

CASUALTIES

Orphans and Juveniles



The majority of these birds will have no physical injuries: such birds should be returned as soon as possible to where they were found. If this is not possible then an alternative would be to place the bird or birds into a wild foster nest or several nests. This method is not as straight forward as it first appears. Difficulties may be encountered initially in locating a suitable nest site. The number of young, their

age and in some instances, their sex will determine the suitability of a nest to be used. If the species is listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 then a licence will be required BEFORE a possible nest site is even checked.

Cross fostering i.e. with a different species, must not be used as this could result in the placed bird becoming disorientated towards its own species. Serious consequences could result from this once the bird is sexually mature and seeks out a mate.

If a suitable wild foster nest cannot be found, orphans can be reared in captivity by foster parents and hacked back to the wild at a later stage in their development. See *Rehabilitation* for more information. Whichever method is employed for this category of bird, it is imperative that they are firmly imprinted upon their own species. Simply stopping imprinting on humans, whilst essential, is not satisfactory.

If the situation arises where a bird has to be hand reared as a last resort, then a puppet that resembles the species concerned should be used as a visual fixation during feeding times. All species can be encouraged to pick up and eat chopped up food by the time they are twelve to fourteen days old. Therefore, there are no excuses for over handling and hand feeding young birds so that imprinting occurs. Great care must also be taken to ensure that the young bird does not know a person is supplying their food or imprinting may still occur.

It must also be noted that for any released bird to fully integrate with the wild breeding population, it may also have to be orientated towards its natural nesting situation.

Short stay cases

These birds will not have suffered any severe trauma or illness and will have only been in care for a short period of time. A common example of this is a Sparrowhawk that has flown into a window and been in care for 48 hours. Such a bird, following observations, can simply be released where it was found.

The time period allocated to a casualty to classify it as a short stay case will vary depending on the species concerned. A Buzzard, for example, which has been in care for two to three weeks, with moderate exercise in an aviary, will perform reasonably well if released.

The Peregrine Falcon in care for the same period would be completely out of condition and almost certainly starve to death if simply released. Any bird that has been confined without any exercise, i.e. in a hospital unit, for numerous days should receive some form of release preparation.

Long stay cases

These birds will have suffered major trauma or illness and have been in care for many weeks or even months.

Casualties that were severely emaciated may have had their body weight built back up to normal, following treatment for the possible cause. Such birds will usually be unfit and out of condition. Their fat to muscle ratio will almost certainly be incorrect.

Birds that were not originally emaciated but have been confined are very likely to be in a similar condition. These birds would be severely handicapped if released and less likely to survive.



Assessment of release suitability is of particular importance when birds have had fractures that have healed. These birds may appear to fly perfectly well around in an aviary but as more exercise is introduced it is not uncommon for complications to become apparent. All long stay casualties should undergo some form of release preparation to ensure that they are reasonably fit before release. This preparation will vary, depending on the species and the original disability. See *Rehabilitation* for more information.

Assessing eyesight before release

Thirty percent of all raptor trauma cases involve damage to the eyes. In 70% of these the damage is at the back of the eye, where it may only be seen by a veterinary surgeon using an ophthalmoscope. Eyesight must be assessed by behaviour in the field or by a vet prior to release.

Captive bred birds

It is inevitable that lost or escaped captive-bred birds will be brought in to a rehabilitator. Every effort must be made to re-unite these birds with their legitimate owner.

No captive-bred bird should be re-homed without the recipient being made aware that the owner may come forward in the future. A rehabilitator is entitled to require payment of any reasonable expense incurred in the care and recovery of a bird, before returning it to the owner.

If the bird concerned is a species that is listed on Schedule 4 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, then the rehabilitator must inform the necessary authorities. **See Appendix A.**

