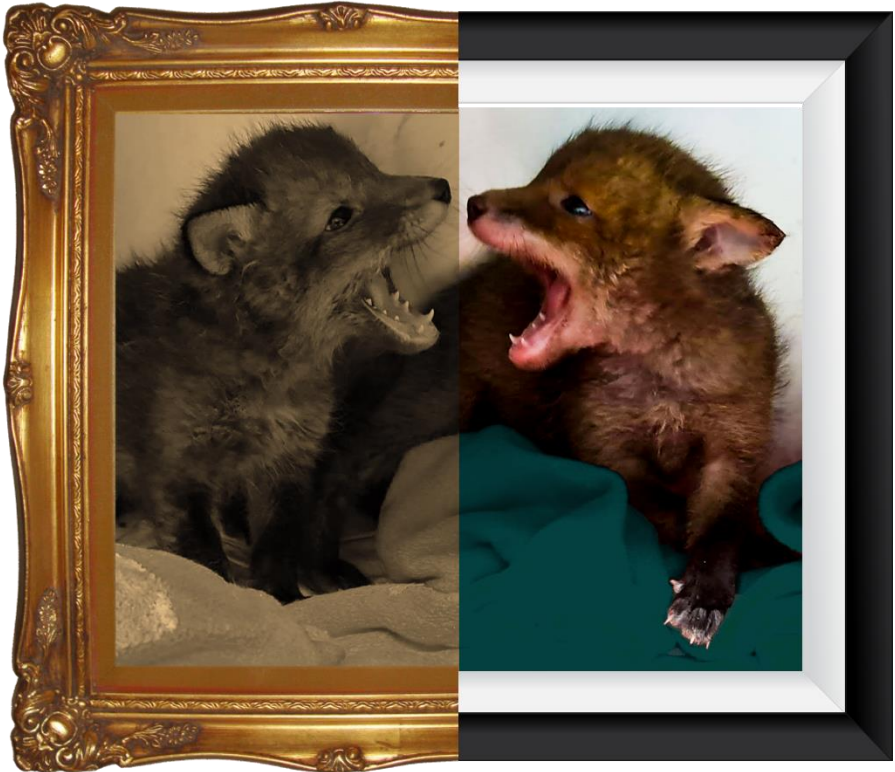




The Rehabilitator

Summer 2021 Issue 81

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



BWRC Annual Symposium 2021

'Reflecting on the past to enhance the future'

Have YOUR say at this year's symposium

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Cover image: courtesy of South Essex Wildlife Hospital, edited by Jonathan Amory

A Word from the Chair

Welcome to the Summer 2021 edition of The Rehabilitator!

In the last edition we described the keynote presentation from Symposium 2020 – Sabrina Brando’s thought-provoking discussion of the importance of looking after ourselves to be better able to care for others – human or non-human animal. This time we include the first of a two-part report on the results of our COVID-19 questionnaire used to collect experiences of wildlife rehabilitators during the first three significant months of the UK pandemic.

A year’s worth of collaborative work directed by Liz Mullineaux and the Born Free Foundation, and including a host of stakeholder partners including BWRC has come to fruition in the form of:

- a series of recorded mini-lectures aimed at veterinary, vet nursing and other students intended to promote understanding and cooperation between vets and the wider wildlife rehabilitation community.
- An information hub including a range of resources for veterinary practices dealing with wildlife casualties which will continue to be developed.

These are currently available online at:

<https://www.bornfree.org.uk/resources-for-vets> and details of the project have been published in a letter to the Veterinary Record (July 2021 edition) as part of the process of attracting the attention of the veterinary profession.

Our *‘Joint statement on the captive breeding of hedgehogs in response to population decline’* - a position statement on why we don’t support the use of captive breeding of wild European hedgehogs as a conservation strategy at this time, was published at the end of March this year and thirty organisations have signed up in agreement with this position. You can read the statement from page 19 and if you would like to add your/ your organisation’s name to the list of co-signatories on this statement please contact us via bwrcouncil@gmail.com.

BWRC are pleased to announce that, after some years of struggling with practical barriers, we hope we have found a solution to establishing a national wildlife rehabilitation database through collaboration with Writtle University

College and Salesforce. In this issue we include an invitation for rehabilitators to take part in a consultation which will be used to help shape the system (see page 5).

