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RESCUE NEWS | WINTER 2015



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The **Folly Wildlife Rescue Trust** is a registered charity dedicated to the rescue, care and rehabilitation of injured, orphaned, sick and distressed wildlife.

The Trust operates primarily in Kent and Sussex, and every year, some **3,500 casualties** pass through its door.

Its education programme looks to highlight the many man-made hazards wildlife faces, as well as dispelling the myths and misconceptions that can so easily lead to persecution.

From the editor

Welcome...

To the **winter edition** of the Folly Wildlife Rescue newsletter.

Winter is now well and truly upon us, and although things have, to a certain extent, quietened down, we're still admitting plenty of casualties.

Especially worrying are the numbers of poorly hedgehogs we're seeing; known as 'autumn juveniles', these are animals that have been born far too late in the season, and have not been able to build up the fat they need in order to hibernate. As the weather gets colder, they're often found out in the daytime, searching for food; if you come across one, please pick it up and then phone us for assistance, as if we get them early, they can often be saved.

Hedgehogs are now in serious decline, and with their numbers having dropped from an estimated 30 million in the 1960s to under 1 million today, they're in big trouble. Why this is happening, no one really knows, but it's very likely that a combination of habitat loss, motor cars, dog attacks and pesticides are all taking their toll; even over-tidy gardens, which reduce the availability of their invertebrate diet, and close-board fencing, which restricts their movements, are not helping.

What's really needed now is a comprehensive, government-backed scientific study to find out exactly what's happening and whether, in fact, anything can be done to save them, as in even just a few years' time it could be too late.

Here at the hospital, I'm pleased to report that the work on the B4 development is coming along very nicely; the training room, supervisor's office and first 6 aviaries have now been completed, and after Christmas, we'll be looking to start work on the nursery and veterinary units too.

At this point, I'd like to thank all the people who've worked (and are working) on the development; Paul Kane, of PK Electrical Services, has very much been 'the brains' behind the technical stuff, while the multi-

talented Colin Denney has single-handedly installed every one of the units and aviaries – which I can tell you is no mean feat. Miles Ludlow, meanwhile, made a great job of fitting the double-glazed external doors and windows, while Tim Burrows has also been invaluable, helping me with a multitude of jobs, including the painting and decorating – what a great team we make!

Wildlife-wise, we've seen something of a resurgence in badger numbers this year (and just recently released 8 cubs back to the wild), while deer numbers just keep going up. Huge numbers of birds were hand-reared and released again this year, and rarities like the dormouse have been seen in fairly large numbers too.

CHRISTMAS APPEAL NEWS!

I would also like to thank everyone who so very kindly responded to our 'Did you know?' leaflet that went out with the summer newsletter; it was only included as an afterthought, but in the event was really successful, and we were completely wowed at the wonderful response – an amazing £2,535!

But, of course, none of this work would have been possible without the support and dedication of our wonderful staff, volunteers, supporters, well-wishers and fundraisers – they're the ones who make it all happen – so our very warm thanks to them all!

I hope you enjoy the newsletter.



Shaping Up

B4, B3, and the new aviary additions **part 4**

It hardly seems possible, but it's now nearly 4 years since the hospital first opened its doors, and 2 years since we started work on B4 – talk about time flying!

In the last issue, I'd reported that work on the new B4 building was well underway and that, apart from a few finishing touches, we'd almost completed the training room, supervisor's office, and 4 of the 6 aviaries; well, now they are completed, and we've already started on the 5 aviaries behind B3 – the frameworks and OSB cladding are in, the doors fitted, and the ceilings up, just leaving the aviary fronts and uPVC hygiene panels to install; if everything goes to plan, they should be ready in time for next year's breeding season.

Going back to B4, the training room and supervisor's office are now looking really good; the heating and ventilation systems still need a bit of tweaking, but once that's done, we can start using them.

With up to 80 volunteers working here every week, it's very important that we have somewhere to give inductions, health and safety presentations, and hold meetings; the training room ticks all those boxes, and from now on, we won't know ourselves. Our supervisors too need their own space, because as well as having somewhere to conduct interviews and have hand-overs, they also need a place to put their feet up!

In addition to all the above, we're also looking to use the room for fundraising activities (including this Christmas, our first *'Folly Festive Fayre'*) and, who knows, maybe even the occasional staff knees-up – the possibilities are endless!

