



THE
HARTBEAT
CHRISTMAS 2022

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Warm greetings to you all! I think I say this every year, but boy does the year go by fast. Blink and you miss it. It feels like only yesterday I was writing last year's newsletter and before you know it here we are again! Hollytrees hasn't been immune from the struggles in the world at large, but we keep moving forward. I sincerely hope that this card and newsletter find you all well, and coping in these difficult times. No matter what's going on in the world, or what is to come, we're happy that we can say we do our best for anything brought to Hollytrees. Anytime of the day or night, our famous Ring doorbell is always there to ring for our attention. Needless to say it's been a hectic year, especially in spring time when all God's little creatures do what comes natural. Kittens, baby foxes, baby hedgehogs, baby squirrels, all manner of baby birds, all appear on our doorstep during the spring months. Some we win, some we lose, but we try every possible thing to pull them all through.



Left: a young squirrel being syringe fed. Right: a young hedgehog snuggled up in the warm between feedings.

We've had loads of the regular inmates; pigeons being the most frequent to get into trouble. The main reason we see them is as a result of predation. They are a staple food source for birds of prey, especially sparrow

hawks and buzzards which are both on the increase; not to mention the friendly neighbourhood cat catching a few, or crows and magpies attacking the young pigeons. We'll clean them up, stitch them up, and get them under a heat lamp to recover. We win more than we lose! The next most common thing we see in pigeons is a condition called Canker. It's a foul smelling, yellow-white, scrambled egg looking growth in the throat which builds up over time to the point where the bird can't eat or drink. When pigeons are brought to us looking weak and lethargic, underweight, fluffed up, the first thing we'll look for is Canker. It's all about time with Canker and sadly some pigeons are brought to us too late. But there are solutions out there if we see them early enough. A company called Harkers produces some fantastic treatments for Canker, amongst other things. I prefer the tablet form, although pushing them past the growth down into the crop can be a fun game. They absolutely do work if caught in time!



*Left: a trio of young pigeons. Right: an adolescent pigeon.
All patiently awaiting their next feed.*

Lastly they are brought to us simply because they are too young. Either coming in as squabs because the nest has blown out of the tree, or they've fallen out of it, and ended up on the ground. Or sometimes they've left the nest a little too early and can't quite fly properly yet. Either way some time in the warm with some good food and they'll be ready to return to the wild in no time. Our tried and tested recipe for healthy pigeons, both young and old, is a 60ml syringe usually used to tube feed humans. It has a long nozzle which easily goes down into the crop. We always use warm Ready Brek which is the perfect solution for feeding at least 4 times a day. Simple, but when you've got a hospital room full of pigeons by the time you've fed the last one, it's time to start all over again! In the height of spring and summer some days we barely leave the bird room!

It's not just pigeons though; we've had another year with an extremely varied mixture of birds needing help.

Most are youngsters either falling out of their nests, or victims of cats or other birds; there are so many things that can go wrong for such little creatures. But most of the time they find good, kind people like yourselves to bring them to us. We feed most of these with good, complete, dry cat food. We blend it into a fine powder, make it into a paste and load it into a syringe to feed. It comes out worm-like which all the birds quickly take a liking to. As soon as the birds don't need us anymore they are slowly introduced to the wild via several aviaries we have. Live mealworms play a big part in helping them reacquaint themselves to the wild, we buy them in by the lorry load, they all love them! And so nutritious for them too. It is amazing how quickly nature takes over. Regular visitors to Hollytrees will know we have a very, very active bird table which soon empties. So even when our birds are released, many will stay nearby and come back to us; we're a safety net for them.

In fact after four days in our large aviary she managed to sneak out straight over my head! She never even said thank you! Bless her, it was great to watch her fly off.



Above: the cheeky Cuckoo, a day or two before flying off!



Left: a green woodpecker that was caught by a cat. He spent a few weeks with us before being released back into the woods.

Right: a young thrush (left) and a young blackbird (right) that became fast friends and were released together.

We've had plenty of birds of prey brought into us this year. Generally they are found as youngsters and need a few weeks of hand-rearing before letting them go wild in our aviaries, and finally released into the wild. I like to find a quiet spot, deep in the countryside to let them go. It's always a pleasure to watch them majestically soar off into the air after looking after them for weeks. Barn owls, tawny owls, buzzards, kestrels, we get them all in. Sometimes they get in trouble when catching their prey, getting caught up in fencing, barbed wire or brambles. Or sometimes just landing funny and bruising themselves. Minor injuries we can clean and stitch up and release them after some rehabilitation in our aviaries. But injured or broken wings are always a problem. They have to be set just right so they can heal properly.

One thing I'm sure you've seen on the news that has plagued all birds this year has been the dreaded bird flu! We've had to be extremely careful with any bird admitted; isolating and checking them for bird flu before allowing them anywhere near birds already in our care. There have been many rescues shut down due to bird flu, but thankfully our practices have so far kept us safe. With all the garden birds, ducks, geese, swans, not to mention the resident chickens we can't be too careful!