BWRC trustees send their condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of Yvonne Fenter who passed away in early July. Yvonne was heavily involved in the day-to-day running of Brent Lodge Wildlife Hospital in West Sussex, alongside her husband and founder of the hospital Dennis Fenter, who passed away in 2019.



Yvonne Fenter
Brent Lodge Wildlife Hospital

Thanks are due to BWRC associate member Stephanie Williams who shares her personal experiences and advice around managing social media as a wildlife rehabilitator on page 15. As always if you have research, experience or concerns to share, write to BWRC at bwrcouncil@gmail.com or by post to PO Box 8686, Grantham, Lincolnshire NG31 0AG.

Terri Amory, Editor & Chair, BWRC



National Wildlife Rehabilitation Database Research



Hi, my name is Jennifer Broome, and I am currently undertaking my MSc in Animal Welfare and Conservation at Writtle University College and completing my dissertation assessment. My research is accompanying a collaboration between BWRC, Writtle University College, BHPS and others to develop a national electronic database designed to collect detailed records of wildlife brought into centres in an accessible way.

The study is looking for participants working within wildlife rehabilitation centres across the UK to contribute their current experience, opinions, and requirements to help adapt and create a database that is well suited to the intended audience, which is you!

Participants will be asked to take part in two short, anonymous surveys, with approximately two weeks to complete each one. The study requires a wide range of participants with a variety of job roles and experience within the centre, so we want to encourage all staff to take part.

All details will be kept securely and in line with GDPR on a password-protected account and folder, with the option to opt-out of future correspondence regarding the study's development.

If you have any questions or queries please don't hesitate to contact me on 98379428@writtle.ac.uk. Please click on the link below to take part in the first survey:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfCQJahcNFub6r33i-sGRxeSdwsI9YyXY-etbo7ZJSIELjO9w/viewform?usp=sf_link

Jennifer Broome
Writtle University College



Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the work of UK wildlife rehabilitators

Presented at BWRC Symposium 2020 by Terri Amory, BWRC Chair
(Part One – admissions and mitigation measures)

Early in 2020, newscasters began to report the spread of a mysterious pneumonia in the Wuhan Province of China, which the Chinese authorities identified as a novel coronavirus.¹ The first death linked to the disease was recorded on 11th January in China, and cases started to appear across the world - the first cases being confirmed in the UK on January 29th. The World Health Organisation declared a global public health emergency, and on February 11th the W.H.O. gave the disease a name – COVID-19.

On the evening of Monday 23rd March (by which date the UK death toll attributed to COVID-19 had reached 336) Prime Minister Boris Johnson declared that a national “lockdown” was starting with immediate effect. UK citizens were told that they must ‘stay at home’ and should only leave their homes for the purposes of shopping for essential items, travelling to work if they could not work from home, medical needs or to care for vulnerable persons, and exercising once a day. Public or social gatherings of more than two people were not allowed, and we were told that the police could enforce these rules.²

BWRC started looking for opportunities to support wildlife rehabilitators, including publishing an advice document on safer working protocols, creating a members Facebook support group, publishing more frequent newsletters, providing justification letters to rehabilitators to carry with them and disseminating advice from DEFRA when it became available (Figure 1. Shows a timeline of activities during this period).



BWRC Lockdown COVID19 activity timeline

19/03 Small Charities COVID19 Joint Letter to Government



10/04 first "To whom it may concern" letter issued



15/05 The Rehabilitator (76) includes answers for rehabbers from Defra



Lockdown begins 23rd March

27/03 The Rehabilitator (74) announced more frequent editions and new Facebook group

20/04 The Rehabilitator (75) & "BWRC Advice on Wildlife Rehabilitation Protocols in case of Human Disease Epidemic"



15/06 The Rehabilitator (77) launches survey- "Effect of Covid-19 pandemic on the work of UK wildlife rehabilitators"

It quickly became obvious that working under COVID 'lockdown' restrictions was going to present considerable challenges to practicing rehabilitators, and we decided to try to investigate and gather first-hand data on how they were faring.

