



March 2020 Issue no 74

# The Rehabilitator

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



Guillemot being cleaned. Courtesy of A Grogan, RSPCA

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(Proceedings from BWRC Symposium 2019)

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# A Word from the Chair

I had finally almost finished the Winter/Spring edition of *The Rehabilitator* when suddenly everything started to change, and much of what I had prepared became irrelevant! The 'dates for your diary' have been postponed indefinitely and our normal expectations for the spring season have been thrown into chaos!

Live fund-raising events can no longer happen, supplies of food and hygiene equipment are harder to come by, vets are closing their premises to visitors (mine are carrying out consultations in the car park!) and face-to-face contact with people who find casualties now risks spreading a potentially fatal virus!

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 21<sup>st</sup> November but will also book a back-up date for January 2021.

I recently attended an event run for staff and students at Writtle University College at which educator Sabrina Brando talked about assessing animal welfare and the increasingly hot topic of 'compassion fatigue'. Sabrina described this as exhaustion and/or depression resulting from the emotional stress of witnessing animal suffering and death, often exacerbated by demanding working conditions such as long hours and low wages. Little did we realise quite how relevant this discussion might become in 2020!

Sabrina's plans to run a two-day meeting entitled "How are you? Understanding sorrows and joys of caring for animals" at the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Slimbridge in May have obviously been put on hold for now, but this is a topic we'd like to investigate further (watch this space). By coincidence rehabilitator Stephanie Williams from Every Feather Rescue recently sent in an article describing her experiences of, and concerns about, another potential source of stress - relationships between rehabilitators - which you can read on page 14.

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

Please take care – Sabrina's main message was that we can't care for others if we don't look after ourselves first (think oxygen masks in an aircraft!) – and keep in touch,

*Terri Amory,  
Editor & Chair, BWRC*



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# Developments in oiled wildlife response in Europe.

Presented at BWRC Symposium 2019  
in collaboration with Wild Things Rescue

Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> November at Nottingham Trent University, Brackenhurst Campus. Kindly Sponsored by RSPCA & Nottingham Trent University.

Adam Grogan, Head of Wildlife at the RSPCA reported on the history of responses to oil spills around the British coastline, research within the UK and abroad and made his case for the formulation of a UK plan for dealing with major wildlife emergencies.

Historical disasters which many of us will remember include the Torrey Canyon oil spill off the coast of Cornwall in 1967, the Sea Empress in 1996, the Erika in 1999, the Tricolor in 2002 and the Napoli in 2007. RSPCA centres dealt with hundreds of casualties from these incidents, including 3158 casualties in 1996, 360 at RSPCA West Hatch in 1999, 530 at RSPCA Mallydams Wood in 2002, and undertook a research programme to investigate how husbandry, facilities and post-release monitoring could be improved to promote and assess survival.

Methods investigated included a deep-water tank for exercise with a longer period of rehabilitation and soft release sea cages. Low numbers of birds admitted during the research period restricted research progress, but then the Napoli incident in 2007

Oil Spill Incident	Est. Birds affected	Birds rescued	Birds released
<b>Torrey Canyon (1967)</b>	>30,000	9851	
<b>Sea Empress (1996)</b>	>7000		1100
<b>Erika (1999)</b>	64,000	15000	2200
<b>Tricolor (2002)</b>	>9000	3700	
<b>Napoli (2007)</b>		>3,000*	

\*<https://www.cefas.co.uk/publications/aquatic/aemr61.pdf>

provided an opportunity to test some of the proposed improvements.

Newly introduced triage and rehydration protocols at the rescue site, in addition to triage at the rescue centre, resulted in 47.5% of birds admitted to centres (those that died or were euthanized at initial triage were not included in the results) being released from that incident compared with 28.7% of birds from previous incidents. Using data from these incidents and further research work into identification and post-release monitoring via radio transmitters, the RSPCA have been able to test the efficacy of their protocols and have published their findings:

*Grogan, A. Pulquério, M.J.F., Cruz, M.J., Oaten, P., Thompson, R., Grantham, M., Thomas, T., Atkinson, R. and Kelly, A. (2014) Factors affecting the welfare of rehabilitation of oiled murre*

*(Uria aalge)* in England and Wales, UK. *Proceedings of the Thirty-seventh AMOP Technical Seminar on Environmental Contamination and Response, Environment Canada, Ottawa, ON: 249-264.*

As a consequence of this work the RSPCA is listed as the main responder for oiled wildlife in England and Wales (with SSPCA for Scotland and the USPCA in Northern Ireland) in the National Contingency Plan, and communicates with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and some of the 16 regional Standing Environment Groups (SEGs - each responsible for a particular area of coastline).



