



East Hoathly & District Preservation Society

Wealden Rural Ambulance Service.

By Trevor Weekes MBE

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Trevor's passion for rescuing and caring for animals spans some three decades. He formed WRAS, as it is known, in 1996 in order to care for the large number of guillemots being washed up on the sea shore. In those days it was still legal for oil tankers to wash out their tanks with sea water and discharge the toxic effluent into the sea. Fortunately, the number of such cases has now dropped from about 400 to less than 10 per year.

His talk comprised a comprehensive set of computer slides, many of which contained embedded video content of rescues and a short discrete video clip from a recent Country File program, who had made a feature article on WRAS. He spoke of many rescues carried out over the years and how the profile, structure and capability of the organisation developed as a result.

The organisation was subsequently registered it as a charity in 2005 and now has 75 volunteers and 3 vets on board. There are 5 veterinary ambulances ferrying casualties to and from the centre near Blackberry Farm in Whitesmith, where an Xray unit is due to be installed this coming winter. Many of the volunteers do 3-4 hour stints feeding the animals in the hospital which, in the recently completed orphan rearing season, required food to be dispensed at 15 minute intervals from 6am right through to 11pm.

Approximately 90 percent of all incidents are due to the effects of human activity, ranging from deer antlers becoming entangled in fencing to small mammals getting caught in carelessly discarded food containers to swans hitting power lines. On average, each incident lasts 2.5 hours and given that there can be 110 calls per day at peak times, this highlights the incessant demand on WRAS and the necessity to prioritize cases. Inter-agency cooperation is also common, with organisations such as the Fire Brigade and the RSPCA working alongside WRAS to provide the best outcome for a given situation.

Each rescue call-out costs average of £75, last year the amount spend on transport and food was £46000. Drug costs had peaked at £54000 annually, but now that the rescue centre is open and registered as a veterinary centre then supplies can be bought directly from the manufacturers at a greatly reduced cost. WRAS relies completely on public donations for its income, monthly subscriptions are particularly welcome as it assists in planning the organisation's activities.

It must be noted that the Whitesmith centre does not cater for visitors; it is a sanctuary for wild animals who, by definition, are not used to and are afraid of humans.