On 15th June a Google Forms questionnaire entitled "Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work of wildlife rehabilitators (March – May)" was launched to collect information from UK wildlife rehabilitators about their experiences during the first three significant months of the UK COVID-19 epidemic (March - May 2020). The survey was marketed to BWRC and British Hedgehog Preservation Society (BHPS) members through our newsletters, and further afield via Facebook, Linked-in and Twitter.

Forty-one multiple choice and free answer questions covering the following topics –

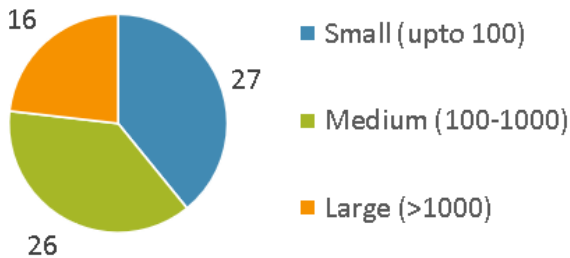
- Changes to admissions policies
- Admissions during March to May 2020
- Veterinary advice and releasing animals
- Mitigation measures
- Impacts on personnel
- Supplies and equipment
- Finances
- External advice and support

The questionnaire was closed on 18 October to allow preliminary analysis of the results for presentation at our 2020 Symposium. Seventy sets of answers were submitted, one duplicate was removed. Sixty-one (88%) of those reported that they are located in England. Six responses came from Wales, one from Scotland and one from Jersey.

39% of respondents (27) were classified as 'small'- dealing with between 1-100 casualties in 2019. 37% (26) were classified as 'medium-sized' handling between 101-1000 casualties, and 24% (16) reported handling over 1000 casualties in 2019.

Forty-four respondents (64%) described themselves as “single native wildlife species rehabilitation” – the majority of which are hedgehog rehabilitators. Twenty-five respondents (36%) were classified as “multi-species” rehabilitators.

No of casualties dealt with in 2019



Single- or multi-species rescue

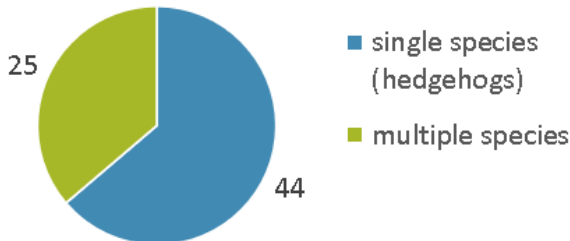


Figure 2. Charts showing how many of 69 facilities were classified as small/ medium/ large and whether facilities dealt with a single species or with multiple species.

Admission rates

- 53% of respondents perceived that they had received more calls from the public than normal for the time of year
- 33% felt that they had receive about the same number of calls
- 14% felt that they had received fewer calls from the public
- Approximately half of the respondents felt that they received more casualties than usual for the time of year

These should be considered as ‘perceived’ patterns because the survey did not require actual figures to be reported.

Media coverage about the first period of lockdown has drawn attention to the potential for these conditions to provide time and opportunity for large swathes of the UK population, newly confined to home and near surroundings, to notice wildlife more – which might have contributed to an increase in encounters between the public and wildlife casualties and consequently an increase in admissions to rehabilitation centres.

However, video footage of wild animals appearing in urban settings where they are not normally seen appeared on social media outlets, and several journal papers documenting this have been published since³. This reflected a reduction in human activity outdoors, and another assumption might be that reduced traffic levels could have led to fewer road collision casualties, therefore reducing the pressure on rehabilitators. Less than a week into the first National lockdown in the UK, Cabinet Office data showed motorised traffic dropped by 73% - to levels last seen in 1955 – although there was an upward creep to 63% the following week.⁴ However, evidence from a pan-European study of wildlife-vehicle collisions suggests that, while ‘expected’ road deaths reduced in some countries by more than 30% during lockdown, no significant difference in road deaths was found in England or Scotland⁵. It may be reasonable to assume that traffic related casualties did not reduce in frequency in these countries either.

Admissions policies and mitigation measures

Although we were getting enquiries from the public suggesting that some rehabilitators had closed their doors, only one of our 69 respondents reported adopting that measure. Approximately 80% of respondents continued to allow casualties to be brought to them, while approximately 20% started taking in animals by collection only. One centre reported giving specific training to staff/volunteers on how to rescue from homes and buildings. Advice on the collection and receipt of casualties was provided in the BWRC ‘Advice on Wildlife Rehabilitation Protocols in case of Human Disease Epidemic’ published in March 2020.

