HEDGEHOG CARE

LINCOLNSHIRE'S FAMOUS LITTLE HEDGEHOG HOSPITAL

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Sponsored by **'Spikes World'**

Patrons: **Ken Livingstone, Mayor of London & Dr. Nigel Reeve,** BSc. Hons, Ph.D., PGCE

2003 ANNUAL REVIEW

In 2003, two hundred and thirty one patients were released from Hedgehog Care for return to the wild, or for those with disabilities, to enclosed gardens. Some weren't ready to leave before winter and will stay until spring, and sadly others were laid to rest in the graveyard by the stained glass window at the end of the garden. It seems a far cry from the years when eight hundred left here for new lives but over the last two years volunteers throughout Lincolnshire have thankfully shared my work load and many of their patients can be added to the success number.

Inspired by St Tiggywinkles pioneering in Buckinghamshire, Hedgehog Care was established twenty years ago. It made sensational headlines all over the world as then there were few wildlife hospitals and even fewer specialising in hedgehogs. The British Hedgehog Preservation Society was formed to campaign for safe cattle grids not care for sick hedgehogs and the RSPCA knew nothing about hedgehogs. My intended hobby soon took over my life and nearly twenty four thousand patients have since been here for help. B.H.P.S. has also flourished and I am grateful for their directory of countrywide carers for referral of distant S.O.S. calls. Every county now has its multitudes of "Hedgehog Ladies" – and gentlemen – and every newspaper has featured its local dedicated hero.

As no qualifications are yet required for nursing wildlife, treatment and medication must be aided, approved, and surgery performed by a vet. Caution should always be taken in selecting a carer. You have every right to check out and ask questions as most are publicly funded. I have been dismayed to hear that people needing help for distressed hedgehogs have been told "Leave it and see if it's still there tomorrow". "What time do you call this?". "Stop feeding them or they won't hibernate". This is not the response of dedicated knowledgeable people. First aid should be prompt; round the clock help should be available for nocturnal creatures; and winter food should be provided until hedgehogs decide to stop coming.

On my own I now rely on my Lincolnshire helpers who have studied and learnt from books by Les Stocker, Jane Durrant or Kay Bullen (available from BHPS). They are all assisted by vets and when necessary I pay the bills. It's reassuring to know that there is a responsible reliable network of good people covering Lincolnshire and working for all the right reasons. We all love hedgehogs.

The Uist Hedgehog Rescue has been disappointing. Scottish Natural Heritage preferred euthanasia to relocation on the mainland and were unco-operative with rescue volunteers prepared for all aspects of hedgehog welfare. Public outrage and thousands of donations have funded extensive research and organisation to save the hedgehogs from slaughter. Two hundred were evacuated by air but sixty were killed by S.N.H. as their method of solving the island ecology problem. Hedgehogs were accused of eating birds' eggs causing an alarming decline in waders native to the Hebridean islands. (To prevent my resident pigeons overpopulating I pinch their eggs and give them to the hedgehogs. Only one ever ate them and a visitor seeing rejected eggs in the cages thought the hedgehogs had laid them). The operation was called off when the breeding season started, and activities will resume after hibernation in 2004. St Tiggywinkles sent me their list of people offering Lincolnshire and Humberside release sites, and I compiled my own so if and when Hedgehog Care receives rescued Uist hedgehogs I will be in touch.

In anticipation of sudden influx of Uist hedgehogs I prepared a large foxproof enclosure which cost £650. This sum was kindly paid for by CARE FOR THE WILD INTERNATIONAL, a fund-raising organisation which helps small charities. I was therefore able to plan two more enclosures to be erected by INTERSKILL of Louth. These people with learning difficulties work for the community and their two spacious runs cost £110. A month later they marched proudly round with a third circular run for Harland which they had measured and designed in secret, a wonderful surprise and absolutely free. Appropriately furnished, turfed and prettied with statues and plants, the wildlife garden was described by an American visitor as enchanting.

