

## **Factors affecting the likelihood of release of injured and orphaned woodpigeons (*Columba palumbus*)**

*A Kelly\*<sup>†</sup>, C Halstead<sup>‡</sup>, D Hunter<sup>§</sup>, K Leighton<sup>#</sup>, A Grogan<sup>†</sup> and M Harris<sup>‡</sup>*

<sup>†</sup> RSPCA, Wildlife Department, Wilberforce Way, Southwater, Horsham, West Sussex RH13 9RS, UK

<sup>‡</sup> Harper Adams University College, Newport, Shropshire TF10 8NB, UK

<sup>§</sup> RSPCA Stapeley Grange Wildlife Centre, London Rd, Stapeley, Nantwich, Cheshire CW5 7JW, UK

<sup>#</sup> RSPCA East Winch Wildlife Centre, East Winch, Norfolk PE32 1NR, UK

\* Contact for correspondence and requests for reprints: andkelly@rspca.org.uk

### **Abstract**

Very little is known about the fate of the large numbers of injured and orphaned wild animals taken to wildlife rehabilitation centres in the UK each year. We reviewed the reasons for admission and outcomes for 2,653 woodpigeons (*Columba palumbus*), 68% of which were juveniles, brought to an RSPCA wildlife rehabilitation centre in Cheshire, UK over a five-year period (2005–2009). Reasons for admission varied with the most common reason for adults and juveniles being ‘injury (cause uncertain)’ and ‘orphan’, respectively. Twenty-one percent of adults and 16% of juveniles had been attacked by cats. Sixty-five percent of adults and 37% of juveniles were euthanased on admission or within the first 48 h to prevent further suffering. Only 14% of adults and 31% of juveniles were released back into the wild. The remainder were either euthanased or died despite treatment more than 48 h after admission. Body condition on admission was not a good predictor of the likelihood of release, but age, weight on admission and severity of symptoms were significant factors. A reduction in the median number of days in care for those birds euthanased more than 48 h after being admitted was recorded for 2007 to 2009, possibly due to the introduction of radiography for all birds on admission. Leg-band recovery data for 15 birds revealed post-release survival ranging from 21–2,545 days (median = 231 days) compared to 1–2,898 days (median = 295) for non-rehabilitated birds.

**Keywords:** animal welfare, *Columba palumbus*, post-release survival, RSPCA, wildlife rehabilitation, woodpigeon