

BOOK AND VIDEO REVIEWS

Care of the Wild Feathered and Furred: the Essential Guide to Wildlife Handling and Care

Mae Hickman and Maxine Guy (1994). Robson Books Ltd: London. 137pp. Paperback. Obtainable from the publishers, Bolsoven House, 5–6 Clipstone Street, London W1P 7EB, UK (ISBN 0 86051 898 1). Price £7.99.

This book, written originally for an American market, has a good blend of general husbandry and common sense, peppered with examples and amusing anecdotes. For a new or would-be rehabilitator it does contain useful and informative chapters in the main, if only to demonstrate the commitment which will be required.

Although I agreed that treating wildlife in America is the same as in Britain in many instances, there are occasions when I was sharply reminded that it was not! One such example is the somewhat blasé description of preparing squirrels for release. This is the only rehabilitation book I have read that makes no mention of the illegality of releasing the grey squirrel in Britain.

There were many times on reading this book that I was unsure for whom it was intended. If it is for the wildlife rehabilitator then there are other British wildlife rehabilitation books I would recommend in preference to a basically American one, seemingly 'tweaked' to suit a British market. If it is intended for the general public I would have liked to see the chapter on euthanasia removed altogether!

The section on raccoons was entertaining, after all it is always of interest to read about other wildlife rehabilitators and their exploits with creatures not native to Britain.

Although the section on techniques for splinting birds was well illustrated, again I was left with a feeling of trepidation that if the book was intended to assist those new to the field, there could be a danger of 'having a go' without proper veterinary expertise. These practices are best left to those more experienced and then only after some practical guidance and supervised training. We at Blackwater Wildlife Rescue were rather alarmed to read the repeated advice to feed milk to birds. Along with most like-minded groups, we would never advocate this as it is generally recognized that birds, unlike most mammals, are unable to digest the lactose! I was also perturbed to read the section on subcutaneous air bubbles – the decision on whether or not to burst such a bubble generally depends on its location. Often it has been caused by an infection created by a cat bite and even if the bubble has been dispersed, we would not advocate instant release before routine treatment with antibiotics.

I could find no mention in the sparse section on hedgehogs of the essential task of 'toileting' hedgehogs or other young mammals. Successful hedgehog rearing and rehabilitation is a specialized and time consuming process, which has demanded whole books from people such as Les Stocker of St Tiggywinkles.

To summarize, the biggest problem is first to decide for whom the book is intended. To appeal to the British market, the authors would have been better to have capitalized on the differences between the fauna of America and Britain and provided more amusing and entertaining stories, leaving the rehabilitation to those more familiar with British ideas and animals. This is not intended to disparage the obvious dedication of the authors nor to demean their areas of expertise. Merely to recommend that readers reserve judgement on some aspects of the advice given in this entertaining and often informative book.

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