The South Devon Seabird Trust was established in 1983, with the express purpose of caring for oiled seabirds. The methodology developed by the Trust has proved to be most successful, enabling an average of 74% of the oiled auks admitted for treatment to be returned to the wild. The success of its methodology is proved by the information received back from its ringed rehabilitated birds post release.

It has always been the aim of this Trust to assist in the promotion and improvement of animal welfare and it is hoped that this paper will be useful to others.

N.B. The author of this paper urges anyone wishing to embark on the task of caring for oiled seabirds to investigate the results of centres giving advice on this matter, in order to make a sound judgement regarding the effectiveness of that information. If centres cannot back up their advice with concrete evidence of successful rehabilitation, then the information they provide must be treated with caution.
IT DOES NOT MATTER WHETHER YOU ARE SETTING UP A SMALL UNIT IN YOUR GARDEN, OR HAVE LARGE FACILITIES, THIS METHODOLOGY CAN BE TAILORED TO YOUR REQUIREMENTS AND SUCCESS CAN BE ACHIEVED ON ANY SCALE.

The methodology developed by the Trust is not from theories, but from practical research gathered over a 30 year period. It has proved to be extremely successful, especially in the treatment of oiled auks, particularly guillemots - which the author contends, (with correct treatment) are probably the easiest birds to treat and rehabilitate, and as far as this Trust is concerned, have provided the best ringing recoveries post release.

Oiled Guillemots used to be considered too difficult and too costly to rehabilitate, however, this regime, with its no frills approach, is both efficient and cost effective. It is based on treating the birds as wild creatures with minimal handling and quiet conditions throughout.

Ringing recoveries from these birds endorses the success of the methodology and SDST is pleased to be able to share its findings with other rehabilitators.

The successful treatment of oil contaminated birds depends upon several factors:

- How much oil the birds have ingested, and its toxicity.
- How efficiently the birds are caught and handled.
- The expertise and efficiency of the rehabilitation centre to which they are admitted.
- Offering each bird the opportunity of treatment, thereby ensuring that viable birds are not destroyed.
- Treating each bird as a separate entity.
- Allowing sufficient time for each casualty to recover fully before release is even considered (bearing in mind that they will not all recuperate at the same rate).

Above all treating them as WILD creatures, and respecting the fact that, not only are they being handled, which they hate, but they are in completely 'alien' surroundings.

In all matters relating to wild birds it must be remembered that they thrive in a stress free environment.
We believe the reason for our success is in the fact that the same simple principles are followed for each casualty:

1) The psychological aspects regarding the treatment of wildlife must be understood and respected. Therefore, it is important to provide a stress free environment.

2) Not to handle the birds anymore than is absolutely necessary; we do not weigh the birds daily – they are weighed only twice, once on admittance and once on release.

3) Bloods are not taken, as we consider this to be too invasive, unnecessary and costly. Progress of the birds in our care can be gained from daily visual observation.

4) Too much interference can be counterproductive, causing great stress to an already traumatised creature, possibly damaging their immune system and introducing a condition from which they will not recover.

5) Only administer medication when there is proof that it is needed. There is absolutely no point in giving these creatures unnecessary (so called preventative) medication on the premise that it may stave off something that they do not even have, or are likely to get if kept in suitable conditions.

5) Birds progress at their own speed. Most victims of oil pollution are held for at least one month before release is considered. Some need longer. The only exception is for those in breeding plumage, in the breeding season, as they are driven by the urgency to return to their mates, but it is most advisable to hold these at least 3 weeks to prove their fitness and waterproofing before release.

6) A window of relatively calm weather is required for release in order to give the birds the best chance of settling back into their natural environment. Auks range widely so do not need to be released where they were found.

7) Keeping the regime simple is the key to success. The birds soon get to know the routine and it is easy for helpers to get involved.
South Devon Seabird Trust

CAPTURE OF OILED SEA BIRDS.

Often the first indication that there has been an oil spill will be dead or moribund birds on rocks or beaches. If a pelagic bird is found beached, whether it appears to be oiled or not, it must be assumed that it is sick and in need of urgent attention.

Even the weakest bird will try to avoid capture, preferring to take its chance at sea. Rescuers, therefore, need to place themselves between the bird and the sea to cut off its retreat. A net is the best means of catching the bird, but if this is not available a towel, coat or something similar can be used to throw over it.

Care must be taken with the beak as even a weak bird can inflict a painful injury. Placing hands around the wings and tilting the head down will help to prevent injury to both bird and rescuer. Alternatively it can be carried under one arm whilst holding the head, thus leaving the other hand free.

Birds should never be carried by the head or legs. Birds will try to stab at a rescuer’s eyes, this is the natural defence mechanism that they employ to escape a predator, so it is most wise to keep the bird at arms length, or held low, until it is completely under control. Birds such as herons have a very long reach and can spring from a crouching position to full height very quickly.

Gannets, Shags and Cormorants should never have their beaks taped firmly closed as this would prevent them breathing. Smaller birds do not need to have their beaks taped at all. Rubber bands should never be used.

When the bird has been captured the best means of transportation is a cardboard box with small air holes punched around the top; it should be big enough for the casualty to sit comfortably, without damage to plumage.

Birds can rest quietly in these boxes for an hour or two, but obviously the quicker the casualty is dealt with, the better its chance of survival.
PROBLEMS OF HOSPITALISATION

Seabirds, as the name implies, spend their lives at sea coming ashore only briefly to inspect their colony and breed. Because they are not used to standing for prolonged periods on hard surfaces it is necessary, during the time they are held for treatment, that care is taken to prevent pressure sores to legs, feet and keel. The use of foam rubber in cages, pens and under a plastic cover in aviaries is an excellent way to prevent damage to the feet, legs and keel of these birds. Once a bird has sustained an injury from pressure sores it is difficult (usually impossible) to cure and infection from excrement can be difficult to treat.

Carers must balance the desire to keep birds clean with the need for it to be left undisturbed as much as possible. Constant disturbance in order to clean cages/pens will stress the occupant and be counterproductive bringing about a relapse in its condition. It is best to heed the birds’ desire for quiet and rest by not disturbing them too often.

It is important to take note of a bird’s psychological as well as physical requirements. Guillemots in particular are gregarious, they do well when placed with others. Initially a bird needs warmth and food, but after a few days, when feeling better, will suffer if it cannot be with others of its own kind.

Aviaries must be constructed using heavy, rust resistant wire mesh. Chicken wire, or similar should not be used because it can cause injury if birds try to climb or push against it.

Some birds mix well, Guillemots, Razorbills, Kittiwakes and small gulls can share aviaries. Divers need their space and because they can encounter such problems such as cloacal impaction must have access to water soon after they arrive at a rescue centre in order to defecate. Fulmars, if stressed, will spit at other birds which they feel are threatening.

Larger species of gulls do not do well in aviaries, they constantly push at the wire and cause damage to their beaks. An open fenced area is better suited to these birds.

Gannets are highly strung, they usually prefer to be fed and tended by the same person. Feeding them too can present problems. Some will take food from the hand, others if it is thrown to them or dropped into shallow water. Rarely will they take from a dish, and often need to be force fed initially.

