SUMMER 2025

The Rehabilitator

The British Wildlife Rehabilitation Council Newsletter

No. 89



Welcome to our brand new look Newsletter!

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A word from the Chair

Dear Members,

I am honoured to write to you for the first time as the new Chair of the British Wildlife Rehabilitation Council (BWRC). It's a privilege to serve such a knowledgeable, passionate, and hardworking community, and I look forward to working with you all to continue raising the standard of wildlife rehabilitation in the UK.
I would like to thank our outgoing Chair, Dan Forman, for his hard work during his time leading the organisation, and personally for his support during my time as Deputy Chair. We all wish Dan well and hope to see him again soon!

As my inaugural word to our membership, I want to say thank you to every one of you for your continued commitment to protecting the welfare of wildlife casualties throughout this year. Rescuing and rehabilitating wildlife is one of the most difficult, emotionally and physically draining roles out there. Although it is also my profession and paid job, I know that many of you do this voluntarily, alongside full-time work and family responsibilities. That deserves special recognition from all of us here at BWRC.

I would also like to extend my praise to the Welsh Government, who have taken a proactive, phased approach towards implementing a national model for the regulation of animal welfare establishments, set to include wildlife rescues and sanctuaries. This follows the example of the Scottish Government, and we are pleased to see growing pressure for England to follow suit.

At BWRC, we have long advocated for the introduction of a licencing framework for our sector. Done right, it can serve as a key tool to protect wildlife welfare and support consistency and professionalism across the UK. Many of you will now be familiar with our 10 Principles for Wildlife Rehabilitation, which were in part shaped by the requirements of Animal Welfare Establishment licencing schemes already in place in Scotland and Wales. While change can be daunting, especially when resources are already stretched, I want to reassure members that if you are working in line with our 10 principles, you are well placed to meet any future licencing requirements with confidence.

I also hope that you have seen, and taken part in, the recent wildlife rehabilitators' survey circulated by the RSPCA. As one of the UK's most established animal welfare organisations, the RSPCA's approach to wildlife rescue can have significant impact across our sector. Supporting and informing this process ensures that our collective knowledge and challenges are heard and taken into account as policy and practice evolve.

As Chair, my key focus will be to ensure BWRC continues to advocate for wildlife welfare and to represent your voices at national level, in working groups, policy consultations, and cross-sector discussions. I also want to ensure that members get real value from their membership: access to learning, collaboration, professional development, and the chance to help shape the future of our field.

Together, we are the professional community for wildlife rehabilitation in the UK. I look forward to building a stronger, more visible sector with you, one that is unified by compassion, expertise, and the drive to give every wildlife casualty the standard of care it deserves.

With best wishes,

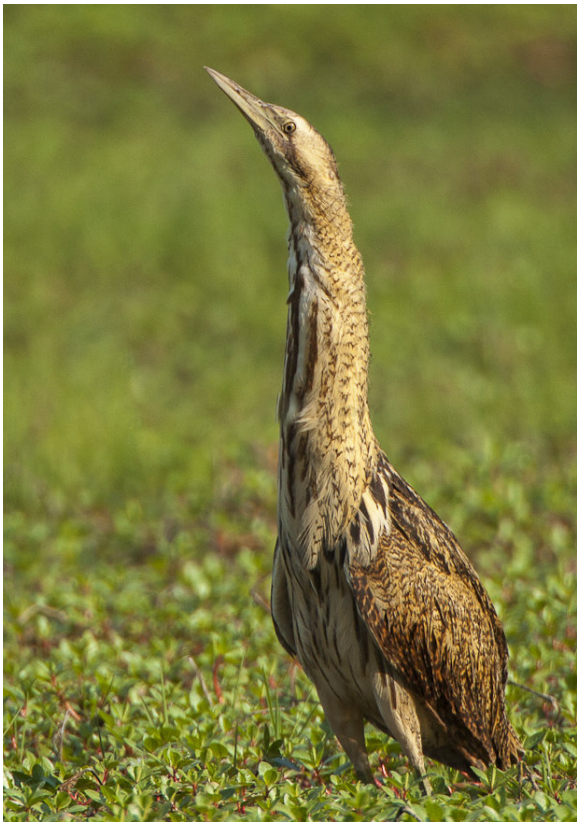
Paul Reynolds

RSPCA Wildlife Rehabilitation Survey

RSPCA.







