

## Hedgehog rehabilitation: pitfalls and celebrations

David Couper

Hedgehogs are very popular with the British public, and, although their numbers are declining, casualties are commonly presented to veterinary practices. A caring, knowledgeable approach to their rehabilitation can help to reinforce a positive relationship with clients. The veterinary nurse often takes the lead in their treatment, in terms of obtaining necessary information from the finder, performing the initial examination and providing suitable nursing care.

Hedgehogs' spines, and their ability to roll up, make them 'interesting' to examine and treat. Knowing how to get them to adopt a wheelbarrow position will allow a thorough examination of the head and underside, ensuring nothing is missed, while having the patience to wait for them to walk will allow the diagnosis of lameness or weakness. Understanding what is normal for a hedgehog, in terms of biology, behaviour and appearance, is very useful in helping to work out why they have presented.

Like many wildlife casualties, hedgehogs have often been ill for some time prior to presentation, and so are frequently suffering from dehydration, starvation and hypothermia. Correction of these conditions will begin the rehabilitation process. Stabilisation is a particularly important consideration prior to anaesthesia, which may be necessary to perform ancillary diagnostics such as radiography or to examine and treat injuries. Wounds are common, for instance from dog bites, strimmers or entanglement in netting; it can often take several days for their full extent to be obvious, and they can be a challenge to treat.

Juvenile hedgehogs, particularly those born late in the year, are regularly presented for rehabilitation as a result of being too small to survive hibernation; frequently they have been found active during daylight hours. It is important to get them up to a suitable weight to survive the rest of the winter before considering release. A variety of in-house tests can be performed by the nurse to

diagnose infections in these animals, such as lungworm and ringworm, and confirm successful treatment.

Hedgehogs have fairly basic housing and dietary requirements which can be easily met in a veterinary practice short-term, provided they can be kept somewhere quiet, away from dogs. Suitable husbandry will help prevent issues such as dietary upset, reduce stress, and encourage a speedier recovery. It will often take some weeks to complete the rehabilitation process; a local rehabilitator can be contacted to take over their care once the nurse has completed the important task of stabilisation.

### KEY LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Examining a hedgehog casualty
- Nursing care of a sick or injured hedgehog
- Understanding the husbandry requirements of a hedgehog

### MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. A small hedgehog, weighing 300 g, is found out during the day in late autumn. What should be done?  
(A) Released immediately, where found  
(B) Rehydrated and released, where found  
(C) Kept in care until sufficiently heavy  
(D) Released immediately, in suitable habitat
2. An underweight hedgehog is admitted with an intermittent cough. What is the most likely cause?  
(A) Lungworm  
(B) Tuberculosis  
(C) Distemper virus  
(D) Aspergillosis
3. What do hedgehogs commonly carry, which means that gloves should always be worn when handling them?  
(A) Leishmaniasis  
(B) Mucosal disease  
(C) Sarcocystis mangle  
(D) Ringworm

## Avian nursing: starling to sparrow hawk

Marie Kubiak

Wild avian patients throw up some additional challenges compared with their pet counterparts:

- Identification of species
- Lack of reliable information on appropriate diet and conditions

- Stress effects and maladaptation to the captive situation
- Poor tolerance of handling
- Negative effects of imprinting of juvenile animals
- Higher potential for zoonotic disease
- Legal implications of capture and release

It is important that each wild bird gets a full clinical assessment (conscious examination in tractable species, examination under anaesthesia in fractious or easily stressed species) to determine clinical problems and prognosis for release. Further diagnostics may be indicated based on findings to gain a full appreciation of likely outcome. With all wild birds the ultimate aim should be rapid