Some birds are crawling with parasites, particularly Cormorants and Shags and to a lesser extent Gannets. Feather lice can be dealt with immediately by dusting with a suitable preparation. But worming should be left for a few days until the bird is stronger.

Birds must be monitored carefully for signs of disease. Aspergillosis is a respiratory illness for which very little can be done, it is caused by fungal spores, and has a debilitating affect on birds whose immune systems have been compromised by illness and stress. Any bird thought to be suffering from this condition should be isolated immediately and veterinary advice sought.

Prevention is better than cure so birds must be kept in the best conditions possible, they should not be allowed to become chilled, pens should be raised off the ground and cages kept at least 2 feet off the floor.

The time a bird needs in care can vary from 3 weeks to several months, depending upon its condition.
ARRIVAL AT THE REHABILITATION CENTRE

When birds are first admitted a brief examination only is necessary in order to determine the extent of oiling and whether there are any other problems. They should not be subjected to a detailed examination at this time, as this would cause additional stress to an already traumatised casualty. Casualties of chronic oil pollution, generally arrive in manageable numbers and it is the view of this Trust that it is impossible to tell, from the outset, which will survive the rehabilitation process and those that may not. All, therefore, are given equal opportunity and provided with the same level of care.

They should be placed in the intensive care unit, in either a warm pen under an infra red lamp in a gentle heat (taking care not to overheat), or in individual cages in a warm room, in a temperature of about 70º(f), 22º(c), and offered one small fish.

Some people believe that because these creatures endure harsh conditions in the wild, they should not need to be provided with heat. However, in their own environment these birds will be on the move constantly, keeping themselves warm in the process, therefore they have no need of extra benefits. But when sick and inactive, their needs are quite different. Providing them with warmth obviates their need to use energy to achieve the correct body temperature. Also being warm helps them to digest their food. Extra warmth is an important factor in beginning the treatment.

A Register should be kept and an entry made for every incoming casualty, detailing by whom it was found, where, and the date of finding. The condition of the bird will be recorded, degree of oiling, any injuries, weight (if you wish. Each bird will be given a Register number (numbered consecutively).

A coloured, numbered ring will be fitted, in order to track the casualty's movement throughout the duration of its time at the rehabilitation centre. This ring will be removed at time of release and replaced with a ring purchased through the officially acknowledged ringing scheme.
TRIAGE.

Victims of oil pollution are separated according to their degree of oiling or general condition. NONE are singled out for euthanasia as we have discovered that it is impossible to tell from the outset which will survive. We have found that some that are so weak upon arrival that they cannot stand, but with care will regain their fitness, and some others, seemingly strong upon admittance, may fail.

Also heavily oiled birds sometimes have a better chance of survival because they have not preened and ingested much of the oil, and internally they are in better condition than those that have preened excessively, and appear to be less oiled.

This method of triage is also most cost effective, because instead of wasting money, and stressing the casualties in an endeavour to assess fitness, the birds themselves will provide the evidence (one way or the other) as to which are viable. And we never fail to be surprised.

We certainly do not destroy small birds. Auks vary tremendously in size (and weight). Large birds are mainly from northern colonies and are also quite dark in colour whilst small birds are usually lighter in colour and most probably from southern colonies.

Weigh, examine for injuries (fishing hooks etc.). Over meticulous handling of an already traumatised bird immediately upon admission should be avoided, as this can cause irreversible damage. Only when the casualty has had time to settle down—approximately 30 minutes after its first feed—should it be examined.

The degree of oiling and, where possible, type of oil will be noted—crude oil is probably the easiest to deal with. Diesel is particularly dangerous because of the fumes it gives off. Birds with diesel on their plumage must be kept in well ventilated conditions.

The small (southern) guillemot in the picture is just as fit as the larger (northern) one. Being small means it is also lighter in weight, but does not mean it is 'not viable'. Just as with people, there are size differences. By the same token it is nonsensical to try to take an average size/weight as a way to determine whether or not to give treatment or to release.

One of our most successful ringing recoveries was for a bird released at less than the weight some centres may...
Other oils with additives that tend to burn the casualty will need immediate attention. Although many casualties will just be ‘oiled’ there are on occasion, injuries to feet and legs when birds are caught on rocks, or even with fishing hooks embedded in their flesh when they have tried to catch bait from fishing lines.

Examination, including weighing (optional) should only take a couple of minutes.

- **ACCOMMODATION**

Birds must be kept in the cleanest conditions possible, grime can cause problems for delicate feet and plumage and also support a variety of bacteria.

**CORMORANTS & SHAGS** must be kept in separate accommodation whilst in intensive care.

**Auks** should be kept (preferably) in individual cages or pens, for the first two or three days, in order to monitor their feeding and progress, e.g. assessing for need to worm or for antibiotics. Cages must be well above floor level to avoid draughts which are always prevalent close to the floor.

Pens and cages must be large enough to allow each bird to stand, open its wings and turn around comfortably. Cages and pens must have 25mm (1”) of foam rubber (or similar) on the floor to prevent injury to delicate legs and feet of auks. This can be covered with a washable plastic (bin bag or similar) and then covered with soft absorbent material, such as towels to soak up moisture and dirt.

- **Left** - small pen suitable for 1 or 2 auks,
- **Right** - pet carrier able to accommodate 1 or 2 auks.
Initially each bird should be monitored and notes made against its register entry. Coloured pegs can be used on the doors of the cages to help identify the date the bird was admitted and also coded to indicate the occupants progress, or problems; e.g. Red = not eating/requiring special attention, and the information kept on a wipe clean board (to keep everyone informed).

Handling should be kept to a minimum. Picking up wild birds to weigh or examine daily achieves very little and can cause stress leading to further problems, possibly affecting the bird's immune system (this has been proved scientifically). Progress can be judged visually and birds should only be handled when being moved to a clean cage or pen.

When auks are stabilised and have started to feed themselves from dishes placed in their pen they can be transferred to pens with four or five others, which are at the same stage of recovery. During this time, Guillemots in particular, will need to be watched carefully for signs of bullying; occasionally dominant birds will prevent others from feeding.

When birds arrive in high numbers the number of birds in each pen will be decided by the size of the pen, but preferably should not house more than 15 auks, as they have a tendency to bunch together when accommodated in this manner, and are very difficult to deal with. Obviously in a major disaster where hundreds or thousands of birds are affected they must, out of necessity, be in larger groups.

Pens that are sited on concrete floors must be on something to keep them off the floor, an inch of polystyrene (or similar material), will help to protect from cold. Sick birds are very susceptible to cold and draughts. The pens should also be ventilated underneath in order to keep a movement of air and prevent the build up of moisture and mould.

Every effort must be made to protect convalescing birds from draughts which are very damaging.
Rehabilitators will often look for easy ways of keeping pens and cages clean. The use of sawdust as a floor covering is not recommended, neither is the use of shredded paper. Sawdust will contaminate any fish that have been dropped and shredded paper tangles around the birds’ feet.

Cloth is best, it can be washed and recycled and if an appeal is made in time of emergency well wishers will often bring towels and sheets, sometimes more than you need right then, but can be stored for another time.