My favourite admission of the year, one that I've never had before, was a cuckoo! A gentleman from Burcot in Bromsgrove came across her just lying in the road. He assumed she was hit by a car, quickly scooped her up, and knew exactly where to bring her! She was so nervous around us but we managed to syringe some glucose water down her. But I tell you she went absolutely crazy for the mealworms, once we were out of sight of course. She didn't appear to have any injuries.



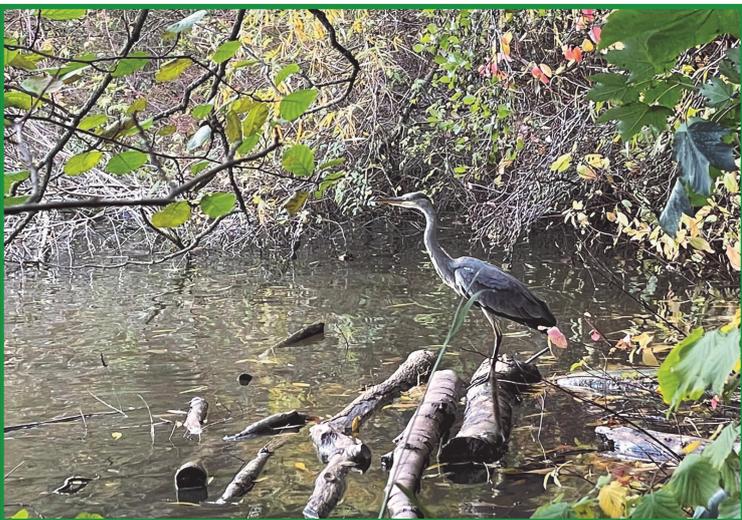
Left: a young tawny owl searching for his next day old chick.

Right: the same youngster a few weeks later alongside another adolescent, happily growing up in one of our aviaries.

I have to take this opportunity to thank our friends at Amicus vets in Shirley, who are always our first point of

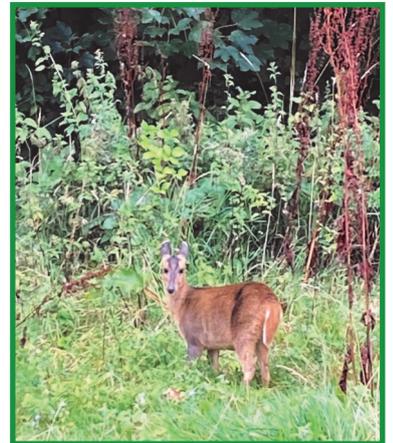
call for seriously ill or injured birds. Or indeed any wildlife. Roy, the boss, is a legend when it comes to helping everything and anything. We're extremely grateful that they're always willing to help us out and fit us in, no matter what situation we present to them. Roy and team, I salute you.

Going back to our wildlife I suspect you all noticed the extremely dry periods we had over the summer? Well that was another time we were inundated with birds and other wildlife. They're all susceptible to dehydration. We noticed an influx of hedgehogs that didn't seem to cope well with the intense heat at all. Also, did anyone else notice the lack of swifts, swallows, and house martins flying around? We had lots brought in over the summer, tired and underweight. Likely due to the lack of insects flying around thanks to the heat. Believe me they can be tough work. I'll never forget one year we had a nest of house martins come in, complete with the nest! My concern was how do you train these birds to catch their food on the wing? We kept them going for a few weeks using the tried and tested live mealworms, till they were starting to fly. Then my daughter Emma, who enjoys helping with baby rearing, googled how to release them looking for advice. She found out the best way was to release them where there is already a colony, and let nature take over. I had a brain wave and recalled a good friend and member of Hollytrees, who lives in the centre of Warwick near Warwick castle, telling me about seeing hundreds of nests all over the buildings around him. I couldn't believe what happened when we arrived early one morning. We parked up and the youngsters started to squawk loudly. As Emma lifted the lid our birds immediately took off and joined in with the local flock! What a beautiful thing to witness. Once again Mother Nature takes over and even I learn something!



Above: a heron brought into us after being clipped by a car. We rehabilitated and released her onto Earlswood Lakes.

