

## A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE

Our speaker on Wednesday 28th of March was Graham Cornick who with his wife Lyn, plus staff and volunteers run Hydestile Resident Animals which cares for both permanent residents, accumulated over the years and new patients in an emergency if no one else can help.

Graham brought along some of his pets to illustrate his talk producing them from covered cages lining the tables at the front of the hall.

The first out was a baby grey squirrel found after recent high winds had blown down the dray. Graham considered the grey squirrel had got a reputation perhaps more negative than deserved. The decline of the red squirrel had been due to changes to woodland management and other issues in addition to the growth in numbers of greys.

Second out was an elderly hedgehog that had lost a leg in a strimmer accident and had been a resident now for two years. Numbers have been declining dramatically over the last decade to the point the hedgehogs are now considered an endangered species. Graham requested gardeners watch out for hedgehogs when cutting long grass and turning over compost heaps, also in autumn to look out for underweight youngsters, (less than 500/600g) and insufficient to survive hibernation and take action to help.

The third animal to be shown was Charles, the chinchilla, which had been abandoned in Windsor Great Park. A member of the rodent species and a native of South America. They have the densest fur of any land mammal and but their tail is hair. Their diet is varied but one must not give too much fruit as the sugar shortens their life span.

Percy the pigeon was brought to Graham as another victim of an air gun attack. Air guns are the cause of all manor of wildlife being injured and Graham considers should be under stricter controls.

A pair of pet rats brought shivers among many present. There are an estimated population of 60million rats in the UK feeding on the waste humans recklessly discard and scatterings from bird tables. Graham recommended clearing up all bird food each evening,

Ginger and Patches, two guinea pigs, brought gasps of delight. A native of the Andes where part of the staple diet of the indigenous groups. Grayham asked parents purchasing animals as pets to continue to monitor their welfare as he comes across many neglected animals after the children's initial interest fades.

Two lively pole cats were the last to be shown. It is essential to spay females as they suffer continuously being on heat which causes sever issues. The males tend to give off unpleasant odour which can be reduced by castration. They can suffer significant pain when owners, using the pole cats for rabbiting, cut down their teeth.

Graham reminded all, how wildlife is under constant stress and danger from humans and it is up to each and every one of us to consider the effects of our actions on mother natures creatures.

Chairman Bill thanked Graham for his most enjoyable presentation and for bringing along so many of the animals under his care. The meeting concluded with Graham drawing the March 100+ Club numbers and winning raffle tickets and Bill wishing everyone a happy Easter.

**END**

