The Rehabilitator

SPRING 2023

ISSUE 84

+ BWRC NEWSLETTER+

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THE REHABILITATOR

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Word From the Chair

As we gear up for the start of ‘very busy times’, I’d like to welcome you all to the BWRC Spring 2023 edition of the ‘Rehabilitator’. As ever, I am grateful to all the contributors for their time and willingness to share their expertise, practises and perspectives on topics that are important to all our work. I very much hope that you find the contents and topics covered in this edition to be both useful and interesting.

It has been a busy few months at the BWRC with some big changes and exciting developments. We are sad to announce that Adam Grogan and Dr Lucy Brydon are stepping down as Trustees due to personal circumstances. I wish to thank both trustees for their time, support and input over many years. They will be very much missed, and we wish them both the very best for the future and both remain as lifelong members of BWRC.

I’d like to welcome three new Trustees to the BWRC, Dr Richard Edwards, Paul Reynolds and Jason Palmer. Each brings unique experience, vision and skills, and we are very fortunate to have them on board. I look forward to working with all the Trustees as we move forward.

I am pleased to report that we have produced in collaboration with a number of partner organisations, several codes of conduct to improve the welfare of Hedgehogs when used in media and live talks and shows. You will find links to these in the “New Code of Conduct” article in this newsletter and shortly on our website. Feel free to post them and circulate them widely. We have also produced a code of conduct on the use of images of animals in social media in wildlife rehabilitation settings. We very much appreciate the efforts of all our members in adhering to the principles set out in these position statements. We welcome any constructive feedback on these statements or if you have any areas to consider that you’d like to suggest (and assist with producing a new code) please do get in touch.

In order to assist with supporting the many strands involved in wildlife rehabilitation, the BWRC has also recently set up three new working groups. The three groups are Biosecurity; Regulation and Standards; and a new Veterinary working group. I am grateful to everyone who is contributing to setting up and leading these groups, and we very much hope to set up additional working groups on specific topics (e.g. 'ethics and welfare', 'membership', and 'training and CPD') over the next few months.

Finally, we are pleased to announce the launch of a new Initiative to provide greater opportunity for members to meet and attend online talks on different topics every two months. Our first online event will be held on the Thursday 20th April at 7.30pm and will include a talk by Dr Richard Edwards on 'Biosecurity with a focus on Avian Influenza'. There will be opportunity for members to ask questions and network after the talk. All members will have been sent an email with a link to register attendance. If you have not received an email about this event please do let us know. We look forward to seeing you there.

Very best wishes,

Dan

A Special Thank You

The BWRC would like to thank Adam Grogan and Lucy Brydon who have both recently stepped down as Trustees.

Adam has been instrumental in helping BWRC define its standards and drive the organisation forward over two decades, and his advice and knowledge will be greatly missed by all.

Lucy has contributed to the work of the BWRC over the past 4 years in her thankless role of secretary and also as one of the Trustees heavily involved in social media and event organisation.

We at the BWRC wish you both the very best for the future and look forward to keeping touch.

From all the BWRC Trustees

Dave Risley
The Loss of a Wildlife Champion

It is with great sadness that Folly Wildlife Rescue Trust announced the death of Dave Risley - Director, co-founder and husband to the late Annette Risley.

Annette and Dave founded Folly - together they devoted their lives to a cause that meant everything to them; helping our wildlife in need.

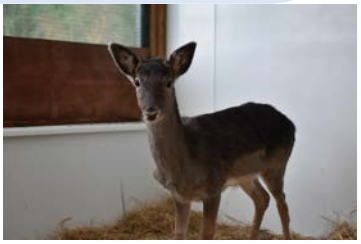
Dave's extensive knowledge of the animal world, great intelligence and reflective decision-making were just some of his amazing qualities. Combined with his compassion for nature and unmeasurable love and support for Annette, together they created something truly amazing.

Carrying on this tremendously proud legacy will now be our focus - we have an amazingly skilled and dedicated team of staff, amongst them include Annette and Dave's two daughters Liz and Hannah. Together, with the support of our wonderful volunteers and you our supporters, we will strive to continue making Folly a first-class wildlife rescue - what a proud place that is to be.

Liz Chandler
General Manager

David John Risley

13th August 1952 – 27th January 2023



NEW CODE OF CONDUCTS

BWRC recently produced a Code of Conduct for the use of images of wildlife casualties in social media posts. This Code explains and establishes eight key principles that we hope all members will adhere to. The purpose of the code is to ensure that the welfare of wildlife held in captivity is fully considered at all times when presenting images or any media footage, and also establishes the need for use of PPE and appropriate handling in any images or media released publicly. The Code can be found below and on our website under '**Resources'**, and '**BWRC Guidelines**' (www.bwrc.org.uk).

You will also all hopefully be aware of the two recent Codes of Conduct that were produced collaboratively by seven organisations including the BWRC. If you haven't yet had the chance to read them please do both statements are available on the BWRC website: . The key take home messages from these Codes are:

- **The BWRC and all the organisations who have signed this Code request that event organisers and hedgehog rehabilitators recognise that hedgehogs are not suitable for taking to shows or talks, and that to do so causes unnecessary suffering.**
- **The BWRC and the organisations who have signed this Code request that production teams around the UK recognise that hedgehogs are not suitable for bringing into studios, and that to do so causes unnecessary suffering. We also call on rehabilitators to commit to not supplying animals for display.**

It is important that we all work collectively to maintain the very best standards and professionalism in all aspects of our work; please do share these codes far and wide.

