



June 2020 - Issue 77

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 the June 2020 edition of The Rehabilitator! In this edition of The Rehabilitator we describe some of the proceedings from the Hedgehog Rehabilitation: Sharing Best Practice conference run in collaboration with Hartpury University Centre and sponsored by RSPCA and BHPS. This time we feature Pat Morris' opening keynote address and Sophie Lund Rasmussen's study of the behaviour of urban hedgehogs in Denmark.

A provisional date of 21st November has been set for Symposium 2020 at Writtle University College in Essex. Obviously at this stage we don't quite know how this event will look, but we will obviously follow government advice and either make use of video conferencing technology or postpone by a month or two. In the meantime, if you would like to contribute to the event by giving a presentation or workshop event please get in touch by e-mailing bwrcouncil@gmail.com.

Colleagues have kindly shared answers to questions they sought from DEFRA concerning working practices during lockdown – these are detailed on page 8.

BWRC feel it is important to start collecting data from working rehabilitators concerning their experiences of the coronavirus pandemic which we hope will enable us to review the situation and learn lessons which may enable organisations to be better prepared and more resilient in the future. To this end we have developed a questionnaire for rehabilitators concerning the period March to May 2020 and urge as many people to take part as possible so that we can gather useful data. There are more



details on page 16 or go straight to the questionnaire at www.shorturl.at/cgpwD

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. Stay safe!

*Terri Amory
Editor & Chair,
BWRC*



Cover photo – Veterinary Pathologist Alex Barlow demonstrates post-mortem examinations of hedgehogs during afternoon workshop sessions at our Hedgehog Rehabilitation Conference at Hartpury University in February

Photo – Terri Amory

P.S. Do the birds sound louder to you at the moment? See “In the news” on page 14...





Keynote Address

Presented at Hedgehog Rehabilitation: Sharing Best Practice
in collaboration with Hartpury University
presented by Dr Pat Morris, Royal Holloway, University of London

Saturday 1st February 2020 at Hartpury University Centre, Gloucester.
Kindly Sponsored by RSPCA & British Hedgehog Preservation Society.

Reported by Terri Amory



**Pat Morris MBE
giving his opening
keynote speech**

Photo – Lucy
Bearman-Brown.



The conference was opened by organiser Lucy Bearman-Brown who introduced Keynote speaker Pat Morris (Royal Holloway, University of London). Pat's address was entitled "Hedgehog rehabilitation - looking back, looking around and looking forward".

When Pat began studying hedgehogs they were considered to be 'common and widespread'. Nowadays that description would be better applied to the numbers of Eurasian hedgehogs in wildlife rescue centres in the UK than our wild population. A range of causes of hedgehog decline have been postulated but the breeding strategy of the species – maintaining a steady population by producing small litters over a long breeding life (described by biologists as K-selected as opposed to r-selected species which have the capacity to produce large numbers of small offspring quickly) makes it more difficult for populations to recover once depleted.



Pat gives Les Stocker credit for promoting hedgehog rescue and rehabilitation through his book "The Complete Hedgehog" published in 1987. At the time Pat challenged Les on whether hedgehog rehabilitation was effective, and Les admitted that he didn't know. Les agreed to support Pat's first small study which involved relocating and monitoring three hedgehogs.

This preliminary study ran out of money after three weeks, but Pat learned that a meaningful study needed to involve a larger number of animals over a longer period of post-release monitoring.

Pat set up a larger study the following year, but Les withdrew his support, so Pat sourced rescued juvenile urban (west London) hedgehogs from the RSPCA and released them at the Flatford Field Centre in Suffolk. Pat observed that these inexperienced animals scattered long distances from the arable habitat they were released into to find local villages – sometimes feeding on refuse! They acclimatised quickly, building nests, moving on and then returning to



them; the only negative seemed to be significant weight loss over the first few weeks, but their weight stabilised after this point – now we realise that these animals were probably overfed in captivity (the heaviest was over 1kg despite being under a year old!). One-third of the animals released survived to maturity – Pat reminded us that rehabilitation does not confer immortality and that this compares favourably to natural survival rates for juveniles.

Pat went on to undertake further studies monitoring wild and rehabilitated hedgehogs, including some work on Jersey which does not have badgers. He was particularly struck by the nomadic nature of some individuals which can travel long distances – one of the Jersey hedgehogs travelled to mainland Britain!

Posing the question of whether hedgehog rehabilitation makes a difference to the wild population Pat lamented that more data needs to be made available by rehabilitators in order to assess their impact with any accuracy. Pat stressed the importance of keeping good records and sharing information – while he has encountered rehabilitators who seem reluctant to engage because they don't want to find out that their work may not be helping, we can only prove that hedgehog rehabilitation is necessary and effective if we have the data.

Pat also commented the recent hedgehog hibernation weight debate. His research into wild hedgehogs showed that animals as small as 450g could survive hibernation. He suggested that the current recommended release weight for rehabilitated animals of 600g was probably sensible as the additional weight provides a buffer for the animals as they acclimatise to their freedom, but he also reminded us that healthy wild animals between 450 - 600g in autumn probably do not need any intervention.