I try to confine intake to hedgehogs but occasional rescues have to include fur and feathers. I am not good with birds and usually pass them on to specialists. Guinea pigs and rabbits are not much trouble but often come needing maternity care. Busy Lizzie arrived in desperate trouble after escaping to elope with a wild rabbit who then abandoned her. She gave birth to seven and, after neutering the males, her family moved in with the hedgehogs in the biggest run to entertain visiting young children who don't particularly want a long lecture on hedgehog welfare. Three more tame and lovely bunnies arrived for sanctuary and joyfully scampered and played together for a fortnight in another run until two of them developed dreaded symptoms confirmed by the vet to be myxomatosis. To save them the advancing agonies of this wretched disease they were put to sleep and twelve others were vaccinated. As all hedgehogs are cleared of parasites on arrival here, those sharing the runs couldn't be blamed so I concluded that the new turf must have been contaminated with fleas from infected wild rabbits.

Perky Pets – our biggest sponsor – has now discontinued tinned Spikes Dinner, as diners much preferred the dried version. Without moisture this chunky food is 100% nutrition, doesn't attract flies or go sour, and is more convenient to serve. Perkys has also now formulated a new range called WILD THINGS. These are four specific menus catering for hedgehog, squirrel, badger and fox, swan and duck. Telephone 01522 688300 for mail order or nearest stockist.

A leaflet with ten top tips for slugs and snails is available free, for a S.A.E. send to Steve Brookes, Public Eye Promotions, P.O. Box 3182, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire CV37 7XW. Hedgehog friendly it also gives details of his intriguing gardening book to be published in summer 2004.

As help here with tending my hedgehogs has more or less dwindled away it's a daily fight against time to include telephone calls, letters, visitors, dog grooming and management of Hedgehog Care. However I now have Karen, my "jumble manageress" who spends hours patiently sorting, hanging and arranging piles of generously donated bric-a-brac, books and clothes etc. which we have permanently on sale in Hogsfam. As we need more customers, she takes selected goods to them at car boot sales to boost funds.

Whilst his mum was browsing through Hogsfam bargains, her little boy trailed round the cages outside with questions about every patient. He eventually asked if I had any really bad cases and I replied that those ones were under intensive care in the house and weren't allowed visitors. "'Ave yer got any dead 'uns?". "Well there is one awaiting her funeral, if you take off your hat you could help". Slowly walking with absolute reverence he tenderly carried in his baseball cap a still little body to her final resting place. I asked him to say a prayer as I covered her with earth. His eyes welled with tears as in a trembly hushed voice he said "For what we are about to receive may the Lord make us truly thankful. Amen".

May I ask two favours. I receive dozens of letters daily with enquiries, offers of help and encouragement and donations and signed frequently with only a Christian name. An address, at least a surname, would save hours of racking my slow old brain and guesswork before admitting defeat. Secondly, these days with only memories of being able to leap over gates and fences, I now have to literally handle my legs over such obstacles. When the phone rings I might be at the end of the garden; feeding orphans; clipping a dog; the wrong side of two or three doors which need closing; up a ladder; changing a dressing; securing roofing felt; or painting the chimney. As often as not 1471 just tells me that caller withheld number and if I carry the cordless with me I lose it. I am on my own and 64 so please make allowance and ring me long!

My deepest gratitude is extended to all who have supported Hedgehog Care in so many different ways. Posted donations, stall and boot sales, two life long collections of treasured hegehogabilia, Mrs Tiggywinkles Washing Line Sale, 11 years old Jade's & Natalie's Fun Day proceeds, Bratoft Church Pet Service, Motor Cycle Action Group run, school jumble sales, Thorslincs fund raising, swear box contents, lady on holiday who tipped out her purse, Magic Wand's and other shop's collecting boxes, handicraft sales, Greenways Garden Centre wishing well, Rapid Office Equipment regular contributions, Harland's hedgehog care and intensive fund raising in Skegness, funeral donations from bereaved families in memory of loved ones, including cherished deceased pets, animal lovers' wills, Edith & Laddies marmalade and chutney sales, house clearance goods and plants to sell, Bank Giro Credits, Charities Aid, clothes for Hogsfam, tins of food, newspapers, blankets, etc. I could go on for ever! Hedgehog Care survives because of your vital support and I can't begin to tell you how much it is appreciated.

Elaine