Hedgehogs at Shows & Talks

Hedgehogs on TV

Captive breeding of Hedgehogs

Releasing Rehabilitated Hedgehogs

BRITISH WILDLIFE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

Translocating Hedgehogs

Written by: Simon Allen, BWRC Trustee

"Humans have moved organisms between sites for their own purposes for millennia, and this has yielded benefits for human kind, but in some cases has led to disastrous impacts".

The above statement from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is especially true in the context of hedgehog translocation when you consider the negative ecological, welfare and financial impact of hedgehogs translocated from the mainland onto the Western Isles in Scotland. Although you might not expect such a disaster when moving hedgehogs from one county to another on the mainland, or collecting them together in large walled garden estates, but it may well be possible to create many mini ecological disasters with negative welfare implications and zero conservation value.

The aim of wildlife rehabilitation is to release the animal back into its original environment because releasing it elsewhere can have the following negative impact on:

A. Ecology

1. Increased competition for food and nesting habitat.
2. Displacement of resident hedgehogs and other species.
3. Introduction of novel diseases into the host population.
4. Predation by hedgehogs of other species of conservation concern.

B. Welfare

1. Habitat may not be able to support hedgehogs.
2. Predation.
3. Overcrowding in walled gardens or estates.
4. Increased levels of stress.
5. Increased road mortality and injury due to excessive movement away from translocation area in an effort to return to home range.

Adult hedgehogs should always be returned to the area they were found regardless of how suitable we believe that area to be. Experienced mature and even juvenile hedgehogs will be specialists at exploiting the habitat they have been born into. There are most likely urban specialists as well as countryside specialists and neither might do as well if translocated. They will have built up a cognitive map of their home range and the environment will be familiar to them, whether it is roads, traffic and pet animals or hedgerows, badgers and farmland, neither may do as well in each other's world.

Hand-reared hedgehogs with no life experience, especially those from heavily urbanised areas that have not had the benefit of the mums experience may be more difficult to place back without a suitable soft release site and post release monitoring. Nevertheless release as close to the original population as possible should be sought.

There may be circumstances when hedgehogs cannot be returned to their original capture site. The most common reason for this is that no information has been recorded from the finder. This can happen when animals are referred from veterinary practices or centres that do not have a policy on record keeping. Every effort should be made to locate the origin of the animal, even if it's just the general area, as at least the animal will be put back into the same population. If this is not possible and the animal has been given a clean bill of health it should be released into the same habitat type i.e. suburban or rural *et cetera*, as long as the area already has a known population of hedgehogs.

Translocating hedgehogs should be an absolute last resort when all other efforts of locating the origin of the animal have been exhausted. Moving hedgehogs to walled estates or gardens should never be done. We can't truly preserve a species by keeping it confined.

Wildlife Crime: A Brief Introduction

Written by: Sue Schwar BWRC Trustee

With very good reason there is a considerable amount of legislation that covers wildlife. It is extremely complicated, sometimes appears conflicting and contains a number of “exceptions”.

Some legislation is due for an update or needs additions, so consultations are constantly ongoing.

So what should the average law-abiding rehabber consider? It is advisable to familiarise yourself with three main acts of parliament.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (WCA) which includes the taking and killing of wildlife, and the Animal Welfare Act 2006 (AWA) which mainly covers animals “under the control of man”.

This is an unusual piece of legislation as it requires the defendant to prove their innocence not the accuser to prove guilt. For example, you have to be able to prove where you got a wild bird from not for the police/RSPCA to prove you took it from the wild. It is the possession of the bird/bat/badger that is the evidence. Record keeping is therefore imperative and some species must be returned to where they have originally come from, a frustration I’m sure many of us have experienced when for example a bat is handed in at a vet or other rescue, no finder details are obtained, it is then impossible to return the bat to its roost when ready for release.

The Veterinary surgeons act 1966 prevents an unqualified person from acting as a vet, for example performing surgery, using anaesthetics, making a diagnosis, prescribing, and dispensing prescription medications. The Veterinary Medicines Directorate are the government body who regulate the use of drugs.

Understanding the relevant law can be of huge benefit when providing advice. For example, section 1 of the WCA protects birds, their nests and their eggs from disturbance so the short answer to an enquiry is no, the house holder/ builder/roofer/tree surgeon can not remove a birds nest and bring it to you to rear the young. They have already done it? Nesting season runs from march till September, the law assumes a nest will be present so they should have done a survey checking for nest and attending adults first. It is well worth collecting the data on wildlife crime that you encounter and passing it to a conscientious police or wildlife crime officer, this can, in the long run alter the authorities response to wildlife offences.

There is much legislation that we should also consider when caring for wildlife.

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 is concerned with the correct keeping of animals.

This act of parliament imposes on keepers of animals that they take reasonable steps to ensure the welfare needs of the animals under their control are being met. This part of the act is known as section 9. The needs of an animal are commonly referred to as the “5 freedoms”, an animal’s needs are taken to include;

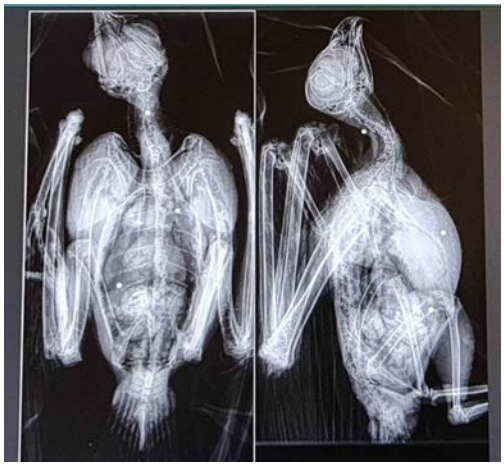
- Its need for a suitable environment.
- Its need for a suitable diet.
- Its need to exhibit normal behaviour patterns.
- Any need it has to be housed with or apart from other animals.
- Its need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

Not meeting these needs may lead to a further offence under section 4 of the AWA whereby consequently an animal has suffered, and this is termed “causing unnecessary suffering” which is a more serious offence.