Large cardboard boxes are also very useful and are recommended as emergency accommodation especially at time of crisis, they are absorbent and can be replaced regularly if they become dirty.

ACCOMMODATION

Oiled seabirds from chronic oiling are generally admitted in small manageable numbers throughout the year (although mainly during the winter months). When a major disaster strikes birds will be admitted in much greater numbers, therefore, they will be dealt with in batches – rather than as individuals. The overall regime will, however, be the same as for those from chronic oiling:

a) Casualties will be quickly assessed according to the degree of oiling and general fitness and placed into pens in manageable size groups of preferably only 20 to 30. Lightly oiled birds will be kept apart from those that are more heavily contaminated.

b) They will be handed food to get them feeding (fish can be handed or dropped beside each bird). When they have all started feeding bowls of fish can be placed in each pen and watched to make sure all the birds are getting some.

Rest, food, warmth, and quiet conditions are most important. It is very important to remember that wild creatures stress easily in unfamiliar surroundings and stress is a killer.

With careful handling, even wild birds will soon settle to a routine and their initial fear of being in alien conditions will soon subside and give way to their need to survive their ordeal and recover.
Casualties of chronic oiling. Casualties that are admitted to SDST for treatment as a result of chronic oiling (as opposed to those rescued from a major disaster) follow these steps:

- **Step 1. Initial care upon admission.** Ideally the new arrival should take a small fish, by hand, straight from water in order to feed and rehydrate. Offer the fish tail first, it will be turned around and swallowed head first. If it does not take a fish from the hand, dropping a fish close by may encourage feeding. This is the beginning of its care and the feeding programme will continue with hourly (or ½ hourly) feeds for the first two days.

**INITIAL FEEDING**

Casualties of chronic oil pollution may not have eaten for several days. By the time they are rescued they are invariably starving. To offer an emaciated creature unlimited food would overtax the digestive system and most probably cause its demise. Therefore, food must be introduced in small quantities and regular intervals to begin with. Rehydration fluids may be given by tube, however, it is our belief that it is far better to get the casualty to start to feed on small amounts of food as soon as possible, that way, when fish is offered straight from water it will both feed and hydrate without causing distress.

Small (sea) fish must be used for seabirds. In the UK sprats are the preferred option, or sand eels. Small sprats will be offered one at a time, hourly or half-hourly, depending upon the condition of the casualty. This will continue for the first two days in order to stabilise its digestive system. The fish should be offered wet (straight from water). White bait is a useful alternative for those birds which need very small fish to start with.

During this time the droppings will be observed and used as an indicator to the internal condition of the casualty. The faeces should be grey and the urine white for a healthy guillemot.
Some birds will take food from the hand, but others need to be coaxed. Dropping a fish on the floor of the pen next to the bird will often get a bird to seize it automatically. Whole fish are swallowed head first allowing the fins to slide easily down the throat. This should be kept in mind when force feeding. Birds that are hand fed should have the fish presented tail first, as they will instinctively turn it around. Fish should always be offered straight from water-dripping wet—thereby providing essential fluid as well as food, as both are equally important.

Initially each bird's consumption of food must be monitored and regulated. Offering too much food to a starving creature is a death sentence. A bird that has not fed for several days will gorge itself if presented with an unlimited amount of food, which is why small amounts at regularly intervals are necessary. Sometimes a traumatised bird is unable, or unwilling to start feeding straight away, in which case it should be left for a short time, allowed to rest and recover. Sometimes, when a bird has been in a bad way for a long time it may need to be left for a few days before it will start to feed. If a bird is still not feeding after a few days then it should be tube fed. However, care must be taken as to the amount given, whilst some guillemots can manage 15mls, others will choke on just 5mls. Rehydration fluids or liquidised fish are tube fed into the oesophagus, and if too much is given it may flood the oesophagus of a dehydrated bird, and go down the trachea, drowning the casualty. TUBE FEEDING

Birds that are very weak and unable to take whole fish will need to be tube fed. The tube used must be gauged and measured against the bird it is to be used on (I have seen very long tubes more suited to a gannet being forced down the throat of guillemots), one size does not fit all birds! Fillets of sprat (or similar small fish) should be liquidised to form a thin soup. Glucose and a small amount of cod liver oil can

See Tubing feeding. However, care must be taken as to the amount given, whilst some guillemots can manage 15mls, others will choke on just 5mls. Rehydration fluids or liquidised fish are tube fed into the oesophagus, and if too much is given it may flood the oesophagus of a dehydrated bird, and go down the trachea, drowning the casualty. TUBE FEEDING

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See Tubing feeding.
not be added until birds have access to pools and are able to bathe). Sea fish contain all the salt that is needed to keep the salt gland working during the early period when the birds are in intensive care.

Birds will now need to be encouraged to feed themselves. Obviously wild birds will need to be taught to feed from a dish. This can be tricky, but dropping the fish into a dish whilst the bird watches, or swirling the fish around in the dish will encourage the bird/birds to help themselves.

Alternatively, placing a bird which needs to be taught in a pen with another which is feeding, and from whom it can learn, will help. This will only work with 2 or 3 birds together, not when they get into larger groups.

The amount of food will now be increased (an amount of 6 per bird, 3 times a day is a rough guide) and the casualty will take as much as it wishes. Some birds may gorge themselves to begin with, but will soon settle to taking just what they need. There is now no fear of injury from over-eating, and from now on food will be present at all times in dishes with water but no added salt.

Obviously because sea birds chase and catch live fish, when they are presented with dead fish in a bowl it is beyond their comprehension and they need to be taught how to feed. This is extremely important, because when they take their place in an aviary with others it is impossible to monitor the food intake of each individual bird. It has been known for auks to stand quite close to a dish of fish, but not take from it.

FEEDING — GANNETS. Upon admission to a rescue centre gannets will nearly always need to be force-fed for the first two or three days — (2 or 3 sprats or 1 small herring/mackerel) at hourly intervals will suffice. Thereafter they may take fish that have been speared on to the end of a stick, or from tongs (at arms length), if this method is used it is advisable to wear strong (thick) gloves, as gannets,
be added. As well as being nutritious cod liver oil will also help to dissolve any stubborn oil in the gut. If cod liver oil is used great care must be taken NOT to get it on to the bird’s plumage as it is very difficult to remove.

Small amounts of this preparation should be given. As a guide, the following is suggested in the initial treatment of the casualty, and this may be judged by giving a little at a time, very slowly, the size of the bird being one of the deciding factors. (See accommodation page 8.)

I should add that the volume given is often greater than a bird is capable of taking

A word of caution - normally these amounts will be acceptable, but occasionally a bird the size of a guillemot (murre) that is severely dehydrated, will choke on as little as 5mls.

Step 2. Take to intensive care room to commence treatment.

Whether the casualty is kept in an individual cage or in a pen with others depends upon the numbers being admitted. (See accommodation page 8).

