Practical Wildlife Care
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A fundamental paradox besets wildlife rehabilitation today – most wildlife rehabilitators have insufficient understanding of veterinary medicine and most veterinarians have little experience with wildlife. Although there are scattered references in the literature describing the care and rehabilitation of British wildlife casualties, a comprehensive account of the subject, in a format accessible to the dedicated rehabilitator and professional veterinarian alike, has hitherto not been published. In Practical Wildlife Care, Les Stocker has gone a long way towards addressing this problem.

Les Stocker is perhaps the best known and probably the most experienced British wildlife rehabilitator, and under his inspired leadership the Wildlife Hospital Trust (more familiarly known as St Tiggy-winkles) has grown from a garden shed to Europe’s largest, purpose-built wildlife hospital. This would be a wonderful achievement in itself, but Les has always believed that to develop rehabilitation techniques without passing the knowledge to others would only achieve half of his self-imposed mission. In writing Practical Wildlife Care he has been able to offer the benefit of his long experience to rehabilitators all over the world. Although Les’s experience has very largely been with British wildlife, much of the information provided and many of the techniques described are applicable to species from a much wider geographical range.

Throughout the book, a close partnership between rehabilitators and their veterinarians is encouraged – an attitude that has no doubt significantly aided the development of the Wildlife Hospital Trust and one which vets and rehabilitators alike must develop to a greater degree if further advances are to be made in the field. Practical Wildlife Care is written in a sufficiently informal style to hold the attention of the interested amateur yet contains enough medical detail to inform the veterinarian. This book should certainly facilitate growth of the essential partnership and stimulate ceaseless debate between the partners!

Practical Wildlife Care takes the reader through the many different phases of the rehabilitation process and provides essential veterinary information about every group of animals likely to be presented to the British rehabilitator. In attempting to be so comprehensive it is clear that the book will not satisfy everybody’s thirst for detailed information about his or her chosen speciality. As more is learnt about the rehabilitation of different species, more specialist volumes will no doubt be required.

Rehabilitators and vets in the UK have long been starved of a common-sense manual of good practice and I suspect that many will use this book as their first port of call when confronted with a wildlife casualty.

Dr John Lewis
International Zoo Veterinary Group
Publishing the first edition of *Practical Wildlife Care* was yet one more outstanding achievement by Les Stocker. Much of his life has been dedicated to improving the standards of treating wildlife casualties both in Britain and elsewhere in the world, and *Practical Wildlife Care* encapsulated over twenty years of unparalleled expertise in wildlife rehabilitation. It was the first truly comprehensive manual covering all aspects of the treatment of wildlife casualties, and as such rapidly became the key source of information for veterinary nurses, animal care students and wildlife rehabilitators. However, the pressures facing British wildlife are constantly changing, new problems arise and levels of knowledge improve. Five years on, the need for a second edition is testament to the value of *Practical Wildlife Care*.

Despite the wealth of information compiled by Les, we still have a great deal to learn about wildlife rehabilitation. In particular we know little about the survival of animals following release, and whilst the key goal is to return an animal to the wild in a fit state with a high chance of survival, hitherto few studies have looked into the impact of different treatments on post-release survival. As part of his overall ethos of improving both knowledge and standards, Les has worked with a range of people to look at the survival of casualties post-release, and it has been a great pleasure to collaborate in these studies.

One of the big dilemmas facing wildlife rehabilitators is trying to decide if a particular course of action is appropriate for a wild animal; what may be appropriate for a domestic animal may be totally inappropriate for a wild animal. The second edition of *Practical Wildlife Care* will prove to be an even more indispensable source of information for animal carers faced with such decisions.

Stephen Harris
*Professor of Environmental Sciences*  
*University of Bristol*
Although the overall care and treatment of any animal, including a wild animal, usually falls to the veterinary surgeon, the support of the veterinary nurse or the trained rehabilitator is crucial to manage the number of wild casualties now being found.

Nearly all of the casualties are as a direct result of collision with man or the environment he has created. The truly natural casualty is a rarity but incidences do occur with our innate compassion demanding that these animals are also taken into care.

However, practically all wildlife casualties are the victims of trauma and are suffering from some degree of shock. A knowledge of the physiology of wild animals and an understanding of the metabolic changes that may occur will allow anyone to provide the first-aid and life-saving techniques that will keep the animal alive to benefit from the ever-advancing techniques of veterinary surgery. The purpose of this book is to lay out simply the support services that the veterinary nurse or rehabilitator may provide to assist the veterinary surgeon.