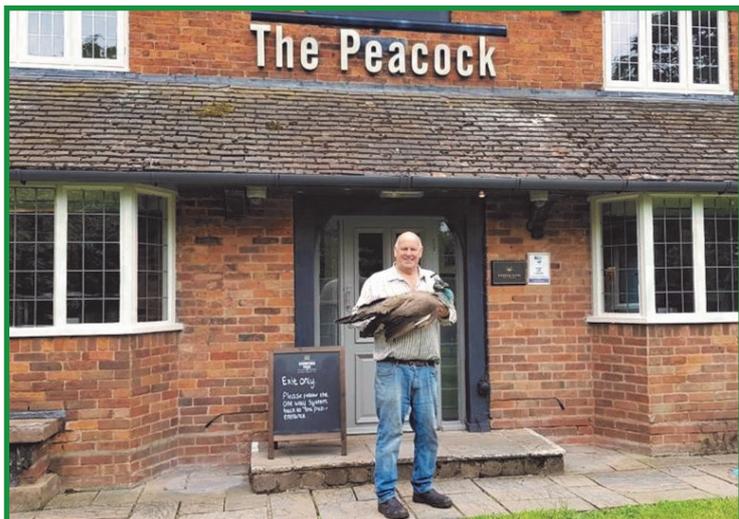
I have to thank you good people who get all of the creatures to Hollytrees. Unfortunately we aren't able to provide a collection service, opting to keep our small crew working on site with the animals, but we do go out to help certain situations; most commonly responding to calls about wild deer. My word they take some keeping up with! Especially the "Mini Monsters", the muntjac. They know how to get themselves into all sorts of trouble. Muntjac are the smallest of the deer roaming our countryside, you should try holding onto a red or roe deer! A kick from them can do no end of damage. With deer I always try to keep the head covered, so they're not getting spooked by what's going on. And if possible wrap their legs together to make them easier to handle. After that a nice thick sleeping bag or duvet in the van and they soon settle down. The main problem we see with deer are the young males getting their antlers caught up in things: garden netting, football netting, sheep fencing, iron railings, anything they possibly can. And for some reason they are always playing with the traffic, especially on the motorways. I have to take this moment to mention how good the Highways Agency is to Hollytrees. They're always finding a range of creatures in distress on the roads, and we're more than happy to provide assistance. They regularly pop by with vans full of donations from their staff, or fundraise for us. A lovely group of people bless you all.



Left and right: a muntjac we rehabilitated this year.

For any who are not aware I and most of the Hollytrees gang all work voluntarily. We have two paid members of staff, but the rest: the board of trustees, the hand-rearers, rehabilitators, dog walkers etc, are all voluntary. Meaning that as much of the money raised goes back into helping the animals as possible. But it's been a tough few years with everything going on. We can't have the numbers of volunteers that we used to, but the number of animals coming in grows year on year. So it has been hard work on the ground. But seeing the results, the wild animals able to be released, the dogs and cats finding new homes, makes it all

worth it. And having you good people behind us with kind words and generous donations for the animals gives us the energy to keep going!



Above: an injured peahen that I helped wrangle at The Peacock pub in Alvechurch. I think she was trying to ask the staff to change the name!

As usual I've been rambling on too long and am being urged to wrap things up so we can get this to the printers and out to you all!

I have to give my utmost gratitude to you all for your continued support of the work we do here at Hollytrees. There isn't enough paper, or time, to list every animal that we help during the year, although I do hope this newsletter gives an idea. But rest assured we wouldn't be able to help nearly as many if it wasn't for your kind donations. Whether it's financial donations, physical donations, bedding, newspapers or even your time; it all helps the animals that come through our doors. I'm so grateful to have this wonderful, caring group of people behind us.

A special thanks to the people that go above and beyond giving their time to Hollytrees. Uncle Eric who gets stuck in to whatever needs doing. He's slowly been turned into the 6 million dollar man, so will be here long after the rest of us have gone. Gordon, an absolute dynamo, who helps out with any of the major work that always needs doing around Hollytrees. He's always willing to get his hands dirty, or up onto a stable roof. As long as there are no wasps around. Uncle Terry who I always call whenever I need advice or help raising and rehabilitating birds. He's an encyclopaedia of knowledge and I'm so grateful. Little Sue who, with the help of her children and very understanding husband, helps us with hand rearing and releasing animals back to the wild; especially the hedgehogs. And I almost forgot our Annice, who keeps track of all your kind donations and makes sure it all gets put to good use; without her help the animals and birds would never get

fed! And lastly I absolutely can't forget to give a big thanks to baby Amelia, the only good thing Wendy has ever done for Ann and I! Her smile and laugh brings me so much joy and seeing her grow up and eager to help with the animals makes even the hardest day at Hollytrees worth it! Bless you Amelia. Of course I should mention the rest of the family, Amelia isn't the only one that helps me out around here! My darling wife Ann for being a rock and supporting me through all the ups and downs. Wendy who is slowly taking over the running of the boarding kennels to ease my workload. Laura who is still working with vulnerable people in Nottingham, hard work but keeps her happy. And not so young now Emma who is still acing her paramedic training and loving every minute. Bless her, it's not the kind of work I could do!

And finally I have to give an extra special thanks to the staff that form the backbone of Hollytrees. Working hard in all weather, day or night, to make sure the animals are cared for. Tracy our long suffering manageress, the place would literally collapse without her here. Sophie the resident artist who has turned our office and break room into an art gallery. And of course young Matt our resident musician. You can catch him performing live all over Birmingham, you'll see him on Top of the Pops before you know it! Thank you all.

I'll end this by saying thank you again for all your continued support during these difficult times. It warms my heart that people still find something to give to the animals even with the struggles we are all facing in our everyday lives. Rest assured you're all in my thoughts and I hope you are all doing well.

Everyone at Hollytrees wishes you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Here's hoping for a healthy and prosperous 2023!

With love,

Ray, Ann, Wendy, Laura, Emma, Baby Amelia, and all the staff and volunteers at Hollytrees xxx



Little Amelia preparing to take over Hollytrees!