All sea bird casualties follow the rule of hourly or ½ hourly feeds for 2 days. All the way through their stay at the rescue centre sea birds must be kept upon soft cushioning to protect their delicate legs and feet. Foam rubber is highly recommended. Whilst the birds are indoors the foam rubber can be encased in soft plastic (bin liner or similar) and then covered with clean soft absorbent material such as towels, which can be replaced regularly.

The length of time a bird is kept in the intensive care area depends upon its condition and speed of recovery.

Wild birds will soon settle to a routine and their fear of being in alien conditions will soon give way to their need to survive their ordeal, and recover.

Step 3. Self feeding, Day 3. (Auks)

When stabilised (after 3 days at the centre) fish should be offered in dishes, in a little water, DO NOT ADD SALT at this stage, (salt should
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When taking food in this way, will often overreach and grab the hand of the person offering the fish. Gannets are very timid birds and are alarmed at being approached by humans – when alarmed they will strike out, therefore (whilst they are in the intensive care area) they should be allowed enough space to keep a distance from the carer. Offering food from a distance is the best means of keeping the bird calm – and protecting the carer.

When Gannets are moved from the intensive care areas into aviaries they will usually require their food to be handed or thrown to them. If the fish are thrown towards their beak they will, usually, instinctively catch them. They will rarely pick up for themselves from the ground or from a dish, but when on a pool may reach under the water to pick up fish. Getting gannets to feed can be tricky and a great deal of patience is required.

Step 4. Washing
It is necessary to let victims of chronic oil pollution rest, de-stress, and physically recover before being washed. The only exception being if the oil is actually burning the skin of its victim. This will be evident by red tender patches (burning) under the feathers and especially around the legs and under the wings. This oil must be removed as soon as possible. Also, if the bird has been rescued quickly from an incident and is covered with thick oil causing extreme distress. Under normal circumstances 4 or 5 days is sufficient time to allow before washing. By this time the casualty will be rested and strong enough to withstand the trauma of this very stressful procedure.

It is advisable not to feed for an hour before washing.
Soft tubing can be used on the beaks of birds about to be washed. The teat of lamb feeding bottles, with a hole cut in the end is ideal (as pictured). Thin rubber bands must not be used as they can damage beaks, especially the beaks of Razorbills. Gannets must have their beaks slightly open, a soft piece of foam rubber between the mandibles works well with a piece of wide elastic around the beak to keep it all in place.

Oiled birds should not be washed for longer than twenty minutes at a time. One wash will usually suffice if a good cleaning agent is used – this Trust uses Fairy Liquid, (which is used for washing dishes). Very stubborn oil will require a second (quick) wash a day or two later, but tiny blotches of oil can be ignored as these will be dealt with by the casualty itself during the convalescent period, without causing harm. This especially applies to small smudges of oil on the head.

Two people will need to be in attendance to wash a bird the size of a guillemot, one to hold the bird, making sure its head and legs are well supported, the other to wash. Gannets need at least 3 people to wash it.

White spirit or other harsh substances MUST NOT be used. On no account should oily substances be used, as although it will help to remove the crude/fuel oil, it will take much longer to get the casualty waterproof again. Cleaning fluid must be applied all over its plumage. HOWEVER, this is not necessary for those that have only a few oily patches of oil on their feathers. It is far better to ‘spot clean’ these birds – just the affected area will have cleaning liquid applied. They will, of course, require all-over rinsing.
Great care must be taken to avoid getting cleaning fluid in the eyes. Only very diluted washing-up liquid should be used for the head and this should be applied with a cloth or small brush (soft toothbrush). Alternatively - if the head has only smudges of oil on it, (which is often the case if the bird has been rubbing its head against its body) then leave it without washing.

• Neat cleaning fluid is best applied to the **D**RY feathers and **O**nly to the oiled areas of the body, NOT the head.
• Work the neat cleaning fluid gently into each oily patch.
• When this is well worked in use a little warm water to make a lather, gently working into a mousse-like froth.
• A spray of warm water is now used to rinse the lather off and then the bird can be lowered up to its neck into a bowl of clean warm water, where the feathers can be agitated to remove the rest of the oil.
• If the oil is stubborn and some remains, then the procedure will be repeated.

- **RINSING** will start with bowls of clean warm water in which the bird is held and the water worked gently through the plumage.
- The number of bowls of clean, warm water will depend upon the level of contamination and the amount of cleaning agent used. Rinse in this manner until the water is clean.
- The bowl can now be dispensed with and only the spray will be needed for the final part of the process.
- Use a moderate spray (NOT high powered as this could damage plumage). It is important that the feathers should be sprayed downwards (the way in which the feathers naturally lie) as 50% of the bird’s waterproofing comes from the fact that it will have to knit the barbs of the feathers together again, so the least disruption to the feathers the easier, and quicker it will be for the bird to regain its waterproofing.

Spray the back first, then head to tail several times. Then the front (making sure the head and legs are well supported), finally spray the back again. Although it will need to be held initially...
whilst the front and back are being sprayed, if a rubber bath mat is placed in the sink the bird will be able to stand on this without slipping for the final stage of spraying.

Spraying will take 2 or 3 minutes and the bird must be sprayed all over, even if only a small patch of oil has been cleaned.

If the bird has been cleaned properly, once the cleaning is complete, of even if a rubber bath mat is used, the bird will be able to stand on this without slipping for the final stage of spraying.

If the bird has been cleaned properly, the feathers will repel water whilst being sprayed, but it does not mean that the plumage is waterproof. Waterproofing can only be achieved by the bird itself when it starts to bathe.

If the bird has been washed more than once the cleaning agent will have a drying effect on the feet. In order to prevent damage to the webs of a newly washed bird, a little lotion such as baby or hand lotion (NOT OIL) will help if it is worked gently into the feet. The feet must then be wiped with a soft cloth to remove any excess lotion, in order to prevent contamination to the plumage.

Heavily contaminated birds may require another wash a few days later, but each session should not be longer than 20 minutes. Newly washed birds will now be wrapped in clean towels and taken to drying pens/cages in the drying room. The towels will be removed and the birds placed in cages or pens on fresh clean towels, under heaters or with blow dryers, where they will be monitored every 10 minutes to check their progress and make sure they are not too cold or overheated.

Food will be given during this time, in dishes of water, but with no added salt. Salt should not be added to their food dishes until they have access to pools and start to bathe.

The use of towels is emphasised because they absorb much of the moisture & hasten drying, which is obviously beneficial for good health. Allowing birds to sit around in wet conditions can damage their plumage.

Drying A large wire cage such as a large dog cage, is ideal for drying birds such as auks which are admitted in small numbers. It should be positioned on a solid surface (bench/table) above the floor in order to avoid draughts which are prevalent at floor level.
Whether the numbers washed are small or large, they should not be overcrowded in the drying pens or cages as they will tend to bunch up and delay the drying process.

A fan heater should be positioned outside the cage (NEVER UNDER THE CAGE) with the heat directed into it. The heater should be about 3 inches above the floor level of the cage (in order to avoid heat damage to legs and feet). One side will be open, the other 3 sides will be covered to retain warmth.

A bowl of fish should be provided in the drying cage or pen. GANNETS, CORMORANTS, SHAGS and DIVERS will require a suitable size pen and an overhead heat lamp.

