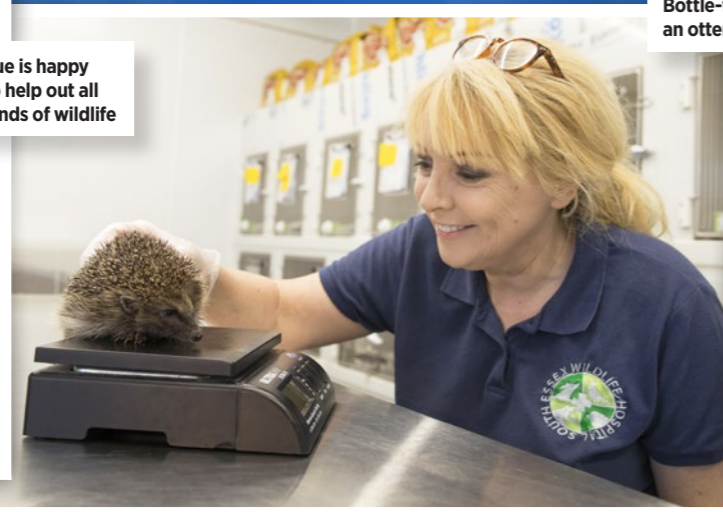


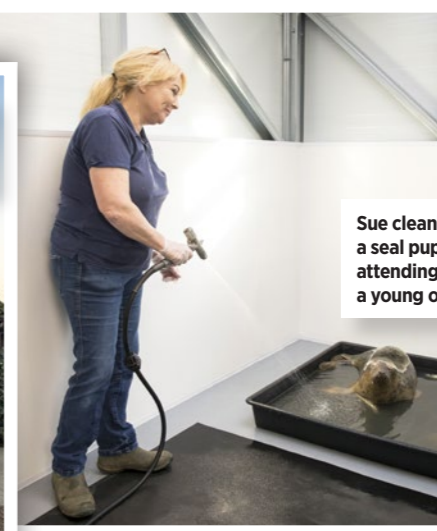
Sue is happy to help out all kinds of wildlife



Bottle-feeding an otter



The South Essex Wildlife Hospital is open 24/7



Sue cleaning a seal pup and attending to a young owl



'I sold my home to build

Sue Schwar's love of and passion for animals led to the creation of a

Our motto at South Essex Wildlife Hospital is that we are 'dedicated to putting life back into the wild'. We are open every day of the year and constantly full to the brim with animals, which we return to their natural habitats once they are fit and well enough for release.

I first realised my passion for wildlife in 1990 when I worked in the control room at Grays Police Station in Essex. We'd receive call-ins about injured animals, but there was no one we could ask to heal them. Having grown up with horses and been involved in cat rescue, I was quite adept at handling animals, so I started taking in wildlife in need of help.

One afternoon, I'd finished a shift and was getting my coat and bag when the phone rang. It was the RSPCA calling to say a cat had its head stuck in a can, but they couldn't get to it for over an hour. I recognised the address (it was close to where I lived) so I went on the way home. I used a can opener to open the end of the can so the cat could breathe, before managing to get the can off its head. I rang the RSPCA to let them know I'd managed to save the cat. I offered them my number and said if they had other emergencies, I'd be happy to help, thinking that no more would come of it. By the end of the week, I had their inspectors turning up on my doorstep with baby birds and other creatures.

One night, we had a call to tell us that a fox had run across a road and dropped its cub.

The police on patrol didn't know what to do, so I went out with an animal carrier, popped the cub inside it for safety, tied some scene preservation tape to the lid and took it back to the police car, hoping the vixen would come

and we could open the lid for her to take her cub. She didn't show up, so in the morning, I contacted the nearest rescue, The Fox Project in Tunbridge Wells, Kent. When the founder, Trevor Williams, came to pick up the cub, I found myself saying that if he needed any help, I would be willing. From that day on, he passed any local fox rescue calls in Essex to me.