It is also important to consider the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 at this point. Many species, particularly birds can only be kept in order to provide veterinary attention or temporary first aid with the intention of releasing them back to the wild. Some folk decide the casualty cannot return to the wild as it would not survive. Aside from being ethically divisive, in order to do this you must have a statement from a experienced vet, you will need to be able to prove you obtained it legally and have records appertaining to its condition and treatment.

This leads us back to section 9 of the AWA , where there have been numerous cases of rescues and individuals falling fowl of the law as they have not met the animals needs (therefore an offence under section 9) and in doing so caused the animal to suffer (offence under section 4) .

Certain species will also require a special license for keeping or rehabilitation usually obtained from Natural England for protected, endangered or invasive species.



So, lets look at a fairly common scenario. The police have been called to investigate a “Mary Miggins” who takes in pigeons. She has some young nestlings she is rearing, she has the details of the people who have handed them over to her and when, so she can prove she has not taken them from the wild illegally. Their nests are clean, however, Mary has been force feeding the birds tinned cat food that despite being M&S finest is not a suitable diet, and as a result of the incorrect nutrition the birds are deformed. Compounding this is the nests themselves. Mary has been saving quality street sweet tins and lining them with kitchen roll. As the birds’ feet can find no perches, scrabbling on the paper has caused their legs to become splayed. Mary has not taken the birds to a vet and has tried to tape the birds’ legs together herself which are now swollen.

The police officer takes the squabs to an avian vet who gave a statement detailing that, covered in cat food and being underweight, the birds are in poor condition. They have a calcium deficiency which has affected their development, unsuitable housing has also contributed to their deformed legs which will be painful for the birds particularly as they are swollen. Veterinary treatment has been withheld and not sought therefore the examining vet concludes the birds have been caused unnecessary suffering.

Mary might have got away with a warning under section 9 but these offences are now being taken into account as they have led to, and are supporting a section 4 offence. Mary could certainly be investigated as she is lending herself to prosecution. If prosecuted Mary could face a term of imprisonment although this is unlikely, but she could be fined and possibly banned from keeping animals.

Thanks mainly to the increase in social media stories which sometimes encourage bad welfare standards, it is easy to observe questionable and sometimes illegal wildlife husbandry. It is vital for us all to consider the influence we have on others wishing to ’have a go’ at looking after wildlife themselves and to maintain within our facilities be they large or small, professional and high welfare standards, in order to benefit the animals in our care and hasten their return to the wild.

Further details on the legislation mentioned and many others can be found on the BWRC website.

BRITISH WILDLIFE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

Avocet Case Study

Written by: Morgane Ristic Co-manager of the New Arc wildlife rescue centre in Aberdeenshire.

If there ever was a list of native species you are the least likely to see coming into care, the pied avocet would be ranked pretty high up. Yet not long before Christmas, we got reports of an injured avocet in a town centre just 45 minutes away from the centre. The case sounded suspicious as firstly the bird was not where it should be and secondly not behaving right, and with the ongoing concerns regarding avian influenza, we advised the member of the public to contact the RSPCA.

Within an hour, the RSPCA inspector who attended the call reached out to us after getting a hold of the bird. After a series of triage questions, we were reassured to hear that the bird was not showing any neurological symptoms or worrying signs of avian influenza and was in fact injured. We cautiously accepted to see the wader, although we remained convinced that the bird was unlikely to be saveable; after all, if anyone is ever able to get a hold of an avocet, something very serious must have happened, right?

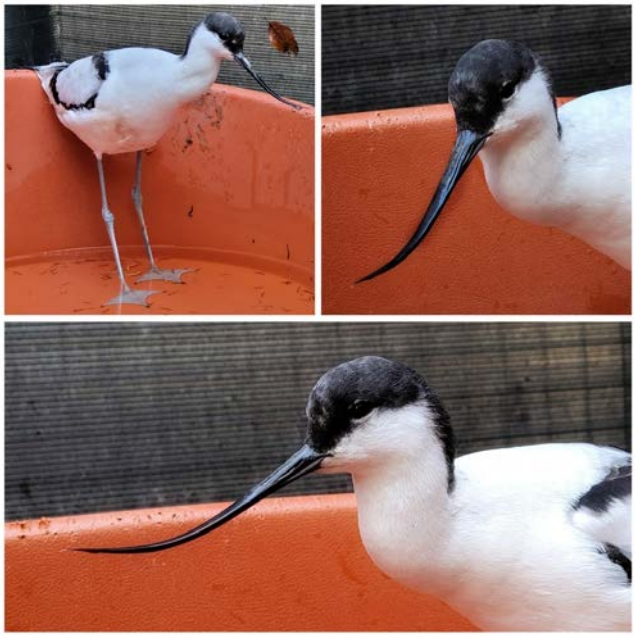
The assessment took place outdoors with PPE. We concluded that the bird was in good body condition and from the faeces it was clear that the avocet had been feeding not long before being found, but it was weak and dehydrated, and puncture wounds on its chest suggested a predation attempt, most likely by a peregrine. We suspect the avocet was then dropped nearer to where peregrines usually roost, which would explain why it ended up in an urban area.