Finally, Pat appealed to rehabilitators to collaborate with each other and with researchers to provide data through which rehabilitation practices can be developed for the future.



Lockdown answers from **defra**



Staff from DEFRA's Animal Welfare Division provided the following guidance in mid-May in response to questions from regional colleagues.

- **Wildlife rescue centres are not on the list of businesses that were instructed to close during lockdown and have therefore been legally able to continue to operate and to travel for the purposes of wildlife rescue and rehabilitation if they comply with government guidance on social distancing.**
- **Members of the public should not transport casualties to a rehabilitator or vet without phoning to confirm that this is appropriate first.**
- **Rehabilitators should ideally travel to collect animals rather than have members of the public deliver to their premises, and only admit animals if there is no other alternative.**
- **Animals in care should be released when appropriate and according to -government on social distancing.**
- **If a rehabilitator, who is based at home and relies on help from volunteers, needs to self-isolate they should contact their local authority for support (in line with guidance to other animal owners).**

Editor's note –

While this advice unquestionably prioritises human health and safety, BWRC recognise that staff/volunteer and funding shortages and reduced services provided by other charities and veterinary practices may have made it impractical for rehabilitators to collect all casualties, and therefore it is essential to facilitate the safest possible transfer of animals delivered to a centre by the public.

Not only does the law place a duty of care on anyone in possession of a suffering animal, but the distress displayed by members of the public when struggling to find help for injured wild animal casualties underlines the under-recognised importance of this service to the mental health and wellbeing of human society.





COVID-19

BWRC 10-point plan for those working in wildlife rescue and rehabilitation

1. Staff and volunteers should work from home if possible.
2. Any staff member or volunteer who exhibits symptoms of the disease should remain at home (self-isolate) for at least 7 days, and anyone who is in contact with anyone exhibiting symptoms should self-isolate for 14 days.
3. Any staff member or volunteer who is considered vulnerable (at risk of severe illness) or extremely vulnerable should self-isolate at home, and anyone who lives with someone in those categories should stay at home.
4. Maintain closed working teams where possible - avoid mixing staff who do not routinely work together.
5. Staff should stay at least 2m (6ft) away from other staff or the public wherever possible.
6. Wild animals should be released as soon as possible in line with government guidelines on essential travel (as locally as possible).
7. Centre capacity should be reassessed regularly in response to changing staff availability, and measures put in place to protect animal welfare in the event of inadequate staff availability.
8. The public should be deterred from visiting your premises wherever possible and public entrances to buildings should be kept locked to prevent unauthorised entry.
9. Procedures for receiving, collecting, transferring, seeking veterinary treatment for or releasing animals should be planned and agreed in advance with all parties involved (using telephone, e-mail etc.).
10. Essential journeys include sourcing necessary supplies and transporting animals to obtain emergency care. Vehicles and equipment used off-site should be disinfected after use.

FOR MORE INFORMATION REFER TO OUR FULL GUIDANCE DOCUMENT WHICH CAN BE FOUND AT www.bwrc.org.uk





The ecology of suburban juvenile hedgehogs in Denmark

Presented at Hedgehog Rehabilitation:
Sharing Best Practice

in collaboration with Hartpury University

presented by Dr Sophie Lund Rasmussen, University
of Southern Denmark

**Saturday 1st February 2020 at Hartpury University
Centre, Gloucester. Kindly Sponsored by RSPCA &
British Hedgehog Preservation Society.**

Reported by Terri Amory

Sophie has presented her work at several UK conferences in recent years. She completed her PhD in 2019 and organised her own conference in Denmark which was planned to take place in April of this year at the Legoland Billund Resort in Denmark. This has now been rescheduled to 19th and 20th September – details are available at <http://hedgehogconference.com/>

This paper is open access online at <https://doi.org/10.1002/ece3.5764>



The decline of the Eurasian hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*) is thought to be occurring across western Europe, but studies of Danish populations and urban-living hedgehogs are under-represented in scientific literature. Hedgehog monitoring methods currently available include radio-tracking, GPS (global positioning system), microchipping, camera traps (using infrared sensors), thermographic cameras, footprint tunnels and spine markings such as heat-shrinking coloured plastic tubing.

Sophie used a combination of radio-tagging (with reflective tape attached to the tags to make the animals easier to spot under torchlight) and, with the help of research assistants, recording the GPS location of 35 wild juvenile Eurasian hedgehogs in western Copenhagen every hour over a period of 70 nights in the autumn of 2014 and 84 nights the following spring/summer. She noted that it is particularly important to inform local police of projects like this in populated areas.

The animals' ranges (area visited) were larger in the Spring/Summer period (an average of 14 gardens) than in the autumn (average 10 gardens used). Males had larger ranges than females, but none of the animals dispersed far from their birth area. The ranges were small compared with similar studies of hedgehogs living in rural areas, which suggests that the suburban garden environments were relatively hedgehog friendly compared with the rural landscapes studied. Not surprisingly however the deaths that were explained were mostly from anthropogenic (man-made) causes – garden machinery, man-made water features, pet attacks and infection contracted at a feeding station.

