



## RSPCA EAST WINCH WILDLIFE CENTRE

STATION ROAD, EAST WINCH, KING'S LYNN, NORFOLK PE32 1NR

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### 2014 NEWSLETTER

We will never forget the surge tide that hit the Norfolk coast on the 5<sup>th</sup> December 2013 and the impact it had on the breeding seal colonies. The pups were separated from their mothers on the beach and were left calling for them and trying to suckle on any adult seal they could find. At East Winch at that time we already had 50 seals in our care.

Because of the number of orphan pups the inspectors collected the seals from the beach and transported them to us in a borrowed horse box. On the 6<sup>th</sup> December 16 pups were admitted, 26 on the 7<sup>th</sup> December and on the 8<sup>th</sup> December another 17 arrived. By the 8<sup>th</sup> December we had 108 seal pups to care for. We have never had so many seals in at any one time and all available space was used.



Inspectors collecting seals from beach



New arrivals in borrowed horse box

All of the 58 new arrivals and many of our existing pups were white coats; which means they were all under 3 weeks old and should have still been suckling milk from their mums. Seal milk is very rich and fatty milk (over 50% fat content) so it is difficult for us to replace and many of the surge tide pups were emaciated. Feed times had to be extended from our normal 3 hours to 4 hourly as we could not feed all the pups before it was time to start again. This just about gave us enough time to wash the jugs, stomach tubes and funnels and prepare litres and litres of fish soup.

The work load was incredible and it was thanks to the team work of dedicated staff coming back after doing a day shift to help colleagues in the evening and the evening shift staying at times until 2a.m. to finish all the feeds that we managed. We also could not have managed this without the help of some fantastic volunteers who stood for hours making up the fish soup and doing all the washing up. Staff and volunteers also gave up Christmas Day and Boxing Day to come in and help colleagues with seal feeds.

Of the 58 pups that arrived in the first 3 days after the Surge tide we lost 9 mainly due to starvation. During January we admitted 9 grey seal pups and February brought a further 9 grey pups.

We have 17 isolation cubicles in the centre where large mammals are housed on admission but these were filled up rapidly. Box room which normally houses small mammals and birds was quiet due to the time of year and a very mild winter, orphans room and holding room were all used.



Young pup sitting on shelving normally used for hedgehogs in boxes



Pups relaxing in trays we normally use for defrosting fish - we had to be creative



Hedgehogs were moved to our visitor centre



Swans were moved into theatre

As the pups' health gradually improved, they progressed onto whole fish and the work became fractionally less demanding for the staff, but the sheer numbers meant it was still very challenging and tiring.



We bought extra tables into isolation as we could not get all the feeds in our small kitchen.

Once the pups had started to regain their fitness they started to hand feed and then began to chomp fish on their own in a shallow pool of water. This was a major improvement as once they began to eat the fish on their own they could move from isolation to an intermediate pool.



Hand feeding As the pups regained their fitness they started to hand feed

Pups began to chomp fish on their own in a shallow pool of water.



Defrosting and moving fish began to take up a huge amount of time during February and March as the seals progressed onto self feeding.

We needed 260kg of mackerel each day at the height of the incident. It takes days to defrost the fish correctly in the fridge so we needed 3 days of fish defrosting so we had at least 780kg of fish on the go at any one time. To feed a seal for a day costs £3.90 and if my maths is right - this makes it £27.30 a week.

We moved seals to all available pools once they were eating on their own. We had seals on both of our swan pools, the oiled bird test pool and duckling pool.



Seals on one of the swan pools

We have two large deep pools that seals can exercise and get fit in prior to release.



Seals in large deep outside pools

We released the first of the surge tide pups in February 2014 and continued to release the fit, healthy and heavy enough ones as often as the weather and tides allowed us.



First of the pups going back to sea



This pup epitomises our work.

We released her from the beach and within 3 minutes she was eating a crab - it makes all our hard work worthwhile.

The last of the surge tide seals were released on the 1<sup>st</sup> August, 2014 - this means that some of them were in with us for nearly 8 months.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> June the first orphan common seal pup of the season was admitted and we still had some of the surge tide seals in our care and so the work continues.



Common seal pup found by the staff at King's Lynn Ferry



Two common seal pups found at Terrington Marshes



At the moment we have 41 common seals and 2 grey seals under our care and it will soon be time for the grey seals to start arriving again. So the fish deliveries are still arriving and we still have to make sure we have enough fish defrosting for three days.

*On behalf of all the seals and staff we would like to say a massive thank you to everyone who has helped us throughout the year - your donations really do help us care for seals. We would not exist without donations from people like you.*





**Please help us care for seals**

- 1 day's fish feed: £3.90
- 1 week's fish feeds: £27.30

Name.....  
Address.....  
.....  
e-mail address.....

**If you would like to help us care for seals please send your donation –  
I am sorry we can only accept cash or cheques to:-  
RSPCA East Winch Wildlife Centre, Station Road, East Winch,  
King's Lynn, Norfolk PE32 1NR.  
Thank you very much.**