The bird was placed into an isolated building in a large cage to accommodate its long and very sensitive beak. Treatment for the injuries and condition of the bird was administered and the bird was tubed electrolytes prior to being left to settle. The research phase began swiftly as we reached out to colleagues across the country, looking for any useful tips to keep the bird safe and stress-free during its recovery. Sadly, not many rehabbers had dealt with them before, so I began reading about the species from available literature regarding their habits, diet and behaviour. I became conscious of the challenges ahead such as appropriate food substitutes as well as the need to provide a large enough space for the bird to exhibit natural foraging technique. Videos would show them “sweep” left to right with their beaks as they scan the shallow brackish water, a technique unique to avocet which I would recommend looking up if you are curious.

After a course of electrolytes over 15 hours, the bird was looking much brighter, and my new priority was to get him feeding. I sprinkled some bloodworms and krill into a tray of water to begin with, but the bird had seemingly no interest. The tubing became less and less appropriate as the bird regained strength, so I began setting up an outdoor enclosure for it. All sides were screened with plastic correx sheets to prevent its beak from getting injured, and rubber playmats were used to cover the concrete floor to keep the bird's feet clean and healthy. A large plastic dog bed filled with water was given and in addition to the bloodworms and krill, I added some mealworms and waxworms to the water.

Mealworms were a success and from this point onward the Avocet (nicknamed Avocado…) started to "sweep and feed", and its weight went up day by day until it reached a natural plateau. A complication arose when the bird became waterlogged after a rainy day: it became apparent that the oiliness of the krill, combined with the habit of the bird to wipe its beak on its chest as it forages, had contaminated its feathers. A gentle wash with washing up liquid and warm water was needed to remove any contaminant. As soon as the bird was dry, it was moved back outdoors again and no more krill was given in order to keep the water oil free, and a large 1mx1m, 15cm deep tray of water was made available alongside the dog bed containing the food to reduce the risk of feather contamination by food. "Avocado" was often seen bathing, preening and feeding but remained in care whilst the extensive bruising on its chest settled and its feathers could repel water again. Just 9 days after being admitted, the bird was fit, healthy, waterproof and became more vocal and restless. After a flight test and a last thorough physical check after being ringed by the British Trust for Ornithology, we agreed the bird was ready to be returned to the local wetland not far from where it had originally been found.

The release went at as well as it could have done. The avocet stepped out of the carrier and walked through the shallow waters for a few minutes, then took off and flew at speed whilst the local black headed gulls gave it a chase. It was spotted later that day preening amongst the gulls but disappeared the following day as we suspected it would do. The marshes was known to be a stopping point for avocets, most of them soon making their way to Farlington Marshes which is just a short flight away and host to a well-established avocet population.



I feel very privileged to have been involved in the rehabilitation of such an unusual species as this might be the only avocet I ever get to rehabilitate and see through to release. Let's hope this individual keeps out of trouble!

New Online Members Events 2023

The British Wildlife Rehabilitation Council is pleased to announce a new series of online talks and meetings for all current members that will take place every two months on ZOOM. These events will typically include a talk lasting approximately 30 minutes followed by an open discussion and networking opportunities.

Our very first event will take place on Thursday 20th April between 7.30pm and 8.30pm. The session will include a short presentation by Dan Forman (Chair) followed by a presentation from one of our new Trustees, Richard Edwards, entitled “Biosecurity for rehabilitation with particular reference to Avian Influenza”. We will then open up the room to discussion on this topic and any other that members wish to raise. We very much look forward to seeing you if you are able to join us. If you have any questions or queries about this event please contact us at this email address: secretary@bwrc.org.uk.

How can I sign up to this event?

Please sign up to our first online event by completing the Eventbrite form that can be accessed below:

https://www.eventbrite.com/e/bwrc-members-event-20th-april-2023-tickets-605066679727?lang=en-us&locale=en_US&status=30&internal_ref=social&view=listing

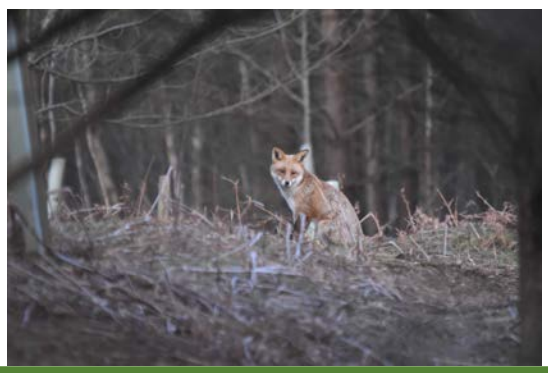
The Wildlife Euthanasia Dilemma

Written by: Richard Edwards MRCVS, Trustee BWRC

Our first reaction as an animal lover to any animal that is ill or distressed is to try and help make them better. For us humans, if we are sick or ill, there is no question that we should just seek medical attention, and someone will do everything they possibly can to make us better. We may be subjected to lots of tests and procedures, given lots of drugs and possibly even have major surgery, but this is where there are some very significant differences between human and wildlife treatments. For starters, humans can make an informed decision to accept or decline treatment once that treatment has been explained to them. Animals don't have that choice. With pet animals, their owners can make that choice. With wildlife, it is their wildlife carers that make that choice. Secondly, there is an NHS for humans to cover the often-considerable cost of treatment. For pets, there may be insurance to help pay for treatments - although frequently, finances do become limiting for pet owners. For wildlife, there is nothing other than the goodwill of wildlife carers and vets working on terribly limited budgets who must decide where their time, money and efforts are best spent. And just because something might be technically possible, or even financially possible, it doesn't mean that it is automatically the right thing to do for that animal, ethically or morally.