- Fifty-two percent of respondents reported changing their transfer (hand-over of animals) procedures

- Fifty-nine percent of respondents indicated that they increased the use of remote (telephone) advice to calls from the public, with one giving additional details that they set up their answerphone to direct serious injuries straight to veterinary surgeons and so cutting out the 'middle-man' until vet treatment had been obtained.
- Thirty-five percent of respondents indicated that they received more remote advice from vets (probably instigated by veterinary practices).
- Sixty-five percent of respondents reported that they had adopted increased use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and 35% reported changing cleaning and disinfection procedures.

The potential consequences of these measures on animal welfare and other elements of work in this field are interesting to consider and more research on this topic would be beneficial. Some changes of practice - such as increased use of technology for communications - are likely to be retained across many sectors because they convey benefits in addition to limiting the spread of COVID-19.

Veterinary support

Across the three different sizes of organisations surveyed, about a third of organisations reported greater difficulty accessing veterinary support, while two-thirds reported no difference during lockdown. The size of the organisation did not influence the perception of ease of access to veterinary support.

Releasing animals during lockdown

Responses indicated that lockdown did have an impact on release practices. A small proportion of centres reported that they released animals sooner than they might have done previously, while 20% released more locally than they normally would. Proportionally, larger organisations were a little less likely to curb their release practices. This may be because they have more animals to deal with, or may have had more confidence in their position, particularly if driving around in an 'official' van or wearing 'branded' clothing.

BWRC received and responded to requests from eight organisations for letters for their workers to carry. Ninety-seven percent of responders thought that letters from umbrella organisations would or might help, although it was understood at the time that police were not generally authorised to require documentation from people to justify their activities (although there may have been regional differences).

Very few people reported being challenged, and some reported that the local authorities were supportive. There were no reports of penalties being issued to rehabilitators, but this question was not asked directly in the questionnaire.

Unnecessary suffering

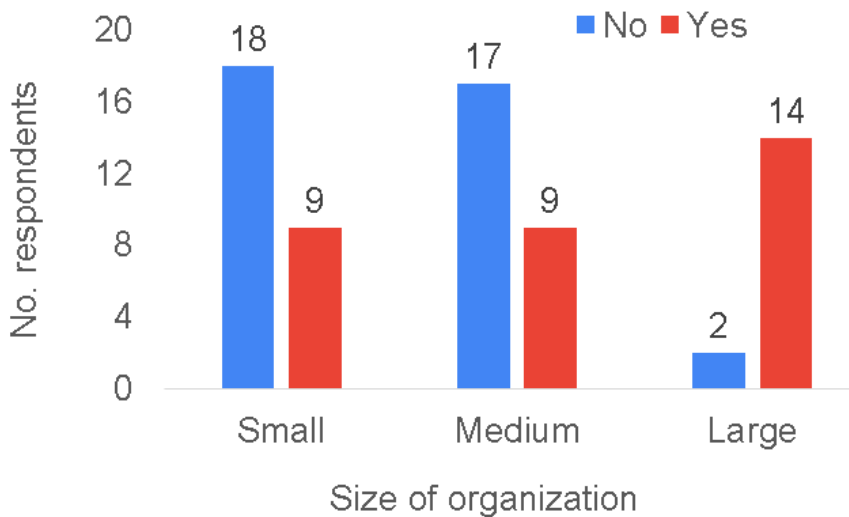


Figure 3. Chart showing responses regarding whether reductions in veterinary or rehabilitation services were perceived to have resulted in animal suffering.

When asked if they encountered situations in which animals were subject to unnecessary suffering because rescue and/or veterinary services were reduced, 54% of respondents answered NO, while 46% answered YES. There is a noticeable discrepancy here between large centres and small/medium centre in their answers to this question, with 88% of larger centres reporting

perceived unnecessary suffering compared with an average of 51% of small and medium centres reporting witnessing unnecessary suffering, despite there being no effect of centre size on ease of access to veterinary support. This may suggest that the larger centres (who may have better veterinary support as a consequence of their size) were observing suffering related to other factors such as reduced access to veterinary support for the general public with wildlife casualties, or closure of other rehabilitation units making it more difficult for the public to access help (although there is no direct evidence for the latter in these results).