It is advisable to allow the birds to rest and recover in the cage or pen when the heater has been turned off.

The time a bird takes to dry depends upon:

a) Its general fitness;

b) How well it has been cleaned.

(It could be as little as 20 minutes or as long as an hour). After drying they will be rested for 24 hours, and then join others in a heated pen which has access to an enclosed aquatic aviary.

PROGRESS TO AQUATIC AVIARIES. When they first start to bathe they may become quite wet, or at best damp, so will need protection from the cold. They must not be allowed to get chilled so must be shown how to access the enclosed pool area in order to bathe and then be ushered back indoors to dry off under heat lamps.
They will soon learn this routine and it will be repeated several times a day until they start to get dry.

It is by bathing and then returning indoors to preen and dry under heat lamps, that they bring about their own waterproofing. If there are a number of birds sharing a large indoor pen, it is wise to have 2 heat lamps as the stronger birds will take the best places and weaker birds may be forced to sit in the cold.

**PUFFINS** will benefit from the provision of a small cage or similar object in which to hide away. These can be sited inside the normal indoor areas, and because they will resemble the burrows into which they go at their colonies, will help to settle them down and keep them away from other birds.

**SHEARWATERS** prefer to come out of shelter at night, making it difficult to assess their progress, so they must be encouraged into the pool area during the day, even if it is only for a few minutes at a time.

DO NOT IMPOSE A TIME LIMIT.

In the past some rehabilitators believed you could wash oiled birds dry, and this led to birds being released too soon (before they were waterproof) and coming to grief. This in turn emanated in reports which questioned the worth of treating oil contaminated birds, particularly guillemots. During the 1990s oiled guillemots were considered only fit for the ‘bullet approach’ and many hundreds were destroyed through ignorance.

During the washing process water may bead off the feathers, but it cannot be taken for waterproofing – only the birds themselves can achieve this by bathing and preening, and the time it takes to achieve full waterproofing varies from bird to bird.

The length of time they are in this protected ‘nursery area’ varies from bird to bird, but they should not be hurried, and should not be forced to stay on the water. They soon learn how to use the indoor areas and bring about their own waterproofing.

Note the dish of fish which is placed in every area which now has a sprinkling of salt added.
The barbs of each feather will have been displaced during the washing process, therefore each feather will be carefully treated by the bird itself. The barbs of the feathers will be correctly aligned and knitted together, and oil from the oil gland at the base of the tail will be applied by the bird to condition each feather, all of which helps towards waterproofing.

**Razorbill** (pictured on the right) reaches to its oil gland.

**Step 5. Self rehabilitation.**

From now on only visual observation will made as birds progress through the various stages of bathing and rehabilitation. They will now be getting fit and once again regaining their wildness, and must be given their space to prepare to return to the wild.

N.B a light sprinkling of salt should now be added to the water in their food dishes, in order to keep the salt gland working which is essential for when they return to the sea.

**Step 6. Progress towards Release.**

When newly washed birds first start to bathe, they may be damp or even a little wet, so they will need protection from the weather by means of an enclosed aviary (the nursery area). However, as they start to regain their waterproofing they can be moved to the first of the outdoor aviaries. Aviaries are connected by internal doors for ease of movement. Also note the ‘bird access’ doorways to and from the building into the aviaries. It is advisable to have the aviaries adjacent to one another, so that as the birds progress they can be moved from aviary to aviary through connecting doors, without the need to handle.
As the birds increase in strength their wildness will also return and it is a retrograde step to handle them. Aviaries should not be overcrowded, particularly when the birds are nearing release.

Aviaries of this size will have a pool 10ft x 6ft and 3ft deep. Bigger aviaries and pools would make it hard to effectively control the birds and difficult to catch them when required, for release.

Rehabilitators with smaller facilities will scale down as appropriate to their requirements.

Each aviary will have its own pool of skimming water (see water quality Page 29). The area around the pool will be lined with soft substrate (foam rubber is ideal), covered with waterproof material (tarpaulin or pool liner) which can be mopped. (See Cleaning Page 29).

Every aviary will also have an indoor area which can be easily accessed, through small doorways, by the birds, if needed. Indoor areas will have towels or other absorbent material covering the foam rubber and this will need to be kept clean by frequent changing.

Do not use sawdust as this will contaminate any fish that is dropped by feeding birds. Shredded paper is also unsuitable as it tends to get tangled around the legs of the birds.

Each indoor pen will have 1 or 2 heat lamps to help drying after the birds have bathed. This especially applies to the first area where newly washed birds first start to bathe. By the time they reach the release aviary there will be no need of lamps—except in very cold weather.
By the time the birds reach the release aviary the indoor area will probably only be used for catching the birds up for release, as they will use it very rarely and most probably as an occasional retreat.

If, however, a bird is found inside on several occasions, it is an indication that all is not well, and it should be returned to the pre-release area for further observation.

Preparation for Release.

Over a period of 3-4 weeks the birds will progress from aviary to aviary until, fully fit, they take their place in the "release aviary", usually in the company of many of the others with whom they started their convalescence and have become acquainted. This is very useful as they 'make friends' with certain others in their group, and it contributes towards harmony and relieves stress.

At the commencement of their treatment the birds will be observed for their general progress, but observations will be more detailed by the time they reach the release aviary. A viewing window from which the birds can be seen without disturbance is ideal, as when they know they are being watched they might act differently from when they are (or think they are) alone.

The birds should be on the water a good deal of the time, but not forced to do so. A spray of water can be played onto the pool to encourage bathing, they will enjoy circling under the spray and it will help to judge their health.

The birds can access indoor pens by means of doorways directly to and from the pool. They are totally relaxed and at ease (recovering from their ordeal).

Indoor pens provide protection from inclement weather and somewhere to retreat from perceived danger, (bearing in mind the birds are in alien conditions). By the time they reach the release aviary they have no more need of indoor areas, except for catching for release.
South Devon Seabird Trust

their waterproofing. Also a few fish dropped into the pool will encourage them to dive. Seabirds must be 100% fit and waterproof when they return to their own natural environment. We must be certain that they can withstand all the rigours of the sea.

We have, however, released 2 guillemots that have suffered the loss of a leg and a puffin whose leg was actually the wrong way around (facing backwards) and obviously had been all its life. They were all deemed releasable after careful scrutiny during rehabilitation.

It is unwise to release a victim of oil pollution until it has been observed at the centre for at least a month, for although it may appear outwardly fit, there is no telling what internal damage it may have suffered as a result of the oil it has ingested.

It used to be thought that they should be released within 10 days of admission, but this is wrong. Occasionally birds which have appeared to be doing well have died two or three weeks into the convalescent period. To release a bird before it has proved, beyond reasonable doubt, that it can survive in the wild is negligent and subjects the creature to unnecessary suffering.

IS WEIGHT AN INDICATOR OF FITNESS?

There are those that believe only birds above a certain weight will survive. With this in mind the Trust conducted its own research regarding the weights of guillemots at time of release. The results of this study were published in the Seabird Group Newsletter No.92 (October 2002).