Next year, there are further projects in the pipeline, including a utility/food preparation room for the B3 aviaries. In B4, the new nursery unit is a major priority, and, with luck, the new veterinary unit will get underway too.



And the B3 aviaries are coming along too



Well, the sign is up, but still a way to go!



The training room and supervisor's hidey-hole at the far end

A lot of the groundwork for the nursery and veterinary units has, in fact, already been installed, with the electrics, plumbing, fire alarms, data cables, ventilation system, heating and insulation all in place; but that still leaves the specialist Altro flooring, the work stations and the suspended ceiling system.

None of this work would have been possible, without the very generous bequest we received two years ago, from the estate of the late Sheena Anne Forth.

The building is now named after her, and I think she'd have been very proud of the result.

Even then, we're not done, as of course we have to install the X-ray chamber, the digital processor, the X-ray generator, and an X-ray table, plus, of course, all the veterinary

equipment too; apart from the small matter of finding the funding, it should be a piece of cake!

On the infrastructure front, we're currently in the process of putting in an emergency generator; since we opened in 2012, we've had several power cuts (and the longest lasted 39 hours) and don't want to get caught out again. This new, diesel-powered system is actually large enough to supply the whole hospital, rather than just a few lightbulbs, and as it will be fully automatic, we won't have to fumble around in the dark looking for matches and a candle!

Another recent installation, which is already proving its worth, is our new 4kW solar power system; when the sun's out, it actually provides 100% of our electricity, and as we also get paid for producing this power, it's giving major savings on our utilities bill.

That's it for now – but more 'Shaping up' news in the spring!

The Manager's Report



Annette Risley casts a reflective eye on the last 6 months here at the Broadwater Forest Wildlife Hospital

Our summer season has finally drawn to a close and, as the days shorten, everyone at the hospital is now looking forward to a quieter time; the constant stream of casualties, the seemingly endless casualty collections and rescues to arrange, gaps in the staff roster to plug, together with the constantly ringing phone have all taken their toll this year!

But whatever the pressure, the hospital still works; everybody mucks in, everyone looks out for one another and if the strain does start to show, a remedial cup of coffee is usually to hand; it really is a great atmosphere, and we're so lucky to have such a dedicated team!

Dave has already mentioned that the long awaited B4 aviaries have finally 'come on stream' (and are exceeding all expectations), and when the five currently under construction in B3 are completed, we'll be very much spoilt for choice!

In addition, the new aviaries have enabled us to overcome a problem of very longstanding, which was our inability to rear swallows and house martins to release; actually, the rearing bit has been fine, but due to their habit of constantly

clinging to the face of the aviary mesh, they damage their tail feathers, making it impossible to release them; as you know, these birds, come the autumn, fly back to sub-Saharan Africa, and for a journey of that duration, you need perfect plumage.

Over the years, we've tried all sorts of things to solve the problem, including lining the aviaries with soft fleece, but largely to no avail; the new aviaries, though, with their smooth plastic panels, are a dream come true, and have really made a difference; one of the most uplifting things this year has been seeing so many released and, what's more, going off with perfect flight!

One group of animals we've been working with again this year is bats. For several years, we've had to pass our bat casualties over to the local bat groups (because we just haven't had anywhere to keep them), but as things are now improving, we're starting to have them back, and already this year 23 have been admitted.

At the forefront of this initiative is supervisor Kaylee Parkes, who has not only been busy re-establishing old contacts, but has also managed to rear 3 bats too (2 common pipistrelles and



A young hedgehog is carefully checked for injuries



This woodcock flew into a building but after treatment was returned to the wild!

a soprano pipistrelle), so very good experience for her, and we're particularly indebted to Jenny Clarke of the Sussex Bat Group and Hazell Ryan of Wildwood for their help and advice.

One consequence of our going back to bats is that our supervisors and wildlife care assistants will need to receive pre-exposure vaccination against rabies, as a strain of the disease (European Bat Lyssavirus Type 2) has now been found in the UK in a small number of Daubenton's bats; although extremely rare, it's potentially fatal, so much better to be safe than sorry.

Dave has already mentioned that we're looking to re-locate our baby bird and hand-rearing operation to a new purpose-designed Nursery Unit in B4. The existing Reception/ICU where we currently keep the babies is (what with the phone going, and the constant coming and going of staff) just too busy; young animals really need peace and quiet and, if we're to avoid them becoming imprinted, as little contact with humans as possible.