Next time....

The second half of the report includes impacts on personnel, equipment supplies and finances, and experiences of external advice and support, and will be published in the Autumn edition of *The Rehabilitator*. The full report will also be published on our website in due course.

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BWRC Annual Symposium 2021



‘Reflecting on the past to enhance the future’

This year’s event will be a little different... We invite you to engage in a day of online discussions, informed and facilitated by experts in relevant fields, to explore how we can help support and shape the future of the industry. Join us from the comfort of your home, via Zoom.



Discussion topics will include:



Should wildlife rehabilitation be regulated?

What standards should be set?

How is animal welfare affected?

Can we learn lessons from ecological translocations?

And much more!

Saturday 16th October 2021

10am – 5pm

Free for BWRC members | £10 concessions | £20 full price

Booking details to follow soon!



Social media and wildlife rescue

By Stephanie Williams, Every Feather Wildlife Rescue

Social media is both a blessing and a curse when it comes to rescue. It can build a reputation, and it can just as easily destroy one with a bad review. Here, rehabilitator Stephanie gives advice on how to navigate the choppy waters of social media for the benefit of your organisation.

I recently read a newspaper article regarding an RSPCA investigation into a wildlife rescue and comments from their Facebook page were used in it. It was probably never intended for these comments to be seen as a flippant response to their closure – but the problem with electronic messages is that



Image by Thomas Ulrich from Pixabay

they are very much open to interpretation. Everything that goes online is in the public domain and it is easy to forget that.

We've all seen the articles about TripAdvisor Reviews. One person can put up a bad review and all of a sudden its National news. People often believe what they see in black and white, and it's hard to remove a perception from someone's mind once it has been planted there.

Social media is essential in wildlife rescue, as in many other fields of the charity sector, to help raise both funds and awareness. Without it I know that our rescue would have struggled a great deal, and in order to build up your following you need good content and a healthy dose of luck. Earlier this year we were tagged in a post on the comedian Jason Manford's Facebook page.

His cousin had rescued a baby bird from their cat and didn't know what to do next. There were literally hundreds of comments – more than half of them were people guessing about what a person should do in that position. Some of these comments were dangerous for the bird. Luckily our number was extracted from all the posts and we were contacted directly – we were able to collect the bird the same night. The next day I got a message from Jason Manford asking if I would send him some advice about what people should actually do in that situation as he thought it would be helpful. That advice went out to thousands of people who followed his Facebook page – and our Facebook page got a bump in followers.

There are various platforms you can use such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. Pick the platform that works for you or tie them all together to save you the job of multiple posts. There is no denying that Facebook can be valuable, but it is more important than ever that we are mindful of what we post. If you share a fundraiser on your page then followers will do their best to contribute, and even better they will share it with people they know. I find that the wording is important, for example:

“There are 500 followers on this page and if you all donate £2 then we will reach our target”.

From research the above comment is often received negatively. Not all followers will be in a position to donate even £2 and they may feel uncomfortable.

“Even if you can't donate at this time then please share the above fundraiser for us – we are saving to purchase a new incubator ahead of baby bird season.”

This type of request is not directly asking followers to donate and also specifies where the money will be spent. People will feel more comfortable donating when they know where their money is going which is why there has been a surge in popularity regarding Amazon wishlists. When people are able to choose what their donation purchases they are more likely to do it. Pinning the link to your wishlist at the top of your page means it is one of the first things

people see when they are new to your page – possibly when they are looking for help – and serves as a gentle reminder that you need their support.

I did a survey on my rescue page regarding social media and the profile of the rescue. It was hard seeing a lot of rescues being criticised for what they posted, their tone or graphic images. I asked what people liked to see on the page, what they hated and what they would like to see more of. So here goes:-

