulls and pigeons are commonly rescued from netting and regularly require treatment. Netting installations should ensure that they are properly maintained and checked regularly, are in a good state of repair and fit for purpose. Dead birds that have been trapped can be reported to wildlife@rspca.org.uk (including the address, date and property owner if known). Live birds should be reported via the RSPCA's 24-hour cruelty and advice helpline: 0300



1234 999. Further details are given on an advice leaflet available from the RSPCA website (Wild birds and netting).

Discarded angling equipment continues to be a risk for wildlife. The RSPCA has been working with the Angling Trust on a number of issues and installed line recycling bins from the Anglers National Line Recycling Scheme in all its four wildlife centres.



Top right: rescue of a gull trapped in netting in progress. Below left: young seal injured by entanglement in fishing litter. Photos courtesy of G Edmond, RSPCA.



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Last year Keep Britain Tidy launched their “Great British Spring Clean” to encourage members of the public to hold local events. 17,097 litter-picks were organised and 957,377 bags of litter were collected. This was calculated to equate to 4,308 tonnes, of which 61% was general waste but around 39% was recycled. The RSPCA and other stakeholders hope that this and similar activities will reduce the risk to wildlife from litter. The RSPCA are also involved working with the Outdoor Guide to support their Litter heroes Campaign.

Editor’s note – this year’s Great British Spring Clean was scheduled to take place between 13th March and 20th April 2020, but unfortunately this has been postponed until September due to the coronavirus pandemic. #GBSPRINGCLEAN.

Fireworks continue to be a problem for domestic and farm animals as well as for wildlife to which the effect may be more difficult to measure. A relatively new phenomenon is an increase in chinese



A tragic example of a barnowl killed by a Chinese (or ‘paper’) lantern. Photo courtesy of G Edmond, RSPCA.

lanterns, which have caused fires as well as domestic and wild animal deaths. RSPCA launched their #BangOutOfOrder campaign calling for changes to regulations controlling the use of fireworks to protect animal welfare. In a separate campaign the public are urged to write to their local councils calling for a ban on the release of chinese lanterns and balloons #EndSkyLitter. The RSPCA would be grateful for further images of damage caused by balloons and lanterns to support this cause.

In conclusion Geoff emphasised that collaboration and partnership working between organisations was paramount to achieving the best protection for wildlife. **Geoff can be contacted via geoffrey.edmond@rspca.org.uk**



Case study - suspected Salmonellosis in hedgehogs

By Kelly-Louise Cobb RVN CertFN

We admitted a number of hedgehogs to the practice from summer 2019 onwards presenting with polydipsia, polyuria and lethargy. Within the first few days we saw improvement with a majority of the hedgehogs but then unfortunately all declined.

Oral ulcerations were found on most of the hedgehogs and high levels of blood and protein were found in the urine along with urine scalds on hind limbs and lower abdomen. Unfortunately, none of the hedgehogs responded to treatment and either died or had to be euthanized. We submitted one of the deceased hedgehogs to the Garden Wildlife Health team at the Zoological Society of London. The results of their investigations are reported below.

XT1145-19 Hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*)

Found in Nottinghamshire in October 2019 with a history of lethargy and polyuria. Euthanised at veterinary clinic October 28th, 2019. Examined by Joseph Heaver, BVetMed, MSc, MRCVS.

Gross examination

The carcass examined was a subadult male European hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*) in normal body condition and in a moderate



state of decomposition. There was visible subcutaneous adipose tissue present, albeit a lesser amount than would be expected at this time of the year. The gastro-intestinal tract was mostly empty, indicating that the hedgehog had not eaten recently.

One small (~0.5x05mm), red, focal lesion was visible on the mandibular gingiva, possibly indicating petechial haemorrhage, given the history of other recent cases in your area.



“One small (~0.5 x 0.5 mm) red, focal lesion was visible on the mandibular gingiva”.

Examination of the abdominal viscera revealed slight hepatosplenomegaly, with some rounding of the margins of both organs. The mesenteric lymph node also appeared grossly enlarged, as were several satellite lymph nodes.

Examination of the thoracic cavity revealed an accumulation of serosanguinous fluid in the pleural cavity, bronchi, trachea and surrounding the base of the heart, likely reflecting the method of euthanasia used.

Other tests

We isolated *Salmonella* spp. upon microbiological examination of the liver, spleen, small intestine and kidney. Parasitological examination of the lungs and small intestine yielded no significant findings.



Comments

Given the gross pathological changes observed, we consider salmonellosis a likely cause of disease in this case, however, *Salmonella* spp. are also found in apparently healthy individuals or as a secondary infection. In order to further investigate the involvement of this bacteria in the ill-health of the hedgehog, we will submit a subset of samples for histopathological examination, and we'll update you in due course should this lead to any further insights in this case.

To our understanding, the observed clinical signs of polyuria and petechial lesions in the oral cavity, as reported in this and other cases, are not considered typical signs associated with salmonellosis in hedgehogs but may be explained by renal involvement (*Salmonella* sp. was isolated from the right kidney) or severe loss of hepatic function. Further future work may also include genetic sequencing of the isolated bacteria to identify its species and strain.

If you would like to submit cadavers or samples to the Garden Wildlife Team please contact them first – you can find details at www.gardenwildlifehealth.org.





New for 2020 – BWRC Associate Organisation membership

We are pleased to add to our existing individual associate membership the option of organisation level membership. This is open to any interested organisation including wildlife rescue hospitals/centres, veterinary practices, colleges and universities and others who wish to demonstrate their commitment to sharing best practice through continuing professional development by affiliating themselves with BWRC.

In order to qualify for Associate Organisation status after the first year, BWRC will require the organisation to provide evidence of engagement in external staff and/or volunteer development (i.e. outside of the organisation itself). BWRC reserves the right to withhold/ withdraw membership in the absence of adequate evidence of CPD (a minimum of one event every two years).

Organisation level membership for 2020 costs £100 per annum and the benefits of becoming an Associate Organisation include:

- Purchase unlimited membership discount rate tickets for your staff or volunteers for BWRC events
- Receive our newsletter and other bulletins via up to 10 e-mail addresses per organisation
- Permission to display our new BWRC Associate Organisation logo on your media
- Promote your events through BWRC media (subject to approval)

To download and application form and for full terms and conditions please visit www.bwrc.org.uk





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