The primary aim of all wildlife work must be to return those wild animals back to the wild. It is a legal requirement that wildlife can only be released back to the wild if it is in a fit state to be able to survive. If an animal cannot be returned to the wild (for example if a wing on a bird is so damaged as to require amputation), is it fair to keep that animal in captivity for the rest of its life? And even if it was, then what do we do about the financial and care resources that must be diverted to looking after that animal in captivity which would otherwise be used to treat another wildlife victim that could be returned to the wild?

The ethics of keeping a previously wild animal in captivity is a whole dilemma in itself – not to mention the legal issues! Different species seem to tolerate captivity better than others, but it must always be remembered that all wild animals are exactly that – wild! They may tolerate captivity, but they will not be as happy as they would have been in the wild. How can we measure stress in wild animals that have evolved to hide signs of weakness from predators? If we have a captive wild animal used to living in a social group, think how it might feel if it was incarcerated in what is effectively solitary confinement in an alien world? Is that fair, or right? How do you decide?



Of course, the alternative to all of this is euthanasia. Statistically, less than 35% of all wildlife presented to vets and wildlife organisations is suitable for release and either dies or is euthanased. That is 65% of all wildlife presented that dies! Shocking? Possibly, but when you consider that a vet's primary and over-riding obligation is to prevent unnecessary suffering, perhaps it may not be quite so surprising

Wildlife presented to vets and wildlife hospitals must have something seriously wrong with them to have ended up in captivity in the first place. It is incredibly difficult to catch any form of wildlife when they are fit and healthy. The only time we get sufficiently close to them to capture them is when they are sick or injured. This could be due to natural factors (such as disease or natural predators) or it could be due to man's influence (for example, Road Traffic Collisions, pollution, traps, strimmer injuries etc.). There is clearly a strong argument to intervene as far as possible in animals that have been made sick or injured, directly or indirectly, by human actions. However, there can also be a question as to whether we should intervene for wildlife that has been subject to natural processes. Take a pigeon that is brought in with so-called "canker" – this is a common protozoan parasite, called Trichomonas, that affects their mouths and will eventually kill them. We can cure that infection with a cheap drug called metronidazole. However, the metronidazole does not confer any longer-term resistance to that bird, so once it is released, it can pick up the infection all over again and go on to die a slow, lingering death from starvation if it is not lucky enough to be found and brought in for another session of treatment. So, the question is, in such cases, would it be better to euthanase these canker susceptible birds when they are first presented to prevent almost inevitable (but out of human sight) suffering later?

These are the sort of dilemmas we face daily. Decisions about wildlife are not cut and dry and lots of factors need to be considered during the decision-making process as to whether to treat or not to treat.

Understandably, many people have great difficulty coming to terms with decisions to euthanase wildlife. It is sometimes very hard to see beyond the cute, cuddly bundle of fluff, fur or feathers to determine that subjecting them to significant treatment regimes and procedures may not be in their best long-term interests and may in fact cause them unnecessary suffering.

Good as we may be, vets cannot cure everything! Even doctors, with their huge NHS resources, cannot cure every human! Humans do not have a choice to avoid suffering sometimes. With animals, however, euthanasia is that option, but any such decision to euthanase carries a huge responsibility to make sure it is the right thing to do having considered ALL the circumstances surrounding that specific case.

No one wants to have to end the life of an animal, but vets often call euthanasia a "last service" because that is exactly what it is. It is the last service we can perform for an animal (pet or wildlife) to prevent it from having to endure unnecessary suffering. We too need to be able to sleep at night knowing we have done the right thing.

Chemical Euthanasia in a Wildlife Centre

Written by: Chris Riddington, Trustee BWRC

Euthanasia is an important part of wildlife rehabilitation. With this comes huge responsibility both morally and legally. Whilst most rescues rely on veterinary practices to carry out euthanasia, some rescues (working very closely with their veterinary surgeon) have the ability to euthanise on site following carefully worded Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). For a lay person, having the ability to carry out chemical euthanasia comes with strict rules and regulations.

Whilst euthanasia in itself, is not an act of veterinary surgery, some of the methods are. Also, the drugs involved in chemical euthanasia (usually pentobarbitone) are POM-V and can only be prescribed by your veterinary surgeon in person, over the telephone/video, or in carefully worded SOPs. There are many complex guidelines and laws to follow when it comes to ending the life of an animal.

Ownership- it's important to have the animal signed over to the practice to avoid any uncertainty with ownership of the casualty going forward, and avoiding issues with the finder when it comes to euthanasia.

Drugs - drugs used for chemical euthanasia are classed in Schedule 3 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001 and 'Controlled'. This means that whilst not as strict as Schedule 1 and 2, the RCVS recommend that they are kept in a controlled drug cabinet for safety reasons. Your veterinary surgeon is likely to insist on this, alongside limited access to the drug by staff members and careful recording of all volumes of the drug supplied and used.