It proved that weight has no bearing on whether or not a guillemot is a suitable candidate for release. It showed that small birds were just as successful as larger ones. It is also unwise to endeavour to find an 'average' weight as a guide to suitability for release, as seabirds vary in weight just as much as humans do.

Birds enjoy sitting under a spray. It is both pleasurable for them and a means by which their waterproofing, and general health can be judged.

Pictured - 2 mature birds in breeding plumage and one juvenile. Note beads of water on dry feathers & how high they sit on the water.
One little guillemot that had proved the point had been rejected three times before it was finally released. It had reached the release aviary, but each time it was picked up for weighing its weight of just under 700g was considered to be (possibly) too light. It must be remembered however, that small birds will always be small birds and small birds, from southern colonies, will inevitably weigh less than their larger northern counterparts. Eventually, of course, it was released and proved the case for small guillemots as it was found oiled again 690 days later 315km from where it was released proving that small is viable and provided they are fit and waterproof, small birds have as good a chance as any of surviving.

Guillemots vary in size tremendously. Ours have varied, at time of release, from below 700g to over 1100g, so they must be judged according to their fitness, not size.

PARASITES IN FISH.
Before fish can be fed to captive birds they should be frozen for a period of at least one week. This is sufficient time to kill any parasites the fish may harbour, the fish will then be defrosted for use as and when required.

SEA FISH FOR SEA BIRDS.
Only sea fish of the highest quality should be used. Oily fish are best, white fish does not have the same nutritional value.

A parasite emerges from the eye of a sprat after freezing. They may emerge from anywhere on the body. It is only by freezing fish that these parasites can be killed. Fish with parasites must not be fed to convalescing birds.
In the UK sprats or sand eels are preferred as they are nutritious and readily eaten by most sea birds. The best sprats for purpose are those landed in the winter between the months of December to March as these are generally small and easily swallowed by newly admitted birds.

Also, and equally important, is the fact that only sprats landed during the winter months have the acceptable amount of oil (those landed at any other time are too oily and very soft and are always rejected). Furthermore, very oily fish will contaminate plumage and fish oil is very hard to remove from feathers.

When auks have progressed to the aquatic aviaries they will take fish as and when they need it. Food should always be made available, in bowls which will be situated around the pool area. The fish need to be completely covered by water to keep them fresh, and a very light sprinkling of salt should now be added.

For those birds that are nearing release, a few fish may also be thrown into the pool to encourage diving. But these fish should not be left at the bottom of the pool for more than 2 hours as they will contaminate the water. If they are not eaten by that time they should be removed. Only fish with low oil content can be thrown into the pool, otherwise a film of oil will develop on the surface and contaminate plumage.

VITAMINS

Fresh fish must be fast frozen in order to retain best quality. They can then be stored and used for up to a year.

Some rehabilitators believe vitamins should be added to fish that have been frozen because otherwise the birds may suffer from a vitamin deficiency. However, we have proved that this is NOT NECESSARY and our results confirm this. No extra vitamins are added to food once the birds are in the aviary/pool areas, and rarely before they reach that stage. Whole fish of highest quality contain all the essential nutrients required to keep birds healthy.
If, however, the rehabilitator wishes to give vitamins these can be added to the fish, in capsule form. Capsules of halibut or cod liver oil can be inserted into the fish through a cut in the lower abdomen, then pushed into the cavity and up towards the head of the fish. No more than one (small 340mg) capsule a day should be given. This can only be achieved when the birds first arrive at the centre and are fed individually.

**MEDICATION**

The natural ability of birds to heal and fight infection should not be underestimated. When given time and provided with suitable conditions, most birds will overcome the straightforward matter of oil contamination. Careful observation during the first few days will indicate if any medication is required.

Some centres give antibiotics to their birds as a matter of course – this is not only unnecessary, but can do more harm than good by killing off good bacteria needed for the well-being of the bird. Antibiotics should only be administered if there is an indication of injury. It is also pointless and harmful to give ‘preventative’ medication for other ailments to birds showing no sign of needing it.

If antibiotics are administered it may prove helpful to leave the birds in the rehabilitation centre for a few days to build up the bird’s immunity to the drug.

We questioned one centre which may be prone to this behaviour. They gave birds antibiotics on the day of arrival. Within a week they had dropped the practice as the birds were still contracting enteritis, and the oil was not being removed from their system. We recommended that they try BCK, but they were not convinced and we were forced to explain the differences between the two feeds. We found that they were still commercially bought BCK, as this was not covered in our letter, which states that BCK should only be used if there is an indication of injury. BCK is not a cure-all, but it can help to speed up the process. However, it is important to monitor the bird’s progress and make sure that it is not becoming dependent on the feed.

Small doses of kaolin are useful for birds with diarrhoea. If BCK is given, care should be taken as to the amount. A post-mortem report, on birds which had died at a rehabilitation centre after BCK had been used, showed that they were absolutely choked, from beak to anus, with BCK, and it was this that had caused their demise! It is, therefore, far better to offer small amounts of oily fish – such as sprats – a little at a time – straight from water, as it will not only feed the casualty, but also assist in the removal of oil from the gut at the same time.
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ENDO & ECTO PARASITES IN AND ON BIRDS

Many sea birds have both ecto and endo parasites, but these generally only become a problem with debilitated birds. When birds are sick the parasites they harbour will increase in number, and need to be dealt with by a worming agent or feather lice spray.

Normally sea birds carry round worms and these will be observed in faeces and regurgitated fish. Cormorants and shags often carry a heavy infestation of worms, so will benefit from being wormed, as soon as they are fit enough.

Besides actually seeing the parasite, evidence of their presence will be observed by the general condition of the host – such as eating more than the others and still being hungry, but not progressing at the same rate. Panacure is the worming agent used at this centre. It is worth bearing in mind the metabolic rate of birds is 4 times greater than that of mammals, therefore a slightly larger amount of wormer is required than that prescribed for mammals.

Feather lice are carried by most seabirds and normally they do not present a problem, however, as with worms, when the casualty is very sick the lice will increase and should be treated with a light dusting of appropriate powder or spray. Again, cormorants, shags, and gannets usually carry the heaviest infestations.

Diseases

Aspergillosis, is a very debilitating fungal infection. Birds infected have difficulty breathing and veterinary advice should be sought immediately. Prevention is better than cure and in order to prevent the onset of this disease birds should be dealt with in a stress free environment. Causing stress to an already traumatised wild creature will compromise its immune system and greatly increases its likelihood of becoming afflicted with this debilitating illness. Indoor housing should be clean, warm and dry. No vegetation such as straw should be used as bedding, which would produce prime conditions for the fungal spores to flourish.

There is no evidence that aspergillosis can be passed from bird to bird, but it is best to isolate a bird that is suspected of having any illness.
CLEANING POOLS & AVIARIES.

Keeping the areas around the pools clean is an ongoing effort. The grime produced by the birds cannot be washed into the pools as the water needs to be kept clean. Therefore, a bucket and mop will be needed. This is easy enough when the soft substrate around the pool is covered with washable material (tarpaulin or pool liner). However, it is quite labor-intensive and needs to be undertaken regularly.

WATER QUALITY.