1. **Keep it professional.** It's extremely easy to be drawn into personal debates or arguments on a page. There are a lot of keyboard warriors out there who are dying for the opportunity to make someone look bad. Monitor the comments and don't react to them personally. Allow followers to express their opinions but if they are argumentative then you have the power to remove or warn them. There will always be trolls and that is why the ban button was invented, but if you ban everyone who disagrees with you then you end up looking like you have something to hide. Remain polite and professional at all times – explain your position firmly and clearly and then move on.
2. **Photos and videos are very important.** They help tell the stories of the patients you are treating and let people see exactly what you are doing. Release videos are extremely popular as they show the successes of the rescue. Make sure the photos are clear – but be prepared for some negative comments. Graphic images tend to be something followers don't want to see – and in my personal opinion don't need to see. If you want to post one then put a warning in the post and add the photo to the comments section so people have a choice. Recently there was a huge argument on a rescue page about the photo of a dead bird and this resulted in the rescue losing followers.
3. **Fundraising is important to share but** followers said they would rather see one big fundraiser pinned to the top of the page. They also like raffles, auctions – something they can take part in and maybe win a prize. It is good to feel as if they are getting something back.
4. **Personal Information** – this got a mixed response. Some people like hearing about the daily trials of the people who run the rescue. They like seeing a face. Others said they didn't like too much personal

information, although if it somehow related to the rescue then they didn't mind. We had issues with a spiteful neighbour last year and the stress of dealing with them led to us briefly closing so that we could look after our own mental health. We were open about this on our page and followers said they appreciated that because it allowed them to understand why we were closing and what had led to the decision. Honesty is a must as people won't appreciate anything less.

5. **Don't use your page for your own personal agenda.** For example, there is no need to comment on politics on your page as this can alienate followers and cause them to leave. There was a local wildlife page which recently saw a decrease in popularity when it became apparent that the founder was less interested in wildlife than in activism. A lot of people who had joined the page to support local wildlife felt ambushed.
6. **Don't use your page to fight battles** – it looks unprofessional if one rescue or organisation uses their page to score points against another. This happens far more often than we would think. It can lead to rescues being harassed by followers of a different page and a lot of unnecessary time-wasting.

The important thing to remember is that social media is a fantastic tool if used carefully. Run the page like you would run a business page – be polite, courteous and professional at all times. Develop a thick skin to deal with the criticisms and trolls because they will inevitably appear on posts – people have differing views on a number of topics and this can lead to arguments if they aren't dealt with correctly.

I remember someone saying they liked our page because it was light, had a lot of photos and retained a positive, upbeat style. They also liked the colour scheme which is light and uses blues and yellows. Facebook is a purely visual tool so you need to remember that people are judging you based on aesthetics as well as content.

Social media should be a quick and simple way of sharing the work you do – but sometimes it can be a headache. I would recommend re-reading a post before hitting SHARE and if in doubt go for the Delete button instead.

JOINT STATEMENT ON CAPTIVE BREEDING OF HEDGEHOGS IN RESPONSE TO POPULATION DECLINE



Summary

The signatories to this statement do not support the use of captive breeding of European hedgehogs (*Erinaceus europaeus*) for release into the wild at this time. This position is based on concerns for the welfare of wild hedgehogs kept in captivity as breeding stock, the viability of captive bred animals released into the wild and the potential effects on wild populations of hedgehogs where captive bred animals are released. Releasing captive bred animals is likely to be ineffective and lead to suffering and mortality if the underlying problems causing population decline have not been identified and rectified. Captive breeding should only be considered a suitable strategy if the decline in the wild hedgehog population progresses despite other conservation actions and should only then be considered as a last resort measure, under carefully managed conditions.

Background

In July 2020, the Mammal Society published a report entitled “IUCN-compliant Red List assessment for Britain's terrestrial mammals”. This report classified the UK population of the European hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*) as ‘vulnerable’, citing “a decline of at least 46% over 13 years”.¹ This report consolidated concerns from a variety of sources about the suspected decline in the UK hedgehog population in recent decades, some of which have been widely reported in the media and attracted considerable interest from the general public.

In January 2017, the People’s Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) and British Hedgehog Preservation Society (BHPS) published a “Conservation strategy for hedgehogs in the United Kingdom (2015-2025)”. The report cites loss, reduced quality, and fragmentation of habitats as causes of hedgehog population decline supported by evidence, as well as other suggestions which require further investigation.² The strategy for hedgehog conservation makes recommendations related to further research leading towards habitat improvement but does not include the use of captive breeding for release as a strategy for British hedgehog conservation.