Rehydration therapy applied to a guillemot at the rescue site.  
*Courtesy of Adam Grogan, RSPCA*

A recent review of the Scientific, Technical and Operational (STOp) note that governs the role of the SEGs provided an opportunity for the RSPCA and other organizations to include more detail on oiled wildlife response. However, the response from the SEGs was that as this was primarily operational activities they felt it should not sit with them and so the suggestion was made to the MCA that a separate STOp note should be produced for oiled wildlife response and this is now being drafted. The new STOp note provides for changes to EU legislation (particularly EU directive 2013/30/EU annex VII – on safety of offshore oil and gas operations), and aims to improve understanding amongst



industry, government and other stakeholders about what would be required for a wildlife response to a future incident.

The RSPCA has also been involved in two international projects, one based in Europe and the other global, working with other oiled wildlife response organizations including the US, New Zealand and South Africa. The EUROWA project was co-funded by the European Union under the Civil Protection Financial Instrument and involved a collaborative partnership between a number of European oiled wildlife responders to develop training packages and other materials to assist in an oiled wildlife emergency. The GOWRS programme was initially funded by the Joint Industry Project with the original aim of developing tier 3 response system. This programme has resulted in key principles for the protection, care and rehabilitation of oiled wildlife and a Standard Operating Procedure for response.

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Both of the international projects mentioned highlighted the need for preparedness, and this has been recognised as the most important element of any response plan. The International Petroleum Industry Environmental Conservation Association (IPIECA) have identified wildlife response as one of the 15 'core capabilities needed for tiered preparedness and response' and published good practice guidelines for incident management and emergency response personnel on wildlife response preparedness.

However, exercising a proper wildlife response for an incident is still difficult as examples from around the globe show that wildlife is often considered a side-issue and the impacts of an oiling incident on wildlife are not fully considered or planned for. There is an assumption that in England and Wales, the RSPCA will provide a response in an emergency situation, but the organization obviously has other demands on its resources that may make a response challenging, if not impossible. Even in the UK, the RSPCA has difficulties in being involved in full -scale exercises when they occur.

For example, the RSPCA has seen a steady increase in the numbers of grey seals over the past 10 years. Seals are very resource intensive to rehabilitate and take up facilities that were originally built for sea birds, particularly oiled birds.

Grey seal pupping season starts in September on the west coast and progresses round the country clockwise so that grey seals on the

Norfolk coast will be pupping from December to February. This means that grey seals are likely to be occupying our facilities at the time when, traditionally, many oiled incidents happen due to rough weather etc. As a result, it seems likely that if there a



*RSPCA staff treat a seal  
Courtesy of Adam Grogan, RSPCA*



major incident occurred during this time, a complete temporary facility would need to be provided to effect a response.

In this scenario, the benefits of cooperative working with other oiled wildlife rescue organizations becomes apparent as additional experienced staff are likely to be required to operate such a facility. Any wildlife management plan should therefore include potential locations where such a facility could be set up, with good transport links, facilities and other support services and so on.

An idea of costs might be gained from an example facility provided for an exercise in the Netherlands which cost €65,000 (or £53,000) to set up. Using data from the 2007 Napoli incident in which the RSPCA admitted 1000 birds in a week, likely running costs for three months have been calculated at £156,000, with additional costs such as overtime, transport and food in the region of an additional £87,656, giving an overall total of £296,656 (recalculated from 2007 prices based on 3% inflation).

A suite of modular courses at four levels has been developed by the European Oiled Wildlife Response Assistance project (EUROWA) partners in order to provide training for those who could managing untrained staff and volunteers, and more specialist personnel including response coordinators and veterinary staff.



Specialist responders cleaning a casualty.  
*Courtesy of Adam Grogan, RSPCA.*

However, there is still some discussion too be had on how this training is provided in order to ensure a continuous, adequate supply of up-to-date personnel over time.

<http://www.oiledwildlife.eu/euowa/training%20packages>

In addition, preparedness measures need to be tested through exercises, which must include wildlife response as well as the other elements of disaster response (such as managing human casualties, containment of compromised vessels and clean-up operations).



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# “Should rehabilitated hedgehogs be released in winter?”

A comparison of survival, nest use and weight change in wild and rescued animals.”

Dr Richard Yarnell, Associate Professor in Ecology at Nottingham Trent University.