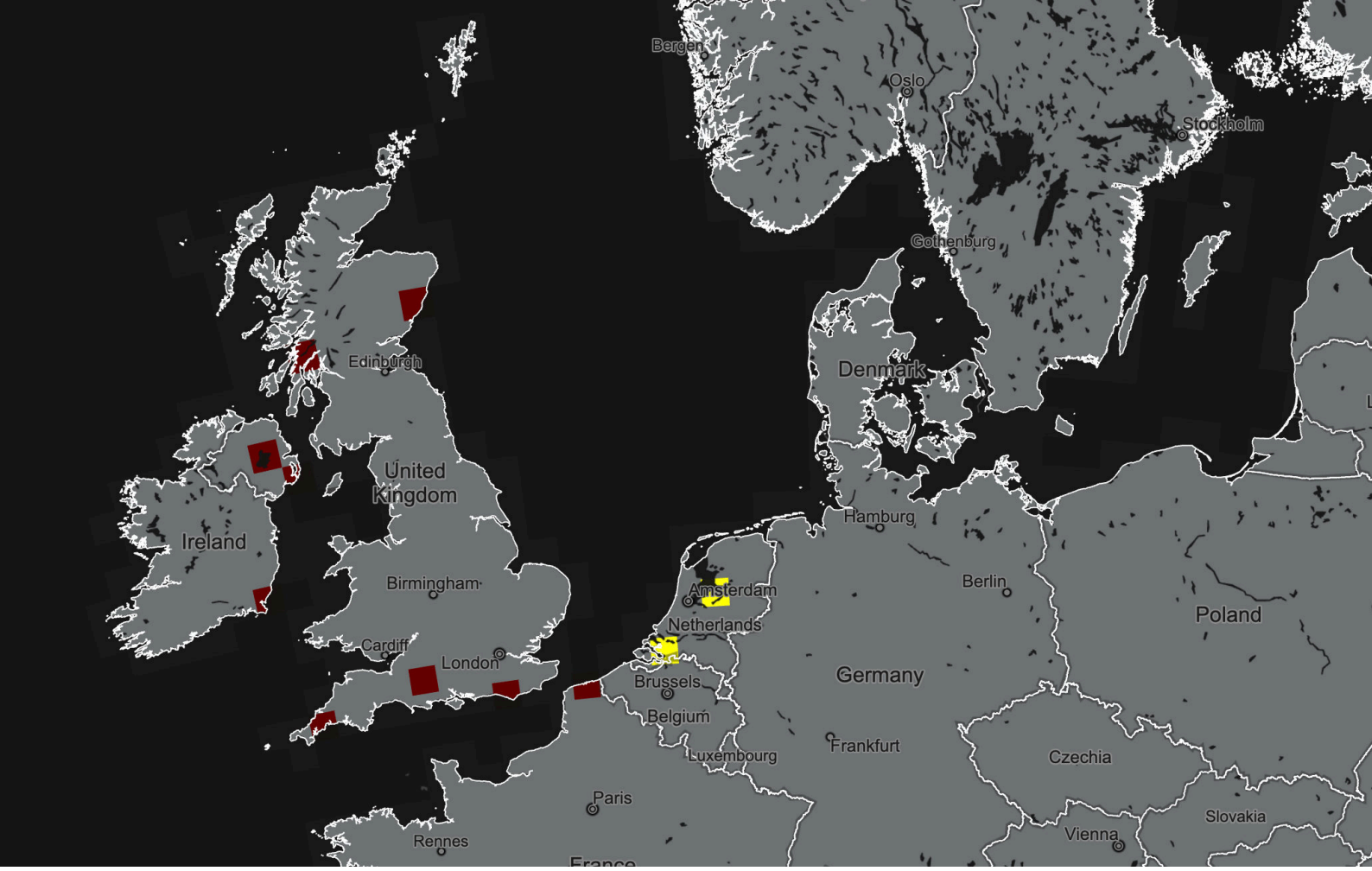
The RSPCA is inviting individuals and organisations involved in wildlife rehabilitation to take part in a new survey aimed at improving standards and ensuring the best possible care for wild animals.

The survey includes 20 questions and takes around 10 minutes to complete. Your feedback will help shape future practices and support the RSPCA's mission to enhance wildlife welfare.

Deadline: Friday, 12th September

Take the Survey

If you haven't already, please take the survey now: **Click or scan the QR Code**



Bird Flu Radar

Predicted Outbreaks Interactive Map

As avian influenza (bird flu) continues to pose challenges for wildlife populations across the UK, staying informed is crucial for protecting both wild birds and the ecosystems they inhabit. The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has developed an innovative resource called the Bird Flu Radar to provide real-time insights into outbreaks across Europe.

This user-friendly online tool tracks the spread of avian influenza, delivering updated information on affected regions, species, and risk levels. For wildlife rehabilitators, the Bird Flu Radar can be an invaluable asset, helping...

- **Identify high-risk zones to adjust your**
- **operations accordingly.**
- **Prepare for potential cases in your area by**
- **monitoring outbreak trends.**
- **Access reliable data to support public**
- **awareness and advocacy efforts.**

By leveraging this tool, wildlife rehabilitators can enhance their capacity to respond swiftly and safeguard the health of the birds in their care.

VISIT THE MAP HERE

(https://app.bto.org/mmt/avian_influenza_map/avian_influenza_map.jsp)

Handling the Rush: Lessons from a U.S. Wildlife Rehabilitator on Managing Migration-Related Casualties

SARA DOLLEN - ANIMAL CARE TECHNICIAN - CITY WILDLIFE INC.