The water in the pools in each aviary must be constantly skimmed to keep the surface tension in balance. Fresh water will be used for topping up but the pools should not be drained completely as the water becomes balanced over a period of time. The skimmed surface water can be constantly circulated through biological and U.V. filters. One or two holes in the bottom of each pool will allow the water to be siphoned and returned to the pool. The pool in the release aviary should have a series of small pipes (or slots) which run half through the side and the other half of the pipe is connected to the main drain. The water will flow into the main drain and through the tanks for re-use.

Sharing aviaries & General Requirements.

Auks get along well with most other sea birds, so will share an aviary with other seabirds of similar size—Kittiwakes, Terns, small gulls, Grebes and Scoters, but not larger birds or predatory birds such as skuas or the larger species of gull. Shags should only be housed with birds of equal size or larger than themselves—Gannets, Cormorants etc. If they are put with smaller birds they are liable to cause problems because of their inquisitive nature. They will also fight amongst themselves at roosting time so should be afforded roosts such as upturned buckets a metre apart in covered areas. Cormorants have similar requirements to shags to roost. In order to aid their digestion both species should be provided with small stones and small pieces of stick. These are swallowed and regurgitated together with bile etc., which regularly forms in the gut. Both Shag and Cormorants have very stiff tail feathers which is why they need to be raised off the ground to roost.
Fulmars, because of their habit of spitting when disturbed, should be housed separately, if possible, or at least allowed their space. Large gulls should be kept apart from smaller birds. All the aviaries must have indoor quarters wherein the birds can retreat for reasons of warmth, shelter, security etc. Infra red lamps will be in constant use in areas where the most vulnerable birds are housed, and in all areas in bitterly cold weather conditions. Remember they do not have the freedom of movement that they do in the wild.

Large birds such as Gannets, Cormorants, and Shags may start off in much the same way as the auks, but when they are fit they will need larger pools etc. Divers & Grebes do not walk well, Divers in particular tend to slide along and rest very heavily on their breast. In order to prevent keel wounds they must be kept on soft material at all times. Divers in particular need to bathe regularly in order to defecate. Foam rubber should cover the floors of all the areas, both indoors in pens and cages, and outdoors around the pools. Pelagic birds are not accustomed to standing for long periods on hard surfaces, therefore their feet and legs must be protected at all times to avoid bumble foot and, in the case of auks, damage to the legs from which they will not recover.

Indoors the foam rubber can be sealed into bin liners and then covered with material such as towels. Outdoors tarpaulin makes an inexpensive cover that can be mopped easily, and replaced regularly.

WHEN CAN I RELEASE?

Chronic oil pollution occurs mostly in the winter with most birds being admitted from November to April, and when the early intake of winter birds are ready for release the weather will still be changeable. Therefore, before each release, the long-term weather forecast must be examined for a window of relative calm, so that when the birds are released they have time to become acclimatised. It is also worth noting that shoals of fish are dispersed during stormy weather; therefore, releasing birds at such times means they would probably have to search harder for food.
It is advisable to hold rehabilitated oiled auks for 4 weeks before being released, this will provide sufficient time to ensure they are fit internally as well as waterproof. The only exception to this will be for birds in breeding plumage which can demonstrate their fitness and are keen to get back to the wild.

Birds in full breeding plumage should have priority over the younger birds as they show signs of stress when they consider themselves fit for release, therefore, for those that demonstrate that they are fit and waterproof, release can be considered at 3 weeks.

Younger auks will not suffer from being held longer than 4 weeks, neither will Gannets, Shag or Cormorants. Divers (loons), however, must be watched carefully, as when they are fit and indicate their keenness to return to the wild, they should be released as soon as possible, otherwise they will refuse food, become lethargic and lose condition rapidly.

When fit and ready for release, (preferably after their 4 weeks convalescent period for those that have been oiled), every effort must be made to get them away quickly. Unlike the auks, Divers can be released onto lakes, rivers or estuaries which provide shelter when there are gales blowing at sea.

Birds are selected from the "release area" where they will have been critically observed for fitness. Using long-handled nets, they can be driven into their indoor pen from where they can be caught easily. Each bird must be carefully, but quickly examined – flight feathers, eyes and feet are inspected. If they are weighed before release it must be borne in mind that weights vary considerably. Care must be taken not to confuse a small fit bird which can be released, with one which is underweight and needs longer care. An experienced handler will be able to tell from the fullness of the breast of a bird and its strength, when it is ready for release.

A pillow slip (or similar) is ideal to contain auks for weighing. The pillow slip (bag) must be weighed before the bird is put into it, and the weight of the bag subtracted from the total weight.
not need to be near a colony of the same species or—in the case of sea birds—where they were rescued in the first instance. It is advisable to release birds from front opening cages. A towel, or similar, should be placed over the door of the cage during transportation, in order to prevent beaks from being pushed through. The towel can be removed just before the cage is opened, thereby providing an opportunity for the birds to see where they are, and what is happening. They can then emerge calmly. GUILLEMOTS & RAZORBILLS, may benefit from being released from a low cliff, as this will provide a lift as they fly off and out to sea. However, this type of release will only work if there are no birds of prey in the area. In recent times auks released by this Trust have come under attack by Peregrine falcons and we now prefer to release from a breakwater which provides sufficient lift for those wanting to fly away immediately, but avoids the possibility of aerial attack by predators. A beach release is not recommended for these birds. Sometimes birds will stand for several minutes whilst they take in the scene. Usually they fly off straight away, often in groups, and are soon well out of sight. Others may land on the sea to bathe and dive before flying off. Most oiled birds are admitted during the winter months, however, some auks are admitted during the summer in poor plumage and also minus their flight feathers. They drop their flight feathers at the end of July and take several weeks to grow new ones. They can be released before the new ones grow, provided they are fully fit, but this must be straight onto the sea, obviously not from a cliff as they are unable to fly. GANNETS can be released from a cliff or from a beach. They may spend several minutes on the water, bathing and preening before eventually turning into the wind and taking off. SHAGS are inshore sea birds and should be released onto the open sea or estuary, either from low cliffs or a beach. CORMORANTS are found on fresh water as well as on the sea and may be released either onto the sea, river, lake or estuary.
GREBES, DIVERS and SEA DUCK are best released on an estuary, they then have the advantage of either staying on the estuary or going out onto the open sea.

All the large birds are carried individually. But if the cage is large enough, 4 auks can share a release cage. Releases take place in a quiet location, and for most birds, as early in the day as possible. However, LITTLE AUKS, STORM PETRELS and SHEARWATERS must be released at dusk, just as darkness falls, which is the time they would leave their colonies, to avoid attack by predators.

RINGING
You may wish to ring your rehabilitated birds, but if you do then it is most advisable to do so for a set period only, in order to record both the short and the long term recoveries together for that study period. It is only in this manner that you will be able to determine the true results of how successful your birds have been post release.

Also, bearing in mind the longevity of sea birds, at least 10 years should be allowed after the end of the study period. The Trust conducted a ringing programme from 1993 to 2003 (inclusive). Over 1,000 guillemots were ringed during this period and it has been very beneficial as the results have proved the success of the Trust’s methodology.