In order to be able to maintain really high standards of hygiene, the nursery will be fitted with the same uPVC wall panels that we use in the aviaries, as well as heat-sealed Altro flooring.

In addition, there'll be heated hospital cages, electric poultry brooders, and a series of veterinary holding pens, so a huge improvement on our current set-up.

Another major innovation this year has been our decision to allocate the entire proceeds of our Gift Aid tax return to funding our seasonal Wildlife Care Assistants. For the past 6 months, this hardy band has been providing essential back-up for our over-stretched supervisors, so when the going gets tough (which is practically all the time), they get going; and it's no exaggeration to say that having that extra pair of experienced hands on your shift can mean the difference between things going smoothly and descending into complete meltdown!

A great example then of how the Gift Aid scheme's 25% top-up can be put to a real and practical use here.

So there you have it, and I think you'll agree that it is now all coming together. It's still going to take time, but as Dave would say, we can at least now see the tunnel, if not yet the light at the end of it, but with the backing of our superb staff, volunteers and supporters, that day will come!

If anyone would like to make a specific donation towards the new Nursery, or perhaps an item of equipment, it would be very welcome indeed.

Please contact me for details of our needs.



Fundraising stuff!

We've had a really great year here at Folly, with some amazingly successful events – here are just a few, plus some old favourites and a taste of what's in the pipeline!

Looking for a Christmas gift with a difference? – A **hedgehog adoption** could be just the thing. There are three to choose from, and the recipient will receive a great gift pack, colour certificate, and hedgehog fact sheet – see our website for full details!

Our **Amazon** link continues to bring in valuable funds, so when you order from Amazon this Christmas (and at any other time for that matter), be sure to enter Amazon via the link on our homepage – we'll then receive commission on all of your purchases.

We now have over 50 **Collection Boxes** in pubs, clubs, vets, shops and other retail outlets, and they raise some very welcome sums – do you know of an outlet that might be willing to take one?

Our '**Did you know?**' leaflet (highlighting some of the costs we have to meet at Folly), which was included with the summer newsletter, was

incredibly successful, and raised an amazing £2,535!

As well as the Amazon link on our homepage, there's **Easyfundraising** too – over 2,500 stores participate in the scheme, and it's a great (and easy) way to raise funds for us.

The new training room at Folly will be put to good use in December when we host the first ever '**Folly Festive Fayre**'. As well as Christmas cards, there'll be lots of ideas for presents, and you'll even be able to meet a hedgehog (but not dressed up in a Santa suit, I'm afraid!). Why not pop along and support us (and maybe have a cup of tea as well)? (*Dates and times in the enclosed flyer*)

If you're reading this, there's a good chance you're already a **Friend of Folly**, but if not, why not join us? It costs just £12 a year and, as well as helping wildlife, you'll receive two issues of this incredible newsletter that will keep you up-to-date with all the developments here!

Gift Aid continues to give Folly a welcome annual boost, and with this year's return standing at £10,000, we were able to fund our seasonal

Wildlife Care Assistants, so money very well spent.

The students at **Hadlow College** were very busy on our behalf earlier this year, when they raised a wonderful £600 for us – our grateful thanks for all their hard work.

Everyone needs insurance, and our partnership with **Invicta Insurance Services** is well worth looking at. For every qualifying insurance policy you take out with them (house, car, business, travel, etc.), the company will donate £20 in your name (and out of their own commission too). Their quotes are extremely competitive (and you couldn't get a friendlier bunch of people), so why not give them a call on 01732 471950 (quoting 'FOLLY') to see (without any obligation) what they can do for you!

Did you know you can make donations to Folly direct from your mobile? **Just Text Giving** is the name, so text FWRT00, followed by the amount (£5, £10, £15 or more), and send to 70070. Visit our website for details (especially when you have a bit of spare cash to hand!).

I'm always going on about the importance of having a will (an ulterior motive at work here perhaps!), but as none of us know what's around the corner, it is an important issue. We've just produced a new **Legacy Leaflet**, so maybe pick one up at reception next time you're passing?

Lucinda Colebeck and Matthew Bullen both went the extra mile (well, 13 of them, in fact) when they ran the Windsor Half Marathon, raising an incredible £400 in the process.

A new initiative for 2016 is our **Online Shop** – there'll be lots of really good quality items for sale, and all the profits will go directly towards helping wildlife in need. Watch this space!

