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**Animal Concern Advice Line (ACAL) is a recognised Scottish charity: No. SC030982.
Animal Concern Advice Line was established in 2001 to take on the charitable work of Animal
Concern which was founded as the Scottish Anti-Vivisection Society in 1876.
E-MAIL: acal@jfrobins.force9.co.uk Website: <http://www.adviceaboutanimals.info>**

20/7/21

Hi Folks,

I've just had an idea for a campaign for whoever takes over from me.

Tonight ACAL had yet another call about a stupid animal, a fox cub this time, which has had the audacity to venture out after dark and get itself injured outside of office hours. It happened at quarter to midnight when juvenile foxes should of course be tucked up in bed with a hot water bottle. Instead of behaving sensibly this silly creature had behaved like an animal and as I write it is lying at the side of the road in pain and fear with a broken leg and other injuries.

The young woman whose car the fox decided to play chicken with had already phoned our national animal welfare organisation, the Scottish SPCA on 03000 999 999, only to get their answer machine message telling them to call back in the morning. That was a pity as the incident took place in Stirlingshire not very far from the SSPCA national wildlife hospital.

I suggested the caller try Scottish Animal Welfare (SAW) on 03000 999 000. Not only is the SAW number similar to that of the SSPCA the SAW Animal Rescue Officers have similar dark uniforms and liveried vans. The big difference is that according to their website they are "Scotland's only 24 hour animal welfare organisation." They say they can "... respond efficiently, reaching the animal in distress on average, within the (sic) 40 minutes." On dialling 03000 999 000 hopes were raised when the message said to press one for help for an animal in trouble. Hopes crashed when that option was answered with "Sorry no one is available to take your call".

It would all be easier if injured animals cooperated with their rescuers. However foxes and other injured animals are too daft to realise that some people are trying to help them and instead of gratefully allowing someone to pick them up and take them to a rescue centre they scratch and bite and try to escape. That's why it is dangerous for someone without proper training and equipment to try and rescue an injured wild animal. You know what I mean – the type of training and equipment the SSPCA and SAW officers have.

As a last resort I got the caller to phone Hessilhead Wildlife Rescue Trust over in north Ayrshire. Their call was quickly answered by a real person but no-one was available to go over to Stirling and the caller was not able to safely handle the injured fox and take it to Hessilhead.

In the end I had to advise the by now frustrated and upset caller that she had done her very best, was now putting herself at risk on an unlit country road and she would have to leave the injured fox and phone the SSPCA at 8am and tell them where it was.

Here's my idea for a campaign. We employ an animal education officer to visit wildlife in their natural habitat and teach them basic road safety. We could also give them alarm clocks to get the lazy critters out of their beds in the morning. Half the problems are caused by the lunatic nocturnal habits adopted by foxes, badgers, hedgehogs, deer, owls and many other creatures. If they were out and about during the day there would be less chance of them being hit by cars and if they do cause an accident due to their careless behaviour there may well be an officer of the SSPCA or SAW available to give them help.

On the other hand it might be easier to persuade the SSPCA to employ some nocturnal inspectors to provide cover at the time of day when wild animals are most likely to need help.

Some years ago I persuaded the Scottish SPCA to extend their helpline into the evening. I achieved that by giving out the ex-directory home phone number of the then SSPCA CEO to callers seeking help for injured animals during the night. When the SSPCA CEO threatened to take legal action I told him to fire away as the adverse publicity might prove embarrassing. Upshot was that phone lines were staffed until 10pm instead of 6pm but I believe that was recently cut back to 8pm. However what is needed is a 24/7 phone line backed by 24/7 emergency rescue provision. With flexible work patterns and working from home becoming the norm it should not be too difficult or expensive to bring animal rescue into the 21st century.

I know I've been a bit flippant with this but I am fed up having to tell good, caring people that there is no help available for the animal they are trying their best to save. I'm angry to have to advise people that the best they can do is phone the police and tell them an injured deer is likely to cause a serious road accident. That way the police will arrange to have the deer euthanised and removed instead of it being left to die slowly from its injuries.

The Animal Concern Advice Line shouldn't have to advise people that help simply is not available.

If you are a member or supporter of the SSPCA why not write and ask them to provide a 24/7 emergency service for injured wildlife?

Cheers4now,

John

PS When I emailed you earlier I suggested you visit the news pages of the Animal Concern website and read an article I wrote in March 2020 about animal to human disease pandemics. That should have read March 2000.