An Introduction to American Migration & City Wildlife Inc.

Each year a combined estimate of 14 billion birds migrate through U.S. airspace (Dokter et al., 2018), navigating vast distances brimming with anthropogenic hazards. One of the deadliest, responsible for up to one billion bird deaths annually in the U.S., is collisions with human structures such as windows, walls, and communication towers (Loss et al., 2014). With one in four breeding adult birds in the U.S. lost since 1970 (Rosenberg et al., 2019), these are casualties North American migratory birds cannot afford.

American wildlife rehabilitators manage a large influx of collision reports and admissions during peak migration periods, straining limited resources. City Wildlife Inc., a rehabilitation center located in Washington, D.C., cares for approximately 1,800 patients annually, nearly 20 percent of which are birds who collide with windows or buildings. Many arrive during peak migration periods for the Mid-Atlantic region — approximately April to May and September to October. City Wildlife may receive over 20 collision victims in a single day during these high traffic periods, in addition to other seasonal influxes such as infant Eastern Gray Squirrels. Hundreds more collision deaths are recorded annually by our volunteer-run collision monitoring program, Lights Out DC (LODC).

Why window strikes happen

The primary cause of window strikes is transparency or reflectiveness of glass. Other features like plants behind or in front of glass and walls that converge toward glass increase the likelihood of collisions. Furthermore, light pollution is a potent attractant towards hazardous architecture as it traps, disorients, and exhausts birds migrating at night. More than 80 percent of North American birds migrate at night (Dokter et al., 2018). aspediciis aut hitem quat eossimu stiunto magnihicte magnatiam lit parum quidistores.



A Common Yellowthroat sits in front of a window after a window strike. *Photo by Lights Out DC*



A high-collision building in Washington, D.C. with many dangerous features for birds including large expanses of untreated glass and walls converging towards glass.

A stark example of the potent danger artificial lights pose to birds comes from New York City's Tribute in Light, where every September 11th two giant light beams are projected from the 9/11 Memorial & Museum throughout the night. Countless tiny dots seem to swarm high in the light — thousands of birds and insects quite literally trapped in the beams. Some drop out of the sky from exhaustion, others collide with nearby windows.

A seven-year survey of the Tribute in Light using weather-surveillance technology revealed that about 1.1 million birds were impacted by the light — over 150,000 birds each night (Van Doren et al., 2017). More than half a century ago in 1937 the iconic Washington Monument, defining the nighttime skyline of D.C., claimed 576 birds including 17 warbler species in just an hour and a half (Overing, 1938). More recently in 2023, a single building in Chicago killed 964 birds and stunned some 80 more in one night (Leffer et al., 2023). This is a longstanding issue for birds traversing U.S. skies, but one that exciting new management strategies are emerging in the face of.

Common Species Affected

A massive study of North American migratory birds using four decades of U.S. collision records found that the species most vulnerable to window strikes are songbirds that migrate at night and call out to each other on the wing (Winger et al., 2019). While this nocturnal communication likely evolved to collectively avoid threats, now birds already falling victim to light pollution end up luring more individuals towards deadly hazards. The American Bird Conservancy used records from several window collision monitoring programs to compile a list of the seven species most likely to die from window collisions: White-throated Sparrow, Ovenbird, Common Yellowthroat, Dark-eyed Junco, Brown Creeper, Hermit Thrush, and the Black-and-white-Warbler. Over a decade of monitoring by LODC has yielded similar results in D.C. with two additions: American Woodcocks and Gray Catbirds. Migratory raptors and other non-Passerine birds, including the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, the United States' only migratory woodpecker, are also common victims.



Birds trapped in the light beams of the 9/11 Tribute in Light in New York City, U.S.A. *Photo by John De Guzman.*

Monitoring Casualties

City Wildlife's approach to managing migration-related casualties has three pillars: monitoring, rehabilitation, and advocacy. Two of these pillars, monitoring and advocacy, are spear-headed by our volunteer LODC program. During migration LODC volunteers, armed with nets and paper bags, patrol set routes in pre-dawn Washington, D.C. to monitor for strike victims. These routes are crafted to include buildings which are known hazards to birds. From 2010-2023, LODC recorded 5,751 window strikes. A ten-year report using LODC data from 2010-2019 showed that a whopping 84% of these birds were found dead or died soon after being found. Only 16% survived past 24 hours, of those that lived past that critical window, just over 40% were releasable. The actual number of window strikes in D.C. is undoubtedly much higher, as LODC only monitors a small area of the District for two to three hours a day during migration.



Lights Out DC volunteers sit next to a portion of identified and labeled window strike victims, 2022.