Special thanks to the staff and patrons of the **Royal Oak** pub in Tunbridge Wells for all their efforts this year. The Charity Gig and Curry Night, in March, and the Beer & Music Festival, in October, raised an amazing £560!

A great day for all was had at the RSPB fundraiser at Tonbridge Castle in June, and the £144.89 that we raised wasn't bad either.

Have you ever considered setting up a **Standing Order**? Lots of people now have, and it's a great way to support us, as just £3, £5, or even £10 a month makes a tremendous difference.



Tracey, Joan and Valerie at Wyevale Garden Centre recently



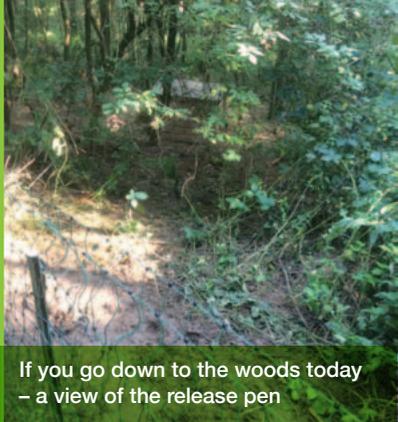
Volunteer Pat at a recent Wildlife Awareness Day in Sainsbury, Tunbridge Wells

Our first **Walk for Wildlife** in over three years was held on 19th September, taking in 7 miles of the RSPB's beautiful Broadwater Warren Reserve (which is just next door to us). Nearly 50 people attended and afterwards returned to the hospital for refreshments and a show round. It was a lovely sunny day and, what's more, nearly £1,500 was raised. Our special thanks too to Sue Johnson, one of our volunteers, who represented Folly for the walk, raising £500 towards the final total. We'll definitely be doing it again next year!

A total of 9 **Wildlife Awareness Days** were held this year: 7 at Sainsbury's, Tunbridge Wells, and a further 2 at the town's Wyevale Garden Centre, and between the two raised an incredible £1,971.41.

The perils and pitfalls
of a badger cub
release programme!

Badger Bits



If you go down to the woods today
– a view of the release pen

You may remember me saying in the last issue that we'd had a lot of cubs in this year and that the release group was getting rather large. Well, in the end (and even after passing some on to other centres), we were still left with 8.

Most had come to us as babies but by mid-summer were badly in need of an outside enclosure. A real handful at the best of times, some of them now weighed 8 kilos, and as it would be another 8 weeks before we could consider releasing them, we needed somewhere nice and secure; fortunately, our heavy-duty pen was to hand, and so in late June (and not before time), out they went.

For a successful release, you need a quiet location, well away from houses and roads, and preferably well away from other badgers too; then you need an enclosure to contain them in (otherwise they'd all simply run off) so they can get used to the sights, sounds and smells of their new home.

This enclosure needs to be as big as possible and to incorporate plenty of undergrowth and old logs; digging holes, latrines, and doing a bit of foraging are all important life skills for a badger, and the one we constructed was nearly perfect – ordinary fencing, by the way, wouldn't last five minutes, so we used electrified poultry netting (which is harmless, but does give the animals a jolt when they touch it) and with the finishing touch being a large, straw-filled wooden box, they couldn't ask for more.

Once the cubs are in, you still need to return every day to check the fence battery and give them food and water; but you do this

very quietly, as the last thing you want is animals that will approach humans. This year, everything went very smoothly (and, in fact, once they were in residence, we never even saw a single glimpse of them), but as the food and water were all going, and they were extremely busy wrecking the place, everything was obviously OK!

Special thanks to Stuart Paton of Badger Trust - Sussex, for surveying the various sites we were offered this year; in the end, only one was suitable, but we very much appreciate his assistance and hard work.

If anyone is interested in helping with future releases, or knows of, or owns a potential site, we'd love to hear from them!

After about two weeks, they were starting to show signs of boredom, and so it was time for them to be free; late one afternoon, we switched off the power, rolled back the fence, and beat a hasty retreat.

The following day, we returned to see what had happened; all around the site there was clear evidence of them exploring their surroundings, with snuffle holes, latrines, and footprints everywhere, so we put down more food (and continued to do this for several days) and headed back to the car.

So that's how you do it; subsequent visits have continued to reveal plenty of activity, but as time goes on, this is likely to decrease, especially as the animals start to disperse or join other groups.

watch out for...

Garden and sports netting!