Although captive breeding and release programmes have been used in attempts to counteract population decline in wild animals, such programmes require very careful planning and organisation. They are often based in zoos and other animal collections, working in partnership with conservation and scientific organisations based in the geographical regions of origin of the animal species concerned and follow Guidelines published by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)³. Captive breeding programmes require genotyping of all participant animals for known polymorphic markers and the maintenance of a studbook, managed by a species co-ordinator to prevent inbreeding in order to maintain the genetic vigour of animals bred. The presence of hedgehog casualties, some of which are kept as

permanent captives if they are disabled, may seem to offer a source of breeding stock which could be used to breed young animals for release in an attempt to boost a wild population. However, this approach is misguided for a number of reasons (listed below).

Potential negative consequences of captive breeding for release

- Releasing captive bred animals is likely to be ineffective if the underlying problems causing population decline (such as habitat degradation) have not been identified and rectified⁴ – leading to suffering and mortality in released animals. IUCN guidelines state that habitat issues must be resolved before releases take place. Perpetrators might also be liable for prosecution for the ‘abandonment’ of animals.
- Captivity (of breeding stock) is stressful for animals that have previously lived wild, and so good animal welfare is difficult to achieve and maintain over prolonged periods.⁵
- Use of casualty animals as breeding stock may be selecting less ‘fit’ animals from the wild population from which to breed, and there is evidence of inadvertent selection for docile behaviours⁶ and adaptation to captive environments.⁷
- Captive breeding removes much of the pressure of ‘natural selection’ on the population, meaning that subsequent generations of animals quickly become less ‘fit for survival’⁸
- There is currently no evidence available regarding potential impacts of releasing captive-bred hedgehogs on local wild populations or *vice versa* (for example, related to releasing animals which have not previously been exposed to natural parasites).

The welfare of captive hedgehogs used for breeding would also be a concern. Minimising the period of captivity for wild hedgehogs is considered by BWRC to be an essential underpinning principle for promoting animal welfare in responsible wildlife rescue and

rehabilitation. Aside from the stress of captivity and the resulting restriction of natural behaviours, anecdotal evidence suggests that some disabled animals are physically less able to groom themselves thoroughly and can consequently suffer ecto-parasitism even when confined to a secure garden/enclosure. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that many UK rehabilitation centres are already at risk of overcrowding at certain times of the year. Keeping permanent captives for breeding or other reasons would reduce the available capacity for new patients, and increase the risk of disease transmission within facilities, exacerbated by the chronic stress caused by captivity itself. For these reasons the signatories do not support the permanent captivity of disabled hedgehogs.

On these grounds the signatories to this statement do not support the use of captive breeding and release of European hedgehogs as a conservation strategy at this time.

List of signatories as of 31st July 2021 (alphabetical order):

Blyth Wildlife Rescue, Newcastle upon Tyne

Brockworth Hedgehog Rescue, Gloucester

Brent lodge Wildlife Hospital, West Sussex

British Hedgehog Preservation Society (BHPS)

British Veterinary Zoological Society (BVZS)

British Wildlife Rehabilitation Council (BWRC)

Cuan Wildlife Rescue, Shropshire

East Sussex Wildlife Rescue & Ambulance Service (WRAS)

Folly Wildlife Rescue, Kent

Gower Bird Hospital, Swansea

Hamworthy Hedgehog Rescue

Hattie's Hedgehogs, Hertfordshire

Hedgehog Welfare, Lincolnshire

Hedgepigs, Nottinghamshire

Hitchin Hedgehog Care, Hertfordshire

Little Wiggly Snouts Hedgehog Rescue, Northamptonshire

London Colney Hedgehog Rescue, Hertfordshire

One Voice for Animals UK

People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES)

Peterborough Hedgehog Hotel

Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA)

Secret World Wildlife Rescue, Somerset

Severn Wildlife Rescue, Cardiff

South Essex Wildlife Hospital, Essex

South of Scotland Wildlife Hospital, Dumfries

The Happy Hedgehog Rescue, Hampshire

Timothy Partridge BVSc, MRCVS, Lead Vet at Vale Wildlife Hospital

Vale Wildlife Hospital and Rehabilitation Centre, Gloucestershire

Wadars Animal Rescue

Wild Hogs Hedgehog Rescue, Gloucestershire

Wildlife Aid Foundation

Wolds Hedgehog Rescue

Acknowledgements:

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