Moreover, records cannot account for birds that may have been taken by predators, swept away by maintenance personnel, missed by volunteers, collided later in the day, or flew away only to succumb to their injuries later on.
Many major cities in North America have programs similar to LODC: New York City, Philadelphia, Detroit, Houston, Chicago, and more. The Fatal Light Awareness Program (FLAP) in Toronto, Canada provided the template upon which many of these programs were modeled. These programs have immense value for understanding how many birds fall victim to collisions, what features increase the risk of collisions, and the efficacy of various mitigation strategies. Furthermore, the data collected can help persuade local legislators to take action to reduce collision casualties. While many rehabilitators may not have the capacity to run a full program like LODC, likely allies in this endeavor are often found in local birding groups, scientific institutions (e.g. museums, zoos, universities), and international conservation entities like Dark Sky International.

Advocacy

Using ten years of compelling data from LODC, and with the testimony of members from a variety of environmental organizations, we were able to get the Migratory Local Wildlife Protection Act passed by the D.C. Council in 2022. This law requires that all new buildings or significant alterations to building facades use bird-safe glass and design features. Such legislative change is a significant step in reducing the amount of collision casualties that rehabilitators must manage.

Nevertheless, there are many bird-killing buildings still standing in D.C. that this bill could not fix. We are constantly reaching out to the worst offending buildings to encourage them to take steps to mitigate the damage done to migratory birds, with some success. For example, when we convinced the Walter E. Washington Convention Center to put screenage on an all-glass walkway connecting two buildings, they saw a near 100% reduction in collision casualties found there. Following the example of Bird Safe Philly, a collaborative effort of LODC, the D.C. chapter of Dark Sky International, and the DC Bird Alliance is underway to build a Lights Out Pledge program where property managers pledge to turn all non-essential lights out at night during spring and fall migration to reduce collisions.

Public Outreach

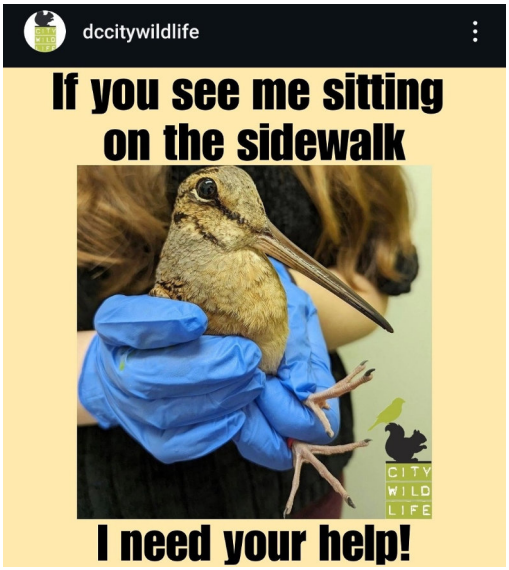
Social media is an undeniably helpful tool for public engagement. Posts that raise awareness, provide avenues for action, and generally garner public support can be planned in advance based on timing of admissions from previous years, and cross-referencing national migration data. In the U.S., nation-wide migration data is most accessible through BirdCast, a multi-organizational effort that uses weather-surveillance technology to track migrating birds. It includes data such as how many birds passed over your location the night before, a three-night forecast for upcoming migration traffic, natural history profiles of expected migrants, and much more.

At City Wildlife, we use the three-night forecast to tell folks that their actions matter most on these nights, and to keep an extra eye out for collision victims the following day. These posts tend to do extremely well, getting shared widely among our followers, bringing in new followers, and even getting picked up by local news stations from time to time. We also design infographics about particular migrants, such as American Woodcocks, as they begin to arrive in the area, as well as general educational information such as "Ways to Help Migratory Birds." All of this information not only gathers direct support for our work, but it equips members of the public with avenues for action and proper guidance on how to help collision victims.





City Wildlife also occasionally uses social media campaigns to raise emergency funds or purchase necessary equipment. Until the summer of 2024, we were operating with just one oxygen concentrator, which left us in difficult situations when more than one bird needed oxygen support — a common situation during migration. In anticipation of fall migration, we highlighted the success story of a recently-released Chimney Swift who suffered respiratory difficulties from unknown blunt force trauma, and who recovered largely due to several days of oxygen support. Within one day of the post being made, two concentrators were donated off of our Amazon Wishlist! These new machines have been a game changer for keeping up with high intake rates during migration.



Rehabilitation

Before migration-related casualties reach our clinic, staff and volunteers answering our hotline must be prepared to give up-to-date guidance to those reporting collisions. Standard advice provided by City Wildlife is to place the bird in a paper bag or box, and to keep them in a warm, dark, quiet place with no food or water until the bird is given to a rehabilitator. We also specify to minimize the sights and sounds of humans and domestic animals as much as possible to avoid undue stress. Historically, rehabilitators told people to put the bird in a quiet, safe place for a couple hours to see if they would recover and fly off on their own, but we now know this advice is dangerous and outdated.