Continuing the series, we look at the danger posed by two outwardly harmless, but extremely perilous items.

Garden and sports netting – pretty harmless really, and few of us ever give it a second thought – the garden stuff keeps the pests off the fruit and veg, while sports netting keeps the kids quiet, so what more could you want?

All very true, but there is a bit of a problem – especially when wildlife is involved, as in its various permutations (fruit, bean, badminton, tennis, football and cricket) netting probably causes more deaths and injury than all the other wildlife hazards put together.

It is, though, a fairly recent phenomenon, as in the ‘old days’ there was no such thing as plastic netting; runner beans were grown up wooden poles, peas on ‘pea sticks’, and if the birds were getting to your strawberries, you frightened them off with lengths of cotton that were threaded with milk bottle tops (or the birds simply ate the strawberries!). As for sports netting, you only ever saw it at sports grounds and schools, but now that’s all changed and, with the advent of cheap plastic, practically every garden in the land must now have a full complement of the stuff.

All wildlife is at risk too, and we continue to see badgers, hedgehogs, hawks, owls, herons, blackbirds, foxes and even deer entangled in it. But if you follow these simple guidelines, it should help reduce the risks:

- **Keep netting well clear of the ground**
- **Ensure its properly secured and doesn’t sag**

- **Check it daily, because if an accident has occurred, it may not be too late to save the animal involved**
- **At the end of the growing season, take your netting down and store it in a carrier bag, hung up out of the way, in a shed or garage**
- **At night, take games netting down and put it away**

In addition, plastic netting has such an incredibly long life that if you do leave it lying around, it can continue to cause fatalities for many years.



A recent victim of games netting – there’s a badger in here somewhere

Finally, people often put netting over garden ponds to protect their fish from marauding herons; entanglements are very common, and although herons aren’t everybody’s favourite bird, they don’t deserve to suffer like this. Ensure your netting is well secured and check it daily.

Grass snakes often get caught up in it too, so if this happens, give us a call.

Nature Reserve

With year four of our *Back to the Wild* project drawing to a close, we're beginning to see some positive results, not least the difference our small flock of sheep is making!

It's taken us three years to remove all the birch saplings from the lower part of the site (in spite of the fact that for every birch we cut back, six more appear the following season), and I'm pleased to say that it's definitely beginning to get a bit of a heathland look about it – all very encouraging.

The rhododendron is on the run too (with probably just a few dozen stragglers to take care of) and, with a bit of brush-cutting and hand-pulling, we soon hope to have even those under control; the sheep, by the way, won't eat rhododendron because, of course, it's highly poisonous.

Where they have been particularly effective is in controlling plant re-growth; rosebay willow herb, bramble, thistle, birch and sallow, all once rampant, are now in full retreat, and as the land opens up, we're seeing a lot more reptiles – adders, grass snakes, slow-worms and lizards are all present in very healthy numbers.

I'd like to be able to say that the heather is thriving too, but that isn't quite the case, as the sheep seem to have taken a bit of a fancy to it, and so it's all looking a bit ragged – probably just a case of moving them around the site a bit more?

We've also had some great help with the clearing work this year, not only from our 'land army', but from several groups of staff from AXA PPP and Southern Gas Networks, who by virtue of their sheer numbers made some remarkable headway – proof, if ever it was needed, that many hands do indeed make light work!

Over the coming winter, then, we'll be looking to start work on the heavily overgrown top sector; we have plenty of 'sheep power' (so in theory should be able to deal with the extensive re-growth), but not enough 'manpower', so it's all a bit in the balance?



A young adder on the reserve here

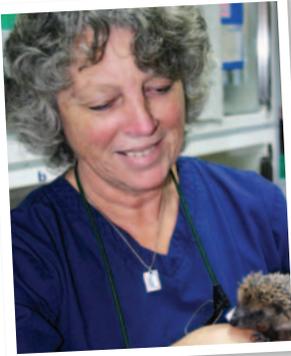
If anyone does fancy getting involved, they're more than welcome to join us; OK, it can be cold, it can be wet and it can be windy (and, in fact, it's usually all three at once!), but, as I so often say, it's extremely character building!

So what are you waiting for! (You can sign up for a taster session by completing the 'land army' form on our website!)

Meet the staff!

I'm always talking about 'our staff' and 'our supervisors', but who are these mysterious people?! Well, to kick off, there's the hospital manager, Annette Risley, our two supervisors, Antonia Blackler and Kaylee Parkes, and charity administrator, Liz Chandler!