Presented at BWRC Symposium 2019  
in collaboration with Wild Things Rescue

Richard was involved in the ground-breaking work we first heard about at the European Hedgehog Research Group’s 8th Workshop held in Hyde Park in February 2019. Published in the European Journal of Wildlife Research, this paper provides evidence that healthy hedgehogs can be released during the winter months (during a period of weather forecast to be above 0°C for the subsequent five days) and survive as well as their wild counterparts.

Body weight, nesting behaviour and survival rates were compared between 34 rehabilitated hedgehogs at five sites across England over four winters. Overwinter survival was high for both groups of animals, but there was a significant reduction in survival in both groups when they became active again in

Spring - suggesting that winter is actually quite a safe time for hedgehogs - probably because they are mostly safely tucked away in their nests!

There were no differences in survival rates, weight change or nest use between the two groups up to 150 days post release, suggesting that rehabilitated hedgehogs are just as capable of surviving the winter as their wild counterparts, even though all of the rehabilitated animals were juveniles which had not previously experienced winter at all!



We hope that this evidence will give hedgehog rehabilitators confidence to reduce the congestion that is reported in British centres by releasing more healthy animals during the winter months. You can read the full paper online at:

<https://research.brighton.ac.uk/en/publications/should-rehabilitated-hedgehogs-be-released-in-winter-a-comparison>

(Click on the links on the right under “Access to Document”).

# Hedgehog Tags



We have been tagging our released hedgehogs at the rescue for several years now with heat shrink printed tubes glued to the spines. Dr Nigel Reeve sourced and tested the original tags with the Regent's Park Hedgehog project supported by the vets at ZSL <https://www.mammal.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/HedgehogMarking.pdf>

We prefer this non invasive way of tagging released hedgehogs, and feel visible tags engage more with the members of the public helping us to gather more post release data.



The tags are easy to attach with a pair of tweezers holding one end of the tag, with the number facing away from you, and applying a blob of superglue to the inside of the other end of the tag. The tag is then placed over and down a spine leaving the end of the spine exposed for continued protection, the tag number should now be right reading facing you. We apply 5 tags per hedgehog to the neck and shoulder blade area of the hog's back. These are gently spaced out and not clumped together in case of injury or spine loss though ringworm. On most hedgehogs some tags last up to a year, and some of our hogs still have tags on 2 years later. Bearing in mind a realistic average lifespan of a hog is 1 year to 18 months then these work well. Of course if you have the funds you can use more tags per hog.

We tried and tested many different kinds of superglue and found this one to be the safest, and the one giving the most control upon application. Nobody wants to be superglued to a poor hedgehog and no glue should end up on the hog's skin. We buy these 3g packets from Ebay at £3 per pack and each applicator is enough to tag several hogs.



A recent price increase in our current supplier led me to ring around and find a more affordable option and we are now purchasing PVC tags from IDENTIMARK

The PVC tags are 1.5mm diameter x 12mm and come in white and yellow. We opt for one colour for females and the other for males. If other local rescues are tagging too, then different colours could be used for each rescue. The # symbol before the number ensures the number is not read upside down, or each rescue can use it's own letter prefix for identification, we use HH0000. The previous tags had to be sprayed with a fixative to prevent the numbers smudging but, after rigorous testing, the Identimark tags can be used without fixative. However, you can still opt to use fixative if you prefer. The tags can be cut individually, or semi severed on a roll which we find easier.

There is a minimum order of £35 plus VAT and delivery. Delivery is £11 for larger orders of 1,000 plus tags but smaller quantities can be posted via Royal Mail.

*To give you some idea of cost you can purchase 1,000 tags (5 tags per hog gives 200 sets) for £39.20 excluding VAT and delivery). A discount can be offered for larger orders. NB: prices may change in April.*

Any queries please email or Jayne at [info@happyhedgehog.org.uk](mailto:info@happyhedgehog.org.uk) or Dr Nigel Reeve at [hedgehogs@ntlworld.com](mailto:hedgehogs@ntlworld.com)

## IDENTIMARK

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# The Human Side of Animal Rehabilitation

By Stephanie Williams

(Every Feather Bird & Wildlife Rescue)



This might be a little different from the usual articles that appear in the newsletter. It isn't scientifically-based and it won't shed any light on the various illnesses, diseases or new techniques related to rehabilitation. It does, however, highlight one of the fundamental issues that has plagued our rescue over the last eight years since we opened.

Even if you work primarily with wildlife it is guaranteed that there will be a large percentage of your work which is filled with human interaction. The majority of it is positive. I work with vets, RSPCA, members of the public, businesses etc., and most people value the work that is done and the lengths most rescues will go to. Sadly, there will always be some who don't.

