



Winter Newsletter & Review 2008

Seal Sanctuary News

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A strange year!

60 seals were treated by the Sanctuary in 2008, making it the first time for many years that numbers have dropped. Grey seals (*Halichoerus grypus*) came down from 46 to 28 ~ mainly because the problem of very high tides washing away new born pups did not repeat itself this year. Seals getting entangled in rubbish is still a concern but more of that later. Common seal (*Phoca vitulina*) casualties however, actually increased to 32 (from 21 in 2007). It is difficult to say why but one possibility may be connected to the building of off-shore wind farms close by. Some years ago, colleagues at a Norfolk seal hospital also observed an increase when wind turbines were constructed near Great Yarmouth. Perhaps feeding grounds are being disturbed making it difficult for young animals to find enough food. The animals usually arrive with a heavy internal parasite burden and sometimes they have severe mouth ulcerations making treatment very difficult. If a reason is ever found it also has to allow for the remarkable expansion of the grey seal population: the largest breeding colony of greys in England is now only a few miles from Mablethorpe.

Belle, grey seals and rubbish



The gasket was cutting deeply into Belle's neck

With more grey seals in the world perhaps we should expect more accidents but even so, most are still preventable. Recently for example a pup was found dead with its head firmly jammed in a paint pot. Belle was another case that nearly had as tragic an ending. Andy Scothern found the three year old grey seal at Donna Nook with what appeared to be a plastic gasket around her neck. It had been cutting into her for several months and was causing her great distress. Andy's

quick thinking meant that we were able to get to her without delay. So far we have only ever lost one seal of the dozens that came in with net or other rubbish injuries. We thought that Belle was likely to be the second and indeed we nearly went straight to our vets so that she could be put down. Fortunately we did not and gradually she recovered to the point that we could release her a few weeks later. You can read more about her and the rescue on Andy's web site: www.andyscothernphotography.co.uk

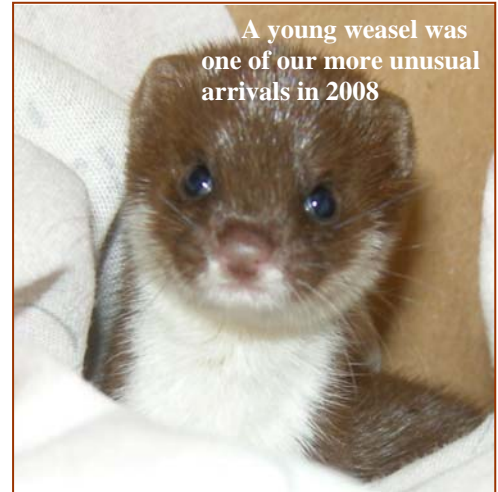


Belle's release

(Photo's of Belle courtesy Andy Scothern)

Other arrivals

As well as the seals there were another 40 species admitted during the year making a total of over 150 individuals cared for at the Seal Sanctuary. After the seals the next most frequent arrivals were pigeons(16), foxes(7), blackbirds(7), starlings(5) and kestrels(4). Of the more unusual casualties a small elephant hawk moth, a hobby and a young weasel were all treated and most have since been released. Not so fortunate was a young muntjac deer that was badly injured by a dog. Despite our vets best efforts and lots of TLC it did not survive. Incidentally two of our common seal arrivals this year also suffered the same fate as a result of dog bites. Once again, a little bit more care by us humans and a lot of suffering could be averted.



Stuart's section!

Stuart, our good friend and supporter is beginning to need a permanent section in this newsletter. You may remember his rescue of a young badger in the spring but since then he has also found an injured barn owl (now released), a nestling (which is still in our care) and most recently, a tortoise! Watching from his seat on a bus he noticed a cardboard box on the road where it was only going to be a matter of time before a passing car ran over it. A man looked into the box and then boarded the bus. When Stuart asked whether there was anything interesting inside he got the answer, "Oh just a turtle of some sort". By this time the bus was well on its way but Stuart being Stuart he demanded to be let off to go back and rescue it. We are now looking after the tortoise while Stuart tries to find its owner.



Seal Pool Renovation

This autumn, for the first time in 15 years our seal pre-release enclosure was empty. We took the opportunity to renovate and it was completed just in time for the busy winter period. In the last few weeks it has accommodated 20 young seals. The picture shows Billy, our most recent release being crated up for a final weight check before being taken to a nearby secluded beach.



We send our thoughts and best wishes to the relatives of the late Vera Shaw who has been a generous supporter of the Seal Trust for some time. She died in October and will be sadly missed. Thank you also to all our other friends who make it possible for us to continue with our work. As always your kindness is greatly appreciated.

Linda Walker & Paul King, Trustees.

The Seal Trust is a registered charity No. 328545