Even if a bird can eventually fly away after a window collision, they are very likely to succumb to latent injuries related to the impact, or to hazards like predators and vehicle collisions while compromised. Staying up to date with peer-reviewed literature and reputable environmental organizations also allows us to connect folks with research-backed ways to reduce the risk of future collisions, namely anti-window strike window treatments and following Dark Sky International's Responsible Outdoor Lighting at Night principles. If the bird is already deceased, folks can still help by reporting the window collision to local monitoring organizations or the international casualty-monitoring website dbird.org.

When a collision victim arrives at the clinic, rehabilitation staff must examine, develop, and carry out treatment plans with great accuracy and efficiency. The most common injuries we see with window strike victims are corneal ulcers, brain trauma (concussions), and respiratory trauma (Pulmonary contusions, subcutaneous emphysema). Soft tissue and orthopedic injuries (fractures, luxations) to shoulders, wings, and the spine are common as well. Even if a window strike victim appears totally uninjured upon intake, the bird will stay with us for 48 hours to monitor for the emergence of new symptoms as injuries related to head trauma may take as long as 24 hours to present. The variety of protocols in place for different ailments can be difficult to accurately remember. Our protocols are not only heavily detailed in our Animal Care Protocols binder, but also posted as simplified "cheat sheets" in our intake/intensive care room to improve accessibility and efficiency for anyone performing intakes.

It is also crucial to keep meticulous records of all patients in care to track progress and monitor for decline. This can be very difficult when multiple staff and volunteers are all contributing to daily care. We log all records of care in WRMD.org so that anyone caring for a patient can easily access their history and add new notes. We also utilize a shared monthly Google Document, with a new page for each day, where carers can add information on new patients, developments with old patients, reminders, and to-do tasks. Not only does this help everyone stay up to date on all patients in-house even if someone has not been to the clinic in a few days, but also helps us keep up with more menial housekeeping tasks even during busy times.



Various patients at City Wildlife admitted for collisions.

Other Considerations

For most species, it is not difficult to facilitate sufficient self-feeding with husbandry that mimics their natural environment and foraging style. However, some high-stress species such as American Woodcocks notoriously eat poorly in captivity. For these birds, we have converted an old bathroom into a “quiet room” where only the most high-stress patients are housed, helping to protect them from the nevitable hustle and bustle in the rest of the center. Sometimes it is still not enough, and these birds may lose weight in captivity.

In those cases, we must weigh considerations of fitness for release or tube-feeding. As soon as we are confident they are fit for survival in the wild, we release them without going through some of the more extensive trials that we put more resilient species through. If they are not ready and are still declining in body condition, then we may tube-feed EmerAid products appropriate for that species’ natural diet to help improve body condition. In these cases, we provide supplemental feedings as little as possible while maintaining appropriate metabolic needs.

Another obstacle that is less often a part of our decision making, but still important, is considering the timing of release. If a bird has spent a few weeks with us and we are unsure if their species is still migrating, we may use eBird data to figure out how much longer that species is spotted in the area, and determine suitable locations for release. Occasionally a bird may not be ready for release until after the window of migration for their species has ended. In such cases, we have to consider if the best thing for the bird is overwintering in our clinic, sending them to an accredited zoo, or euthanasia. Luckily, we are in an interesting little geographic pocket in the mid-Atlantic U.S. because many birds overwinter here, so it is not an issue we have to face often.

Conclusion

The seasonal influx of migration-related casualties puts a heavy load on the limited resources of American wildlife rehabilitators. Many strategies can be employed within a rehabilitation setting to improve standards of care and capacity to handle influxes of patients, from improving protocol accessibility to utilizing public outreach to meet supply needs. As human infrastructure continues to grow, so does the need for proactive and retroactive strategies to reduce the intensity of hazards faced, and thus the abundance of collision victims. Social media campaigns can increase public awareness of this issue and inform people how they can help birds and the rehabilitators caring for them alike. Additionally, data collected by collision monitoring programs has proved valuable throughout North America for reducing bird deaths through legislative change as well as direct communication with property managers. While rehabilitators may not individually have the resources to run such programs, collaboration with other environmental organizations can make it feasible.

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Waterproofing Scoring System

MORGANE RISTIC - CO-MANAGER - NEW ARC WILDLIFE RESCUE

In 2022, my partner and I relocated to New Arc Wildlife Rescue, a wildlife rescue centre in the North-East of Scotland. Due to its location, the centre admits hundreds of seabirds each year. These figures highlight the need for our team to become familiar and well acquainted with waterproofing standards, as failure to maintain waterproofing during care can prolong the time patients must spend in captivity. Unfortunately, this delay often exacerbates captivity-related conditions, as noted in the Rehabilitation Guide for Pelagic Seabirds (New Zealand Department of Conservation, 2019), with captivity leading to chronic stress or aspergillosis in some individuals, further worsening the patients' condition and reducing positive outcomes.