PUBLIC SUPPORT

I realised that animals in the wild suffer from the same illnesses and injuries as pets do. They need pain relief and antibiotics, and yet there wasn't anywhere for them to get those or any other treatment.

Very soon, my house started filling up with animals requiring help. One local vet was sympathetic and would give guidance on how to take care of them. At the time, there was no internet or mobile phones, so it was difficult to get information about what to do, but I would contact reputable rescues for advice and to learn more about looking after these animals.

I started to get donations from well-wishers and would keep accounts of every penny we were gifted. I asked a tax inspector how much a charity could make before it had to be registered and I

realised we were being given a little more than that. So, in 1995, I gathered some of the people who had joined us to help as volunteers and we formed a committee of trustees. We are very grateful to our supporters for their much-needed and greatly appreciated help, which keeps our charity going.

It grew from something I was doing in my back garden to what is now a fully fledged animal hospital, open all hours, to provide any rescue, care and veterinary treatment that wild animals need. We also provide advice and assistance to vets, other rescues and the community. In 2002, as we had exceeded the limitations of my back garden, I moved the charity to my

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The badger and fox cubs we rehabilitate are adorable
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an ANIMAL HOSPITAL

remarkable hospital for wild creatures who need special care and attention

parents' smallholding in Orsett. Initially, they said I could use their empty farm buildings for three months, but several years later, they gave me half of the land at the property to build a purpose-built facility. I was so passionate about it that I actually sold my house to fund the project and lived on-site.

It took four years to get the planning permission, but we had a strong crowd of support. In 2009, South Essex Wildlife Hospital moved into its forever home, with three visiting vets to assist as we gradually got more and more patients. They still help to this day. In 2014, I met vet Tom Linsel, who became my partner. He moved in with me at the hospital and it's been a massive bonus to have a vet here all of the time and to be a registered veterinary practice.

We soon started rescuing and rehabilitating all kinds of animals. We've received an increasing number of seal pups - last year we admitted more than 50. Tom has become very knowledgeable on how to treat them, but they are really challenging patients to handle and very expensive to care for. We now have a specially constructed unit designed to accommodate them.

EMOTIONAL IMPACT

You never know what's going to happen at the wildlife hospital. We go out to rescue deer that have been hit, we've been on railway tracks and up high-rise buildings. We've even been on lakes when swans have been in danger. As a charity that is open all day until late at night and on call for emergencies during the night, we work long hours in intense circumstances.

Not only am I often emotionally impacted by what I see, but as a type 1 diabetic, it can be physically exhausting work.

Our hospital sees around 9,000 animals each year and between 200-300 'patients' at any one time. Our aim is that every animal that passes through our doors is able to return to the wild, where they belong. Unfortunately, we're running out of places for animals to exist safely and happily; many animals that come to our hospital are affected by human activities, whether that's because we're disturbing habitats, a pet cat has attacked them or they've been run over by a car.



HOW YOU CAN HELP WILDLIFE

- **Make a log pile** Logs are ideal for burrowing animals, like beetle larvae, and decomposers, such as woodlice.
- **An 'untidy' area** Having a section of garden that's overgrown can be good for amphibians as well as hedgehogs. They also need gaps at the bottom of fences to reach other gardens.
- **Natural ponds** Ponds are great for wildlife; sloping sides are important so inhabitants like frogs can get in.
- **Plant native** Wildflowers and plants are an important source of food and nectar for pollinators and other insects that will attract other species to your garden.

Wildlife is part of our ecosystem. Plants and animals all depend on one another - it's a balance that requires us to recognise that we are part of nature ourselves, and that nature needs our care, especially as so many animals have learned to co-exist around us.

In the past 33 years, I've developed a love for all animals. The badger and fox cubs we rehabilitate are absolutely adorable and very entertaining. Personally, I feel particularly compassionate towards birds and amphibians; I think our native species have a hard time living in our environment. And our iconic national species, the hedgehog, needs as much help as possible. While I'm aware we can't save every single animal, if we can prevent them from suffering, then I feel like I'm helping in some way.

• southessexwildlife.org □