The book is a result of my 20 years of experience in dealing with the idiosyncrasies of British wild animals. In that time I have always worked in close cooperation with veterinary surgeons especially for diagnosis, prescription and surgical intervention.

My directive is to rescue the animal, keep it alive and provide first aid and stabilisation. Under the direction of the veterinary surgeon many of the casualties need no more than care and support before rehabilitation and release, whereas others need the surgeon’s diagnosis, medication and even surgery. However, after these disciplines the animal is once more returned to my care for its rehabilitation and release.

This book deals with the anomalies of wildlife care and covers the vital disciplines of wildlife care, namely rescue, first aid, rehabilitation and release. The diagnosis of disease is always the province of the veterinary surgeon but I have touched on those diseases that are so regularly seen that routine treatments can easily be directed by a veterinary surgeon. Also included are simple stabilisation techniques that can often be adopted to prevent pain and suffering and provide a long-term treatment of choice.

Although there may be other products available for the treatment of wildlife casualties, those I have mentioned have proven suitable for the many thousands of patients The Wildlife Hospital Trust (St Tiggywinkles) has cared for. However, although at the time of writing the medical information given is correct, the reader should always first verify that the data have not changed. Neither I nor the Publisher can take responsibility for any matters arising from the guidance given in this book.

Over the last 20 years the care and treatment of sick or injured wildlife has become accepted all over the world. Yet all over the world the vast majority of the care has been provided by veterinary nurses and rehabilitators under the direction, where possible, of veterinary surgeons.

Early in the development of St Tiggywinkles I was indebted to Gary and Derek Carthew of Millpledge Pharmaceuticals for their care and advice on many aspects of animal support. Now, nearly 20 years later, I still look to Gary, Graham Cheslyn-Curtis and Millpledge for their support.
and I am especially grateful for their sponsorship of the colour photographs in this book which makes my experiences even more accessible to veterinary nurses and students.

I believe that if we all work together and take our own responsibilities then wildlife care will not impede the already busy veterinary practices and will lead to more wildlife casualties receiving that vital first aid, expertise and rehabilitation allowing more than ever to survive and be released back into the wild.

Les Stocker MBE
Aylesbury 2000
Preface to the Second Edition

The first edition of *Practical Wildlife Care* has been well received and well thumbed by many veterinary practices and rehabilitators, throwing a lifeline to many more wildlife casualties that otherwise might have fallen through the net. At the time of its publication all seemed settled in the field of British wildlife . . . but every year has seen some trauma or other affecting the way we deal with wild animals.

Who can forget the awful year when foot and mouth disease blighted the countryside? Not many realised that the hedgehog, in particular, had shackles put on its movements. Rehabilitators and nurses, as always, found a way of treating their prickly patients making house calls, albeit in environmentally-secure space suits.

Britain’s bats have all of a sudden become rabies suspects but we have found a way around the barriers by getting ourselves vaccinated and once again making house calls, this time to collect bats so that nobody unprotected has to handle them.

The work life of wildlife care and rehabilitation is very much on a one-to-one basis, often scoffed at as a waste of time by numerically minded conservationists. But then it was revealed that Britain’s two most familiar birds, the house sparrow (Passer domesticus) and the starling (Sturnus vulgaris), had been put on the Birds of Conservation Concern Red List (Gregory *et al.*, 2002). Their numbers had dropped so drastically over the last 25 years that they had joined the song thrush (Turdus philomelos) and the skylark (Alauda arvensis) on the slippery slope towards extinction. Now those individual sparrows, thrushes and skylarks rescued by the wildlife carer play a crucial part in the survival of what were once our commonest birds.

Yes, times are changing, even sometimes for the better when red kites, buzzards, otters and polecats are all to be seen in the countryside again. And there are newcomers: with the often ill-informed fashion for keeping more exotic species, rehabilitators and the veterinary profession are now called upon to attend to a profusion of snakes, wallabies, parakeets and even, dare I say it, wild boar, injured and needing care.

These animals prove that Britain can be a good place in which to roam free and I am sure that given a positive attitude and bolting the stable door in time we should together, one by one, bring those sparrows, starlings and thrushes back into the countryside.

Les Stocker MBE HonAssocRCVS
Haddenham 2005