Waterproofing

Pelagic birds rely on their waterproof feathers for insulation, buoyancy, and overall survival. As mentioned in Wildlife and Offshore Drilling: The 2010 Gulf of Mexico Disaster – Pelagic Seabirds (Defenders of Wildlife, 2010), contaminants such as oil can compromise this waterproofing, leading to hypothermia and drowning. In rehabilitation settings, maintaining feather integrity is equally crucial. According to the Avoiding Feather Damage in Hospitalised Birds guide by the New Zealand Wildlife Health Centre, factors such as handling, exposure to topical agents, and environmental conditions can damage feathers, resulting in a loss of waterproofing. Implementing meticulous care protocols is therefore essential to preserve feather condition and ensure the successful rehabilitation and release of seabirds.

As novel species were admitted into our care (e.g., Long-tailed Ducks in winter 2023-2024, Little Auks in winter 2024-2025), the presentation of waterproofing in patients varied: from fully waterproof to critical failure to remain dry. Staff were then instructed to take daily notes on patients' waterproofing, but the subjective nature of the assessments ("Waterproofing improved from yesterday," "Better") rendered the data unreliable for comparing cases, and difficult to hand over to other team members (e.g., what exactly is meant by "better"? What has changed?).

A simplified and unified approach to rating the waterproofing of pelagic birds undergoing rehabilitation would not only allow for better comparison of cases, but also help identify shared traits and common patterns, both upon admission and later in care (e.g., species, body condition, finding situation, length of care exceeding 10 days, etc.), while monitoring overall progress. If the data is routinely used and reviewed, a Waterproofing Scoring System could become a reliable tool, helping patients maintain waterproofing throughout their stay or achieve waterproofing sooner by adapting the treatment plan based on rating.



Little Auk admitted in care in December 2024 showing poor waterproofing following their first exposure to water

Unfortunately, I was unable to find an existing, freely circulating scoring system, despite numerous documents available in the context of oiled seabirds which generally focus on stabilization, washing/drying processes, and a short list of criteria to confirm that a bird is waterproof and ready for release. For this reason, I have developed the following scoring system. Results are categorized into Critical, Poor, Medium, and Excellent waterproofing, based on five key criteria: Feather condition, Buoyancy, Behaviour, Water shedding, and Thermoregulation. Each criteria is accompanied by detailed visual indicators for assigning scores. Since implementing this system, we have received an additional 2 Little Auk, who's waterproofing journey from first exposure to water to release has been recorded and saved For future use. I hope this tool becomes useful to centres and individuals dealing with pelagic birds, and I would be delighted to share the PDF document with anyone wanting to trial our scoring system.

Seabird Waterproofing Assessment Scoring System

Objective:

To evaluate the waterproofing quality of seabirds' plumage based on visual, behavioural, and physical indicators.

Scoring Categories:

Feather condition (0-3points)	Buoyancy (0-3points)	Behaviour (0-2points)	Water shedding (0-2points)	Thermoregulation (0-2points)
3/3 Feathers appear uniformly sleek, aligned, and well-oiled. No visible signs of wetness or disruption. Bird appears dry when exiting the water. **2/3** Feathers mostly sleek but with minor signs of misalignment or small patches that appear damp. **1/3** Feathers visibly dishevelled, with large wet patches or signs of significant oil loss. **0/3** Feathers appear soaked or waterlogged, visibly disordered, and lacking any sign of natural oiling	**3/3** Bird floats high on the water, showing minimal submerged areas. **2/3** Bird floats moderately, with noticeable wet feathers near waterline. **1/3** Bird floats low, with significant water absorption visible on feathers. **0/3** Bird is waterlogged and struggling to remain afloat or exit the pool.	**2/2** Normal preening behaviour observed, with active oil gland use and grooming. **1/2** Reduced preening activity or ineffective preening motions. **0/2** No preening observed; bird appears distressed or lethargic.	**2/2** Water beads off the plumage effectively during movement or contact with water. **1/2** Water beading is inconsistent, with some areas showing absorption. **0/2** Water soaks into feathers quickly, with no beading observed.	**2/2** Bird shows no signs of heat loss; remains active and alert. **1/2** Bird shows mild signs of cold stress, such as fluffing feathers or shivering. **0/2** Bird displays severe cold stress or lethargy due to impaired waterproofing.

Scoring results

- **10–12 points**: *Full pool access granted.*

Excellent waterproofing — feathers are in prime condition, and the bird demonstrates optimal waterproofing and buoyancy. **Release can be considered when scoring 12/12.**

- **7–9 points**: *Regular checks needed if free pool access granted, weather dependent.*

Moderate waterproofing — minor issues in feather condition or water shedding, but bird maintains functionality.

- **4–6 points**: *Bird should not be left with pool access unattended.*

Poor waterproofing — significant issues in feather alignment, water shedding, or buoyancy. **Immediate intervention may be needed, such as heat.**

- **0–3 points**: *Bird should not be left with pool access unattended.*

Critical waterproofing failure — feathers are soaked, and the bird is at severe risk of hypothermia or drowning. **Urgent action required: provision of heat is required; washing might be needed.**

This chart is to be filled in daily following exposure to water/pool access.