Route of administration - the only routes available to a lay person are:

- **Intraperitoneal or intracoelomic**
- **Intrahepatic or intrarenal**

IMPORTANT TO NOTE:

- **Intravenous (IV) administration is a Schedule 3 procedure under the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, it can only be carried out by a vet or vet nurse (working under the direction or supervision of the vet caring for the animal). This route cannot be used by a lay person or delegated to a lay person – this would be illegal, and the user could face prosecution and the vet be reported to the RCVS.**
- **Intracardiac injection – should never be used unless the animal is unconscious, deeply sedated or anaesthetised.**

Sedation is preferred first, before all methods of euthanasia, with the exception of IV administration by a vet in an animal that can easily be restrained.

It's crucially important to remember the weight of this responsibility. Whilst we may understand we are doing what is best for the animal, you are ending a life and even the hardest of vets feel it. It's a final decision and there is no going back. That is why SOPs, safeguards and open and honest communication is a must.

Further advice: **Changes to RCVS Guidance**
The RCVS has recently consulted on 'under care' and 24/7 cover and has produced new guidance for veterinary surgeons. This is available at: https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/news/rcvs-council-approves-new-guidance-on-under-care-and-247-cover/

The new guidance, which also includes restriction around prescribing of antimicrobials, is likely to come into effect in September 2023. The guidance includes restrictions on the prescription of controlled drugs. Under the new guidance, when prescribing controlled drugs to an animal in the first instance, veterinary surgeons will have to carry out a physical examination in all but exceptional circumstances, and be prepared to justify their decision when no physical examination has taken place. This means that all animals will need to be, or have been examined by a vet before chemical euthanasia takes place.

Further information can be found within the following links:

- Clinical assessment: https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/advice-and-guidance/code-of-professional-conduct-for-veterinary-surgeons/supporting-guidance/veterinary-medicines/

- https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/advice-and-guidance/code-of-professional-conduct-for-veterinary-surgeons/supporting-guidance/treatment-of-animals-by-unqualified-persons/

- https://www.bornfree.org.uk/resources-for-vets

- British Veterinary Zoological Society (BVZS): www.bvzs.org.uk
- Veterinary Defence Society (VDS): www.thevds.co.uk

- Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RVCS): www.RCVS.org.uk

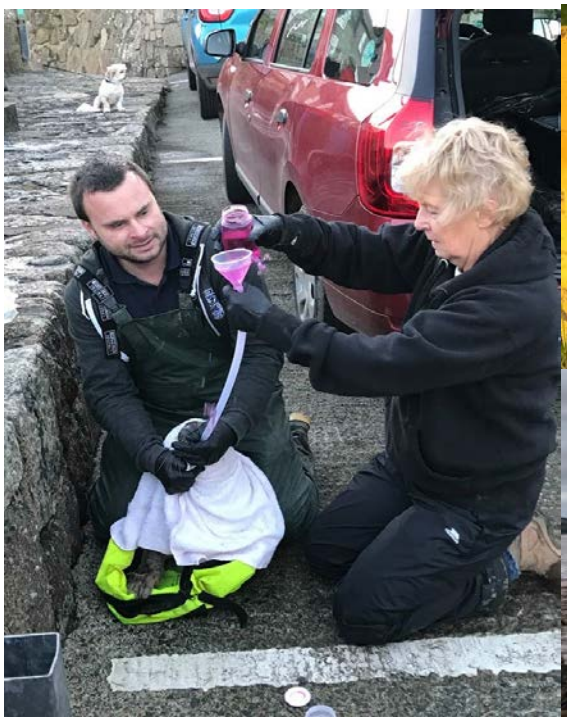
British Divers Marine Life Rescue

Written by: Dan Jarvis, Director of Welfare and Conservation BDMLR

British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR) is a frontline response charity with volunteer Medics trained in the health assessment, first aid and rescue techniques for marine mammals, turtles and sharks in distress around the coastline of the UK. A 24-hour hotline operated by staff and volunteers assess each incoming call and can receive photos and videos from callers to help with an initial assessment of the animal and its circumstances. Where required, hotline coordinators will then dispatch the medics via a mass text callout system to request assistance. In 2021 the charity received over 3200 calls, the most in its entire history.

BDMLR was formed back in 1988 by a group of divers when a disease called Phocine Distemper Virus (similar to the canine variety) began an epidemic across northern Europe and spreading up the east coast of the UK. Common seals, one of the two native seal species in the country, were heavily affected with thousands of casualties coming ashore over a period of months. Nothing like this had happened previously, and so local and regional rescue and rehabilitation resources were quickly overwhelmed. This group of divers came forward and worked alongside the RSPCA to retrieve patients from the beach and transport them for care at their wildlife hospital in Norfolk.

PDV soon disappeared, but the team were keen to continue working for marine mammal welfare causes and over the following years attended the major oil spills from the ‘Braer’ in Shetland in 1993 and the ‘Sea Empress’ in south Wales in 1996, once again assisting with mass casualty retrieval alongside other rescue organisations. As well as this they teamed up with the Born Free Foundation to rehabilitate and release the last captive bottlenose dolphins in the UK back into the wild in the Caribbean too.



During this time, the group were increasingly being contacted about individual seals around the coast that may need help, as well as stranded cetaceans. In 1995 an orca live stranded at Pegwell Bay, Kent, and was attended by the team and the emergency services. The adult female animal was tended to until the incoming tide re-floated her, but sadly she was found dead nearby the next day. Determined to learn more around the rescue of stranded cetaceans, they reached out to colleagues at Project Jonah in New Zealand, who gladly shared their experience, techniques and equipment. In August 1997, the first Marine Mammal Medic course in the UK was held in Caithness and started BDMLR along the path to become what it is today.