The survival rate of the animals to one year of age was 70% - very successful in comparison with previous studies. The first animal went



into hibernation in November, and the last in mid-January probably because the weather was exceptionally mild and wet and so food remained available. Similar mild winters have occurred since, and there may be a general decreasing need for animals to hibernate due to climate change. Nests were changed between one- and eight-times during hibernation (average 1.2 per animal). The November, and the last in mid-January probably because the weather was exceptionally mild and wet and so food remained available. Similar mild winters have occurred since, and there may be a general decreasing need for animals to hibernate due to climate change. Nests were changed between one- and eight-times during hibernation (average 1.2 per animal). The maximum weight loss experienced over the winter period was 23% - this was recorded in the individual which changed nest eight times.

In conclusion Sophie suggested that conservation efforts might best be focussed on improving suburban habitats for hedgehogs. Further work is needed to evaluate the effects of climate change on hedgehog biology



The ever-popular Dr Sophie Lund Rasmussen gives the first of two presentations on the day.

Photo – Lucy Bearman-Brown.



In the news

Mysterious in German blue tits

Germany's largest nature conservation organisation Naturschutzbund Deutschland (NABU) reported an unknown contagious disease affecting Eurasian blue tits (*Parus caeruleus*)



earlier this year, after receiving over 11,000 reports of sick or dead birds from the public in the west of the country within an eight-day period during April. Other species including great- and long-tailed tits are thought to be affected to a lesser extent.

The condition has been identified as *Suttonella ornithocola*, a recently discovered bacterium from the family *Cardiobacteriaceae* which causes lung disease and pneumonia-like symptoms. Cases



have been observed near feeding stations, where the birds present a typical ‘sick bird’ fluffed up posture and unreactive to the environment around them – by which stage they are close to death. Anecdotal evidence also describes them appearing to have problems breathing, having lost feathers from the head and having eyelids stuck together.

It was first identified from 11 deaths in tit species which occurred across the UK in 1996, but it has not so far been isolated from other British garden birds. Since 2005 the UK’s Garden Wildlife Health team have been on the case, and surveillance has picked up no more than two cases per year in the UK – suggesting that the disease is endemic in the British tit population.

In Europe a few cases were identified in Finland in 2017, and then a handful were reported in Germany in Spring of 2018.

Investigations are continuing into this sudden and severe outbreak in Germany this year.

As it is likely that this disease is transmitted by aerosol (being coughed up) by infected individuals, this further argument for careful and hygienic bird-feeding station management.

Signs of *Suttonella ornithicola* infection:

- Fluffed up, huddled posture
- Unresponsive to surroundings
- Laboured breathing
- Feather loss (from head)
- Eyelids stuck together

Acknowledgements:

<https://www.nabu.de/news/2020/04/27990.html>

<https://www.gardenwildlifehealth.org/portfolio/suttonella-ornithocola-infection-in-garden-birds/>

<https://www.birdguides.com/news/mystery-illness-killing-off-german-blue-tits/>

<https://www.bto.org/community/news/202004-german-blue-tit-disease-identified>



Have birds been singing louder during lockdown?

If you've been noticing birdsong more during lockdown, you are not alone. Are they actually louder or is this just because the drop in traffic means that our environment is quieter so we can hear them better? Our perceptions that the birds seem louder are in fact likely to be completely wrong!

Just like people in a bar talking loudly over ambient music, birds have been found to 'raise their voices' when background noise levels rise. This phenomenon was recognised in people over a hundred years ago a French biologist and is known as the 'Lombard effect'. This behaviour has also been observed in birds, and recently Dr Sue Anne Zollinger from the Department of Natural Sciences at Manchester Metropolitan University recorded chiffchaffs singing in woodland near Manchester airport, and observed that they increased their volume from 60 to 66dB when an airplane passed overhead. This doesn't sound like much until you remember that because decibels are on a logarithmic scale this equates to almost a doubling in volume.

Dr Zollinger suggests that it is possible that it is likely that birds are actually singing more quietly than they would do under 'normal' circumstances because there is much less background noise to compete with. That may not come as much consolation if they are waking you up at 5am though!

The Chiffchaff
Phylloscopus collybita
might not look like much
but this member of the
warbler family has a
characteristic 'drip-drip' call.
Photo Needpix.com.





Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the work of UK Wildlife Rehabilitators

We all want to learn lessons from the trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic and so BWRC are launching a questionnaire focussed on the experiences of wildlife rehabilitators during the three month period March – May 2020, with a view to developing advice for reducing the risks associated with future events of this nature for the sector and to provide evidence with which to lobby government for support. We hope to follow this with further

This questionnaire should take no more than 20 minutes to complete and the information that you provide will not be shared in a way which enables any individual or organisation to be identified or any data to be linked to any specific organisation without the explicit permission of the persons/ organisation involved. You will be asked questions about data consent at the beginning of the survey.

As with all studies of this nature the more contributions we gather the more useful the data will be. Please take part if you can by following this link:

www.shorturl.at/cgpwD

If you have any queries or feedback regarding this questionnaire please contact us via bwrcouncil@gmail.com.





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 £75 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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