Duration: How long did the bird stay in the water for? Aim for 15min of observation.

Date	Duration	Feather condition /3	Buoyancy /3	Behavioural indicator /2	Water shedding /2	Thermoregulation /2	T/12

This document must be scanned and added to the patients file when discharged

(Please note that the above in not a protocol but a scoring system to be used in conjunction with seabird rehabilitation and release protocols).

Meet a wildlife professional: Caitlin Ganley

SENIOR WILDLIFE ASSISTANT, SSPCA NATIONAL WILDLIFE RESCUE CENTRE

We were excited to learn more about Caitlin's career, especially following her recent promotion To Senior Wildlife Assistant—congratulations, Caitlin! She kindly agreed to share her story with us, offering insight into her journey as a wildlife rehabilitator.

Hi, I'm Caitlin Ganley and I work at the SSPCA National Wildlife Rescue Centre as a Senior Wildlife Assistant. I specialise in the Seal, Waterfowl, and Seabird Unit where I've dedicated the past seven years of my life to caring for injured and orphaned wildlife.

For as long as I can remember animals have been my passion. I always knew my career would involve animals in some capacity but I never imagined I would end up in such a rewarding and unique field as wildlife rehabilitation.

After leaving school I went straight to college to study Animal Care. At 17, as I was finishing my college exams, my Mum—my biggest supporter and rock throughout my career —spotted a vacancy with the SSPCA National Wildlife Rescue Centre for a 6-month Seasonal Wildlife Assistant. I applied, fully expecting rejection due to my age and lack of wildlife experience but to my amazement, a week before my 18th birthday, I was offered the job! That moment changed the course of my life. Now, seven years later, I can look back on how far I've come with immense gratitude. The Centre has become like a second home to me, shaping both my career and personal growth. Over the years I've had the privilege of working across all four of the Centre's units. The Bird Unit, The Small Mammal Unit, The Large Mammal Unit and The Seal, Waterfowl, and Seabird Unit.



My journey began in the Bird Unit, where I developed critical skills and confidence. Once fully trained, I moved to the Small Mammal Unit where I cared for tiny creatures requiring round-the-clock attention. I then moved to the Seal Unit briefly, then moved to the Large Mammal unit where I worked mostly with weasels, foxes, badgers and otters. After working in the large mammal unit I was drawn back to the seals. It was in the Seal Unit that I truly found my calling. I fell in love working with seals, waterfowl and seabirds and I have never looked back!
Now, as the Senior Wildlife Assistant in the Seal Unit I am proud to lead a team that cares for some of the most challenging species that rehab in the UK has to offer.

A Typical Day in My Role

In summer my day looks a bit like this;
A typical summer day starts with feeding—and lots of it! The experienced staff members in the unit turn their focus to the harbour seals, conducting daily weigh-ins, milk feeds, hydration checks, pen cleaning, and socialization. Meanwhile, our seasonal staff tackle the enormous task of caring for the ducklings and gull chicks. Their duties include pen cleaning, bi-weekly weigh-ins, checking ID rings and preparing these birds for life in our paddocks as they await release.
My work however doesn't stop at the Centre! In summer, my nights are not my own. I often take home mammals for hand-rearing, such as baby hedgehogs, rabbits and leverets etc. Whilst a lot of people in their mid-twenties might want to spend their summer evenings out and about, you'll find me at home, syringe-feeding tiny creatures through the night—and I wouldn't have it any other way!

Winter Season

Winter is all about grey seals. This season brings with it the most physically demanding work of the year as we can see up to 100 grey seal admissions. The care required is intense with feeding schedules of 3 to even 8 times a day depending on the individual seal's needs. My days are filled with pen cleaning, health monitoring, hydration checks, ensuring they are transitioning successfully to eating fish and of course keeping the staff safe whilst working with these large mammals.





The Challenges of the Job

While I love my work, it comes with its challenges. One of the hardest aspects is seeing animals arrive in conditions beyond our ability to save.
Another challenge is the sheer physical and emotional demands of the job. Wildlife rehabilitation is a 24/7 job.. Still, the rewards far outweigh the difficulties. Every successful release back into the wild reminds me why I do what I do.

What I Love Most About My Job

The most rewarding aspect of my job is the opportunity to spend every day surrounded by amazing animals. I genuinely pinch myself sometimes!

I also love the sense of community. Working alongside a team of like-minded individuals who share my passion for wildlife is inspiring. Together, we constantly strive to improve welfare standards, innovate and educate others about the importance of our work.

One of the most memorable moments of my career took me to the Shetland Islands where I transported four harbour seals to our friends at the Hillswick Seal Sanctuary. Our water treatment system at the time was unable to support the seals' rehabilitation journey and it was vital they continued their care elsewhere. The experience was unforgettable. I flew on a small aircraft with the seals securely in the back as "special cargo" for the trip. I was even given the opportunity to co-pilot the aircraft on the way home!