Presently, the charity has over 2500 trained volunteer Medics around the UK prepared to respond when a marine animal needs help. Around 35 courses for members of the public to join on to are held around the country annually and are open to anyone aged over 18 – note you do not need to be a diver, as most of the activity takes place on land rather than in the sea. More information on the training courses can be found on the BDMLR website.

Over 90% of the calls that come into the hotline are regarding seals, usually young pups in the first few days or weeks of their life that may have variously been prematurely separated from their mother; injured by other seals, dogs or storms; developed infections; are exhausted and malnourished; or entangled in marine litter. Increasingly, the reasons why seals need help is due to human factors. The human population is growing and lots more people use the coast for a diversifying range of activities, from swimming and paddleboarding to boating and drone flying. Disturbance is chronically high at many seal haul out sites around the country, with recent research by Cornwall Seal Group Research Trust demonstrating that some sites are affected by a disturbance incident on average every 14 minutes every day through the main summer holidays. This is not sustainable and the near-constant stress, waste of energy, risk of injury as they stampede to the sea to escape to safety and separation of pups is resulting in more casualties, and potential mortalities.

It is not just the obvious human activity that creates problems. Human-induced climate change has resulted in the increasing frequency and severity of storms in autumn and winter, mainly affecting grey seals as this coincides with their pupping period. In 2017 Storm Brian and ex-Hurricane Ophelia struck southwest England and Wales within a few days of each other at the height of the pupping season in October, resulting in over 70% of pups being lost overnight at several sites. BDMLR, the RSPCA and Cornish Seal Sanctuary were kept busy in the aftermath rescuing survivors in truly horrendous circumstances that continued through until February of the following year as storm after storm funnelled in by the jet stream repeatedly devastated the coast and was the worst rescue season on record for the region, with makeshift holding facilities for seals having to be created to cope with the sheer amount of weak and exhausted pups washing up by the day, if not the hour.

Although this may seem an isolated incident of probably a one in 50- or 100-year event, this was sadly not the case. In November 2021 Storm Arwen thundered into the east coast of Scotland and northeast England, once again during the peak of grey seal pupping. The major seal pupping site at St Abbs Nature Reserve lost over 800 pups overnight and the beaches for days afterwards were left knee deep in the dead. Hundreds of survivors again were responded to by BDMLR volunteers, once again under terrible circumstances as all rehabilitation centres in the country were full, with no other options available Pups that were clearly in no position to survive without long term help were euthanased on welfare grounds to prevent further suffering.

This leads on to one of the current major challenges that BDMLR and the wider national network of seal rescue and rehabilitation face in the present, as the number of seal casualties has increased largely due to human activity, the number of facilities and pens available for seals has actually decreased in recent years, putting a huge amount of pressure on rehab centres to take in more and to modify their protocols to speed up the rehabilitation process, but also on frontline responders and hotline coordinators with ensuring very accurate health assessment and tough decision making on what can come in and what can stay out.

BDMLR has built its own temporary holding hospital and training centre in Cornwall in the last two years that is manned almost entirely by volunteers with a staff veterinarian, which has taken in over 100 patients between September 2022 and March 2023 as the other two rehabilitation centres in the southwest were full for much of the winter. Without it, that would have been 100 more seals that would have had nowhere else to go. Other areas desperate for help include East Anglia, north Scotland, Wales (which has only one small centre for the entire country) and Northumberland.

BDMLR would be keen to work with centres who could assist with seal rehabilitation and can provide training via its Cornwall hospital and other teaching materials – but this is not done lightly. Seals are highly specialised animals to rehabilitate in terms of handling and facilities, can be time-intensive and require a lot of physical effort to work with, and as such require a significant investment of people's time, funds and space to rehabilitate appropriately, which should not be underestimated. The Cornwall Hospital has ten pens for seals, but getting to that level has taken over ten years from starting small in modified outbuildings and training up a specific skilled volunteer team to gradually increase the capacity and ability to care for the animals properly first and foremost.

When it comes to cetacean live strandings things are more black and white. Rehabilitation is not an option in the UK due to lack of suitable facilities, funding, staffing, potential patients and patients that would then survive through to release. A study of the large well-funded and well-staffed centres in the USA showed that in some, only 2% of admissions survived to be released back out to the wild. Some are kept in captivity for the rest of their life, which raises serious moral and ethical dilemmas about whether this is appropriate for a highly intelligent, social species that can live for over 50 years. The UK sees far less strandings than these centres deal with each year, and so one has to wonder if such a facility in this country would have any successes over the course of a decade.

When dealing with live stranded cetaceans on the beach, the options available are for re-floatation back into the sea, or euthanasia on welfare grounds. Veterinarians are always involved with decision making in these cases as it is critical to get it right. There are many good reasons why an individual might strand, such as infection, injury, malnourishment, old age or simply navigational error. Animals falling into the latter category are often otherwise healthy and are therefore the better candidates for re-floatation, but simply shoving it back into the sea as quickly as possible without proper assessment, first aid or understanding can often result in failure.