Annette Risley – hospital manager



Responsible for the overall running of the hospital, Annette is also the founder of Folly Wildlife Rescue.

Having started the whole thing from the spare room at Folly Cottage, she first saw the operation (if you could call it that!) expand into the garden shed,

and then, 21 years later, to our new facility on the Broadwater Forest. Annette did say once that she thinks it might all be a dream and that we're eventually going to wake up to find we're still in that shed!

Over the years, she's seen the charity go from strength to strength, our intake of casualties go from a few hundred to many thousands, and our small group of volunteers and fundraisers grow into a veritable army; some dream!

As well as being in charge of the hospital operation, she also co-ordinates the volunteers and students, liaises with the vet, oversees supplies and equipment, and generally keeps everything running smoothly.

Annette's favourite animal has to be the hedgehog!

Antonia Blackler – wildlife hospital supervisor



Antonia has been with Folly for 10 years now, first, as a volunteer and then, when we moved to Broadwater Forest in 2012, taking on the role of supervisor.

For Antonia, the hospital always comes first, and she's sometimes so engrossed in her work, she forgets to go home!

When it comes to wildlife, Antonia is very much an 'all-rounder', but, having said that, she does have a secret passion for rabbits!

Kaylee Parkes – wildlife hospital supervisor

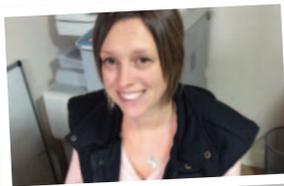
Kaylee is the second of our supervisors and, like Antonia, is a veteran of the old Folly Cottage operation, where she also undertook her work placement, while studying at Hadlow College.

Kaylee is particularly interested in small mammals (with dormice being one of her favourites) and has recently been busy too rearing baby bats.

But as well as mammals, she also has a soft spot for reptiles, enjoying nothing more than a quiet afternoon, out on the nature reserve, photographing the adders and grass snakes!



Liz Chandler – charity administrator



Running even a small charity like Folly is a complicated business, and Liz certainly has her work cut out!

The list of things she's responsible for is almost endless: finance, wages, insurance, staff contracts, pensions, equipment renewal, health & safety, fire alarms and waste disposal are all in her remit, as indeed is fundraising and event co-ordination.

These are just some of the people who 'make it all happen' – next time, our wildlife care assistants and receptionists – a great team if ever there was one!



Deer developments

The latest news from our deer rescue unit

Way back in 2013, when we first got together with Chris and Sylvia Collinson and Debbie Johnson to co-ordinate the deer rescue work here, we little dreamt how it would turn out.

While the operation was being run from Folly Cottage, we certainly attended deer call-outs, but they were by no means a common occurrence; most involved deer entangled in fencing and there was the occasional road traffic accident too, but it was all fairly low-key.

But in 2012, when we moved to Broadwater Forest, this all changed; not surprisingly, our workload had increased, and as we had the ongoing building work to contend with too, something had to give, so, for a time, we stopped attending deer rescues. We were still taking deer in and, in 2013, 3 fallow fawns were being reared; but because the site was largely unfenced, we weren't entirely sure what to do with them next.

So, when Debbie Johnson told us about the work she, Chris and Sylvia were already doing with deer, and that they'd be happy to help us out, we jumped at the offer!

In that first season, they certainly had their work cut out, as by the end of the year they'd attended 75 incidents, but at the time we weren't altogether sure whether this was promising or just worrying!

Moving on, 2014 was equally busy; road traffic accidents, dog attacks, orphans, and the usual entanglements, and I don't think any of us were very surprised when the call-outs that year jumped to 130.

Surely, we thought, they couldn't go much higher – but we thought wrong, and on 17th August this year, the team logged their 131st rescue; but if you think that was bad, by the beginning of November the total had risen to 202!

So what's happening and why are the numbers so high? Well, we're not sure; some people say deer numbers are increasing, while others say they're not, but whatever the truth, it's inevitable that as word of the service we provide spreads, the calls are going to increase.

One thing's for sure, though: not nearly enough is being done to address the problem; plenty of people are calling for a cull to reduce deer



If anyone would like to make a direct donation towards our work with deer or towards the deer recovery vehicle, it would be most welcome.

