

SICK AND INJURED BIRDS

Many Honorary Wardens and members of the public will undoubtedly come across sick and injured birds from time to time. The following information is a summary of some guides to treatment and recommended action which have been kindly offered by Mr. Michael Carins who recently wrote an article on this subject in "The Australian Bird Bander" (September 1971).

Disease

Disease in birds may be difficult to detect but may be evidenced by an excessive number of ecto-parasites, dull dirty plumage, very low weight for the species, excessive lethargy, sores or blebs on the feet or facial flesh, or a discharge from the eyes, nostrils or mouth. Birds so affected should be handled carefully since some infections can be transmitted to humans. The treatment of diseased birds is rarely successful and it may be more humane to destroy them in the first instance.

Shock and Exhaustion

Trapped birds which go into a state of shock may be placed in a darkened box or cage and kept quite until they recover. Most honeyeaters respond very well to sugar and water mixture and this can be used for any shocked bird which will accept it. Frequently exhausted birds will be found (see story on Giant Petrel, page 93). These should be fed and cared for until strong enough to fly and released in their natural environment. A teaspoonful of brandy or similar spirit will aid revival.

Injuries

Leg injuries are the most likely ones encountered and these do not appear to unduly incapacitate most birds. Many birds suffer little inconvenience from a single badly damaged or missing leg.

If a bird has a simple broken leg it may be splinted with matchsticks and thread and the bird cared for until the leg has healed. If the leg is badly broken and the bone protrudes through the skin it should be amputated at the next joint and treated with antiseptic before releasing the bird.

Some birds, particular waders seem prone to entanglement of the feet and legs with wool or string, etc.; gulls and terns also are very prone to such entanglement by nylon fishing line. Frequently these obstructions are so tightly worked into the leg that they are impossible to move without cutting; this should be done carefully using the tip of a scalpel.

Badly injured birds, particularly those suffering from gunshot wounds or ones struck by cars should be destroyed as soon as possible. Gunshot wounds can be treated by the application of sulphate

powder at the site of the injury, but unless the exact nature of the injury is known this may prove futile. Treatment will control infection, but if bones are broken internally the skeleton may become flooded with blood and death will inevitably occur. Injuries from telegraph wires frequently result in the loss of a section of one wing. Whilst the loss may not prevent recovery from the injury, the bird will never fly again and would have to be held in captivity for the remainder of its life.

There are various ways of destroying birds for humanitarian reasons. Small birds may be killed by pressing the thumb strongly on the left side of the breast until the heart stops. Larger birds may be killed similarly by pressing with the knee or foot. Another method is to insert a scalpel into the back of the skull, or instant decapitation which causes no distress and brings death immediately. Do not try to wring a birds neck; apart from being difficult it is frequently unsuccessful. It is highly recommended that any necessary killing should be done in seclusion in the interest of public relations and out of deference to anyone who might be upset by such a process.

Oiled Birds

If only slightly oiled a bird may be treated with a good chance of success, but the treatment must be done and the bird released quickly without destroying the waterproofing of the plumage. Slightly oiled birds should be fed, kept warm and dosed with a small quantity of castor oil to assist in the purging of any oil which may have been swallowed. After this has been done, Fullers earth (a moisture-absorbing substance) may be worked into the feathers to remove the oil. If the bird is other than slightly oiled, treatment is likely to prove unsuccessful. A possible method of rehabilitation is under investigation in Britain but the results are not sufficiently conclusive for them to be released at the present time.

Editors Note:

- (i) *The treatment of botulism and algal poisoning is not covered here, but a booklet dealing at length with this subject is available free of charge from the Department.*
- (ii) *It is recommended that any individual inexperienced in caring for injured birds should seek the advice of a more qualified person if the injuries appear severe. If the bird is to be treated and kept to recuperate a "License to care for sick, derelict or injured fauna" must be obtained from the Department. There is no fee for such a license.*