We do it for the wildlife. Most of us are reading this letter because we work or volunteer within rehabilitation, or we have a passion for wildlife and the work that goes into rehabilitating it when needed. Human interaction is an unavoidable side-effect of what we do, and it can be the reason some centres close their doors, rehabilitators suffer with ill-health, or reputations are jeopardised. I wanted to talk about some of the interactions that



I have had over recent years, and how having a tough skin can sometimes be the only way to survive in this sector.

It seems absolutely ridiculous but one of the main issues appears to be a strange condition called 'rescue jealousy'. It tends to be when rescues pit themselves against each other like gladiators in an arena. Instead of embracing the work that other rescues are doing, the lightening of their own loads due to the fact other rescues in their area exist – they have this desperate need to prove they are better, more successful and even have the finest array of patients brought to them. Instead of working together and sharing our knowledge, techniques and findings – rescues are battering down the hatches and declaring that it's their way or the highway.

Rehabilitation is fluid – organic. I might use a particular medication and then someone recommends one they have had great success with, and I'll give that a try instead. You never know unless you are open to change. New medications and techniques are coming into existence all the time and it's foolish to refuse to take note of them because we are used to working a certain way – or because another rescue has dared to suggest that maybe there is another way of dealing with a condition that they have had success with. It's not criticism to reach out and offer help. People contact us all the time from other rescues to say "have you tried this" or "do you ever use these"? I love it. Every week I go to a local rescue and I'll see things they purchased or ways they set out their workspace and use these ideas for my rescue

because they work so well. Where's the harm? – we're all in this together! The other rescue loves that I am inspired by them and is happy to make suggestions when I talk about how I work.



A tough lesson to learn has been that not every other rescue does want to share ideas – they take it as a criticism, and this can be hard to deal with. The idea of a rescue criticising another rescue doesn't sit well with people in the same field or members of the public – but then how do you highlight any issues that arise if the other rescue aren't listening to you?

Over the last year we have seen other rescues in the area close or be closed down because they failed to listen to what people were saying to them. Does anyone ever know everything? There is always room for improvement, and we all want to be the best we can be.

Being empathetic comes with so many pitfalls. Every loss you take as a failure and so already the burden is heavy on your shoulders – then along comes this seemingly never-ending trail of people who want to make things even harder.

We deal with members of the public who find injured wildlife on a daily basis. They can be demanding, unkind and sometimes extremely judgemental. They don't understand that when you're running a rescue you are often on little or no sleep, less than regular meals and spending a good percentage of your time simply cleaning. One lady turned up when I was mid-clean of the hospital. All the cages had been dragged into the middle of the floor while I swept and mopped underneath. I was scrubbing down the walls and had several bags full of rubbish waiting to go to the car. She walked straight back out with her bird and branded my rescue "squalor" on the internet – publicly declared that she wouldn't leave a bird there. Her immaculate clothes, pristine car and full-face of make-up was offended by the reality of rescue. It's not all sterilised chrome surfaces and white lab coats because it's dirty, bloody and exhausting.

By the time I'm finished every night you could eat your dinner off the floor in our hospital room and the cages, for five minutes at least, are clean. Both the best and worst form of human interaction for rescues is social media. It allows you to spread word on the work you do, ask for help and donations when needed and gather a body of supporters.

On the flip-side it enables people to damage your reputation with a single swipe across a keyboard and mud sticks – as the aforementioned lady realised when she walked into my hospital room mid-clean.

Recently several photographs were shared to a Facebook page regarding another rescue and highlighting the need for us to be aware of people who ask for money but don't use it for their rescue work. These photographs showed the grim reality of what happens when a rescue stops putting the welfare of their patients first. This post



had the most shares and comments of any other post on that page. Instantly the post was out there and everyone could judge this rescue – not for all the good work it had done in the past – but for those images and how hard it had fallen. Social media can be cruel and it never forgets.

My advice therefore is to develop a thick skin - to suffer fools and build relationships with likeminded people that you can trust. Share your findings with people you know will appreciate them and learn to bite your lip with people who won't. No matter how much experience we have or how many qualifications it is important to keep learning, keep growing – because the best rescuers are the ones that never believe they know enough.

Stephanie Williams, Every Feather Bird and Wildlife Rescue.



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Terri Amory, Simon Allen, Janet Peto, Molly Varga, Adam Grogan, Dan Forman, Llewelyn Lowen, Lucy Bearman-Brown, Mike Brampton, Lucy Cosgriff and Chris Riddington.

**BWRC** would like to thank volunteer Jayne Morgan **Facebook Page**

Newsletter designed and produced by Terri Amory

**If you would like to submit an article or letter for publication or give a presentation at a future symposium please contact:**  
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