Cetaceans live entirely without bearing their own bodyweight, so when stranded their organs, muscles and circulatory system are put under pressure. This can build up toxins and cause breathing difficulties that if not corrected in time can lead to damage and death. Stress is also a huge factor. Medics are trained to work carefully and calmly around the animal while providing assessment and first aid while making it more comfortable. If deemed suitable for re-floatation then it is taken out and supported while it is allowed time to recover properly and giving it the best chance of getting out first time. Sadly there have been many cases where well meaning people have tried to help but made matters worse, including re-floating critically injured animals with no hope of survival, repeatedly re-floating animals that are clearly weak and dying, and even on occasion pouring water into the blowhole (nostril) to fill the lungs, believing them to be like fish and not an air breathing mammal.

Marine mammals can be highly emotive animals for people to encounter and understandably people who find them in distress will want to help. The best thing to do first is ring the BDMLR hotline (01825 765546) for expert advice and what can and can't be done, as well as enabling nearby Medics and equipment to be mobilised quickly if needed. A list of key advice for members of the public can be found on the BDMLR website (www.bdmlr.org.uk) for both seals and cetaceans. Education as always is key to being able to do the right thing.

BDMLR has over 35 years of its own experience building a response network from scratch, collaborating with colleagues around the world to share knowledge and new techniques and is generally regarded as being amongst the forefront of such organisations globally. This experience is willingly shared and over the years BDMLR has helped train and set up networks in other countries such as Canada, Malta, Kenya, Italy, Ireland, the Falkland Islands, Kazakhstan, Gibraltar and more. It also participates in a number of research and conservation projects, including those aimed at reducing marine wildlife disturbance through the promotion of best practice codes of conduct, which are freely available online for anyone to use to help keep their impact on our special wildlife to an absolute minimum. The more we can help keep them stay safe and healthy, the less we will be needed to help them in the first place.

Footprint Identification Technology (FIT): A non-invasive post release monitoring tool.

Written by: Stacey Fletcher, BSc (Hons)

How is success measured for a rehabilitated casualty in the UK? They were simply rehabilitated and released? They survived a minimum duration? Or they go on to produce offspring?

These are just some of the questions that a Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre (WRC) should be striving to answer in order to ensure they are carrying out evidence-based decision making. Post-release monitoring is a vital element of wildlife rehabilitation, however, finding cost-effective, low maintenance, and non-invasive monitoring methods is an important challenge to combat. For more than six years of working in the industry the commitment given to acquiring post-release data has been limited, and with very few peer-reviewed studies on post-rehab survival, WRCs could be unknowingly compromising welfare by not investigating the long-term outcomes of their casualties.

Last year I was given the opportunity to collaborate with the non-profit organisation *WildTrack.* Founded by conservation biologist Sky Alibhai & veterinarian Zoe Jewell, *WildTrack* uses footprint Morphometrics, and Artificial Intelligence as a way to identify and monitor individuals including sex and age-class of endangered species. Through their award-winning Footprint Identification Technology (FIT) *WildTrack* have developed accurate algorithms for >40 endangered species including the Eurasian Otter (*Lutra lutra),* with their priority being to create accessible monitoring techniques that promote welfare whilst providing accurate data

My work with *WildTrack* has involved developing an algorithm for the Eurasian beaver *(Castor fiber)* & also looking into its application for the European badger (*Meles mele).* The beaver is a species that has very little sexual dimorphism, is notoriously difficult to monitor, and may be a species that WRC's will see entering their centres in the future.

Using statistical analysis of footprint shape and measurements, FIT relies on a sound baseline dataset of fine-grained resolution images from known individuals, including sex and age-class provided by captive con-specifics, these can then determine accuracy of each species-specific algorithm. Whilst AI is the first step of analysis within FIT, supported by lower-grade and less defined images, AI is able to identify species and provide individual ID filtering.

The methodology of collecting baseline prints varies depending on species, but the primary target is to obtain 6 to 8 prints of the same foot i.e., right hind foot, from a minimum of 10 known individuals, taking into consideration the more prints collated the more accurate the algorithm. The use of sand, mud & even air clay trails are used to improve definition of prints, minimising the length of time needed from each individual. WRCs are in a unique position in that they could greatly contribute to the collection of data for a variety of species, enabling *WildTrack* to develop a robust, quality algorithm, and as such supporting WRCs use of the *WildTrack* Application to post-release monitor their own casualties simply through taking a photo of a footprint.

This was the first study in the UK to use *WildTrack's* technology focusing on a UK native species, generating an opportunity to investigate its use with other important native species that are un-distinguishable in individual morphology, and are in need of vital population data such as the European badger and European Hedgehog. Being able to accurately and non-invasively monitor species populations would greatly improve and inform the UK's recent declarations to protect 30% of UK land in order to enhance biodiversity.

Further Reading:

https://www.wildtrack.org/our-work/fit-technology
https://www.wildtrack.org/our-work/publications

WildTrack AI

Their App is now available to download on Android & iOS

We Need to Hear From You

Membership Survey

Since our initial launch in 1987 the BWRC has evolved, although we still aim to advance the education of the public in respect of the care and welfare of sick, injured and abandoned wild animals. In order to ensure we support our members as effectively as possible we would like to know more about your organisation and the valuable work that you do. To this end we would be grateful if you were able to complete this survey (https://forms.office.com/e/437EQQ4y3c).

We have kept this survey as short as possible, whilst also trying to gain as much benefit from this unique opportunity as we can. It should take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. The majority of the questions are closed questions although there are several opportunities to provide more detail and/or insight if you wish.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. We believe there are no known risks associated with this research study. To the best of our ability your individual answers will remain confidential and no individual or facility will be named in any publication. All data will be stored securely and no personal data will be collected during the survey.

If you have any questions regarding this questionnaire please contact us at: secretary@bwrc.org.uk.

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