I've also developed strong international connections through my work, particularly in the Netherlands with Peterbuiren, a renowned seal rehabilitation facility. Sharing knowledge, techniques, and experiences is invaluable and I love the relationships I've built with like-minded individuals who share my passion for animal welfare.
These connections, both local and international, are a reminder that wildlife rehabilitation is a global effort. It's incredibly fulfilling to be part of a community of professionals who are all working toward the same goal: giving these animals the best chance to thrive in the wild.
And, of course, nothing compares to the moment an animal you've cared for over weeks or months is released back into the wild. Knowing you've been the driving force for that journey, from vulnerability to freedom, is unmatched.



Balancing the Emotional Side of the Job

When I first started I struggled with the emotional weight of the job. Seeing animals in pain and vulnerable was overwhelming. Over the years I've developed a mindset that allows me to focus on the positives. However, I'm only human, and of course this still affects me!

My team are the backbone of everything we do at the Centre. What I admire most about my team is their unwavering commitment to the animals. They approach every day with compassion, even during the most physically and emotionally demanding times. Whether it's staying late to ensure a seal pup receives an extra feed or working tirelessly to prepare dozens of ducklings for release, their dedication never wavers.

What I Wish I Knew Before Starting

Before I began this journey, I wish I'd known just how much goes into wildlife rehabilitation—
Many people may think it's just about spending time with "cute animals" but it's so much more than that. The sights we see, the cases we work on, and the animals we save can be emotionally draining. We are more than "pen cleaners" or "assistants"; we are lifelines. Without rehabilitation centres, the animals we care for wouldn't stand a chance.
Last year was particularly significant for me—I successfully bottle-fed my first grey seal pup and implemented a new lactose-free milk formula for harbour seals which increased our survival rates from 25-35% to 83%. Special shout out to Caithness Rescue & Release for the advice and information on this!

This work is more than a career—it's a calling. While I enjoy all aspects of my role, my heart will always belong to the seals. I look forward to many more years of advocating for wildlife, improving welfare standards, and helping animals return to the wild where they belong.

Tribute to Our Esteemed Trustees

It is with a mix of gratitude and sadness that we announce the resignation of two of our long-standing trustees, Molly Varga Smith and Janet Peto, from the British Wildlife Rehabilitation Council.





Molly Varga Smith, a distinguished veterinary surgeon, has been an invaluable member of our council. Her expertise, dedication, and passion for wildlife rehabilitation have significantly advanced our mission. Molly is a recognised RCVS Specialist in Zoo and Wildlife Medicine, having earned her RCVS certificate in Zoological Medicine in 2001 and her Diploma in Zoological Medicine (Mammalian) in 2007. She has made significant contributions to veterinary literature, including several BSAVA manuals including the BSAVA Manual of Wildlife Casualties. Molly has also been instrumental in running numerous wet labs for the BWRC, providing hands-on training and education to countless professionals and students in the field. Her contributions have not only enhanced the care and treatment of countless animals but have also inspired many within our community. Her commitment to excellence and her compassionate approach will be deeply missed. Although Molly is a highly qualified veterinary surgeon, she was always very approachable, which was greatly appreciated by our membership.

Janet Peto, the founder of Hedgehog Welfare, has been a cornerstone of our organisation. Her tireless efforts and unwavering dedication to the welfare of hedgehogs have left an indelible mark on our work. Janet's vision and leadership have been instrumental in shaping our initiatives and fostering a culture of care and respect for wildlife. Her legacy will continue to inspire us as we move forward. Janet was also our longest serving trustee before her resignation, a testament to her enduring commitment and passion for our cause. Her legendary cakes, baked for trustee meetings in London, were a highlight for many and added a warm, personal touch to our gatherings. These delightful treats became a cherished tradition, fondly remembered by all who had the pleasure of attending.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to Molly and Janet for their years of service, their remarkable contributions, and their unwavering commitment to wildlife rehabilitation.

Their departure leaves a void that will be hard to fill.

Wildlife fact: A unique way to incubate

Northern gannets (Morus bassanus) have a unique and somewhat quirky method of incubating their eggs: they use their feet! Unlike many birds that incubate with a brood patch on their body, northern gannets have specially adapted vascularized webbed feet. They wrap their large, warm feet around the single egg to keep it insulated and at the right temperature.

This unusual adaptation allows gannets to incubate efficiently despite their exposed nesting sites on rocky cliffs, where strong winds and cold conditions prevail. The egg is carefully positioned in a shallow nest of seaweed, grass, and feathers to keep it stable while the parents take turns sitting on it.

This method requires extreme precision; if the egg is accidentally knocked out of the nest, it rarely survives because the cliffs leave little room for error.





Gannets incubating their single egg



Extinct greater mouse-eared bat found in Sussex

In January 2025, conservationists discovered a female greater mouse-eared bat hibernating in the South Downs National Park. This finding offers hope for the species' revival in the UK, where it was declared extinct in 1992.

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