Rings are fitted to the birds at the time of release, and the number recorded in the Ringer’s Log. Only ringers who hold a licence from the recognised Ringing Authority can ring birds.

HEALTH AND SAFETY FOR HELPERS
Wild birds stress easily. When alarmed they will endeavour to jab at the eyes of someone holding them. This is an instinctive reaction to being held and seeking to protect themselves from a possible predator. Casualties should always be held well away from the face. Birds such as Divers, Gannets, Shag, Cormorant, Grebes and Herons have a long reach and even sick birds can strike very quickly. Therefore, handlers need to be alert, it is advisable to wear protective goggles, especially when handling Gannets, Herons, etc.
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Heavy-duty rubber gloves are also necessary, not only as protection from jabbing beaks, but also from scrabbling feet. Other protective clothing will include waterproof aprons (when washing) and long-sleeved overalls and rubber footwear (boots or equivalent) for work in the aviaries.

There is always a good deal of dust from feathers. This needs to be borne in mind by those suffering from chest complaints, it is advisable to wear a face mask when cleaning pens/cages.

It is important to wash hands after handling casualties, and after working in all areas in which birds are kept.

Sometimes the oil which contaminates sea birds will give off fumes, especially diesel. Care needs to be taken to keep these birds in well-ventilated areas.

CLOTHING.

Birds soon start to recognise our faces, and also our clothes. Sudden ‘changes of plumage’ are baffling to creatures that only change theirs twice a year! So it is best to keep to the same outfits and dark or dull colours are best.

CENTRE HYGIENE FOR CASUALTIES

Obviously the best hygiene regimes need to be employed at all times, as grime can cause problems for delicate feet and plumage and also support a variety of bacteria. However the need to change bedding for new arrivals must be balanced against the affect of disturbance on a traumatised bird. Disturbing a sick bird in order to clean its pen/cage can be counterproductive. It is better to cover soiled areas with clean material until the casualty is ready to be moved to a fresh area and then the cage/pen can be scrubbed, disinfected and prepared for the next casualty.

If it is suspected that a casualty has an ailment which is likely to be transmitted to others, it must be isolated immediately and veterinary advice sought. All feeding utensils for that bird must be kept separate from others.

If it is necessary to tube casualties, a separate tube should be provided for each one. If the same tube is used for several birds then the tube must be sterilised immediately after each use. Tablets that are used for sterilising baby feeding bottles will suffice.

Feeding bowls/dishes must be scrubbed after use, plain water will suffice, stubborn stains can be cleaned using salt then thoroughly rinsed.
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EUTHANASIA

Some centres destroy heavily oiled birds, or those which are light in weight and are considered not worth trying to save. The South Devon Seabird Trust believes every casualty should be treated with a view to restoring it to health. Euthanasia is, therefore, viewed as the very last resort. At times of major incidents however, numbers of oiled birds is so great that it is necessary to focus on those which appear to have the best chance of survival. This is at the discretion of the rescuers and centres to which they are taken. It is a matter of logistics - many casualties and few hospital places available. At such times priority is given to birds in order of classification of species and general condition.

Fortunately we have never been placed in the position of having to choose which will live and which will die.

LEGAL RESTRICTIONS & REQUIREMENTS

Wild birds are protected by law. In the UK it is the Wildlife and Countryside Act. They are categorised according to their numbers in the wild, e.g. Red — endangered. A person may take a wild bird which is injured/sick for treatment, but when it has recovered and is fit, it must be released. A bird which is deemed to be unfit for release must not be abandoned. The decision then has to be taken whether or not it should be destroyed or kept in sanctuary. Birds that are held in sanctuary must be provided with suitable conditions, having regard for their way of life in the wild.

It has always been the policy of this Trust to find sanctuary, where possible, for birds that are unable to be released, and indeed auks that cannot be released are offered sanctuary in our own centre. They have proved to be of great benefit as they have a calming affect on new arrivals, particularly of their own species.

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Finally I would say to anyone embarking on the care of sea birds, don’t be timid—
we all make mistakes, and although this methodology may appear, at first, to be complicated, it is in fact very simple. The hardest part is cleaning. There are very few people prepared to work with sea birds, so sea birds need you. At the time of writing this methodology (2013), hundreds of contaminated auks are destroyed regularly, just because there are not enough people willing, or able to help them. They are not the most well known of creatures, the fact that they live, for the most part, far out at sea, means that people are not as familiar with them as they are with land birds. However, once you get to know them you will find they are the most beautiful of creatures and very clever. They will adapt to whatever conditions you can provide.

I cannot say it is not hard work, for it is. But the reward of seeing your birds return to the wild, (that harsh environment which is their home), is beyond measure. Good Luck to new rehabilitators, and I trust the information provided in these pages may be of help to those who already have a centre and may benefit from knowing the way we do things at the South Devon Seabird Trust.

The following page portrays a somewhat jocular look at the antics of some of the birds we have cared for. Although it is portrayed in a humorous manner it does give an insight into the character of these birds which some people will recognise and others, who have not yet worked with these birds, may find amusing.

SOUTH DEVON SEABIRD TRUST
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Registered charity No. 1048739
RULES FOR PATIENTS

The Management will make every endeavour to ensure your stay is comfortable and stress free. There are, however, a few rules by which you should abide to help with the smooth running of this rescue centre.

1. Guillemots, in particular, are asked not to walk over any Grebes or Divers with whom they may be share accommodation, not only does this cause disturbance, but it makes a mess of their plumage. Also, if during your stay you think you might know someone in another part of the bird hospital, please do not pen hop to investigate. Pen hopping, or balancing on walls between pens is dangerous and can upset the other patients.

2. Divers are asked not to nip the feet of their companions whilst in the pool. If you think someone looks a bit dim, it could be that he/she is just having a nap on the water and it is rather rude to surprise them from underneath.

3. Razorbills might like to be a little friendlier. Being aloof, or on the other hand croaking into the face of another patient is rather rude. You are also requested not to drag Guillemots around the pool by the neck, it is not funny and does not win friends.

4. Shouting to an acquaintance in another part of the building is allowed, but only during daylight hours.

5. It would be very much appreciated if all patients would kindly look before they pass a motion, the chap next to you might have just bathed and preened.

6. Gannets are particularly requested to cooperate at feeding times. Helpers are not mind readers. If you would like your fish thrown into the pool—that's fine, or we can hand feed you; throwing the fish to you is also an option, just as long as we know and you keep to the same routine.

7. Grebes—when you make your dash into the water, please watch out for smaller patients—running over them, or bowling them over in your haste is not allowed. Also, please do not continually rearrange the bedding.

8. On occasions Fulmars have to share pens/aviaries. Arguing amongst yourselves is one thing, but please on no account must there by any spitting.

9. Kittiwakes must not sit and guard the food dishes, there is plenty for everyone. When the dish empties it will be filled again quite quickly.

We hope your stay with us will be as happy as your circumstances will allow. When you arrived we know you felt very sick and despondent, but all of us at the South Devon Seabird Trust will strive to make you comfortable and aid you through the recovery process.

Jean Bradford (Manager)