If you're sending a cheque, please write the words 'Deer Fund' on the back or if you're making an online donation, via our website, please be sure to leave a message to that effect! Thank you.

One of this year's fallow fawns

With the onset of winter, and shorter days, the risk of deer vehicle collisions is now at its greatest.

The peak times for accidents are dawn and dusk, when deer are making their way to and from their feeding grounds.

If you do see a deer, slow right down, and if it's safe to do so, come to a stop.

Where there's one deer, there's very likely to be more, so stay alert.

Dip your headlights and, if required, alert other road users with your hazard lights.

Never sound your horn or flash your lights, as this is likely to panic them.

Give any deer plenty of time to get clear of the road, and then proceed with extreme caution.

If you are unlucky enough to have an accident, phone the police on 101, who will then organise assistance (and can give you an incident number for your insurers).

There are some practical things that could be done, including putting up more deer warning signs on roads; the majority of accident hot-spots are well known and it should be a fairly easy thing to do (and even temporary ones would be better than nothing), but some local councils seem strangely reluctant to act.

Education too can play a part, as if drivers were more 'deer aware' (particularly during the short days of winter, when rush-hour traffic coincides with deer moving to and from their feeding grounds), a lot of accidents might well be avoided.

On a brighter note, 5 fallow and 5 roe fawns have been successfully reared this year and, of these, 7 are now out on the nature reserve here. It's an ideal place for them, with lots of natural cover and plenty to eat, and, being fenced in, is completely safe from dogs. We've actually built a number of 'jumps' into the new fence, so next spring we can open them up, allowing the deer to go whenever they're ready.

On the equipment front, we've now raised £2,000 towards the cost (approximately £10,000) of a 4x4 truck for off-road rescue and recovery, and are currently looking at the feasibility of obtaining a dart gun that would allow us to capture (under veterinary supervision) free-running deer that are either badly injured or entangled in fencing. These dart guns require a firearm certificate (as well as Home Office approval), and as there are still a number of things to be considered, it could be a little way off.

More deer developments next time!

numbers, but as no one knows how many are out there in the first place, that's not much help – but with fencing entanglements, dog attacks, road traffic accidents and poaching continuing pretty much unabated, they're virtually being culled anyway.

Focus on - bats!



A pipistrelle bat – small, but lots of attitude!

As we're now going 'back to bats', it might be an idea to take a closer look at these fascinating creatures and the problems facing them.

There are something like 1,300 species of bat alive in the world today, ranging in size from the fruit bats (which can be as big as a small dog) right down to the bumblebee bat that weighs just 2 grams; they're certainly diverse, but one thing they have in common is that their numbers are in decline.

In the UK (which has 17 species of bat that breed here), the situation is already fairly dire, and some of our once common species have all but disappeared; habitat loss, building development, our ever-growing road network, and threats around the home – including cat attacks, chemical treatment of building materials, and even the flypapers some people put up in stables – are all taking their toll.

For wildlife rescuers taking in bats, the two most common reasons for admission are youngsters that have become separated from their mothers and predation by cats.

How does a cat catch a bat? Well, it's probably not easy, but as cats have a lot of time on their 'paws', it's probably just a matter of eye-balling the bat's roost, and then positioning themselves near the entrance; some bats too are caught when swooping down to drink and it's likely that others are ambushed when flying low to the ground.

This is one of the reasons the Bat Conservation Trust ask people to keep their cats indoors at night – at least between the months of April to October (when bats are most active) and, especially so, from mid-June to the end of August (when bats are caring for their young).

The BCT's 'Bats and Cats' leaflet also informs us that cats don't actually eat bats, but that they do like to play with them; as cat saliva is extremely toxic, just a tiny drop in the bloodstream of a bat is enough to kill it. More disturbing still is the fact that only 44% of bats survive such an attack and, of these, only 14% are returned to the wild (with the remainder having to be kept in permanent care).

If you find a bat on the ground or your cat brings one home, don't handle it with your bare hands, as European Bat Lyssavirus Type 2 (a form of rabies) has been found to be present in bats in the UK and, although the risk is extremely small, you should ensure you always use gloves or a tea towel when picking one up. Place the animal in a secure box (with some air holes), and then phone 01892 543213 for assistance.

Not everyone is fond of bats, and there are lots of old wives' tales surrounding them, but the more you learn about them, the better you'll get to like them, as they are truly amazing!

More on bats next time.

Hope you enjoyed the newsletter – see you in the spring!