Ginni Little: volunteer bat-rescue worker

Ginni Little has formed a 'bat rescue' centre in her own home.

Judging by their loud purring, Natalie and Rupert are enjoying their evening. While Ginni Little sits propped up in bed watching TV, Natalie, a natterer's bat, and Rupert, a one-winged pipistrelle, are happily snuggled next to each other, occasionally looking up to receive a few loving words from their rescuer, Ginni, who has set up her own 'bat hospital' at home.

1

In her village, Ginni is known as 'Batwoman'. As a nature-loving five-year-old, she became fascinated by bats and their built-in radar systems, which she now knows to be their echo location. She continued to read up about the different species of bat in the UK, their diet, habitat and behaviour patterns.

2

Before she could officially become a bat carer, Ginni had to undergo some training, for example, learning to identify the species, as this can have an effect on their treatment. She also learnt how to examine a bat for injuries and make sure she understood the legislation regarding the protection of bats. After that, she was given an abandoned baby bat to nurse back to health.

3

After several months of hard work and dedication, Ginni contacted the bat group to ask a more experienced bat carer to assess whether Batty was ready to be released back into the wild. Batty was declared strong and fit enough, and her release was organised. Ginni was delighted that she had been successful with Batty, but at the same time sad to see her go.

4

They come from several sources – animal protection societies, wildlife organisations and local bat groups. Sometimes members of the public find them lying on the ground, and when this is the case, it can provide valuable information about roosting sites. Over the years, Ginni's knowledge and ability to care for these fascinating creatures has increased significantly, as has the number she cares for at any given time.

5

The survival rate of those who are fortunate enough to come under Ginni's care is impressive. Around half of them recover. The sickest patients live in small glass cages. The more robust hang from bamboo screens or behind pictures, an occasional scuffling sound being the only hint of their presence during daylight hours. At night, the flyers emerge to circle and swoop around the room, building up their strength before being released.

6

Caring for bats is an exhausting, full-time commitment. Because they are nocturnal creatures, Ginni can often be found in the early hours of the morning hand-feeding her patients with vitamins – bits of raw liver and water on the tip of a paintbrush. Others are fed live worms or the occasional insect.

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A The majority of patients – there are 35 in the house at the moment – have been attacked by cats. Others have been injured by cars or poisoned by pesticides. Abandoned babies are also relatively common.

B Ginni replies that many bats which have been injured will regain their health as long as they are treated quickly. Wounds which are infected need antibiotics as soon as possible to prevent the infection from spreading.

C Since Batty's departure, Ginni has fostered hundreds of sick, injured and abandoned bats. Most of the tiny creatures which arrive at her Bat Hospital (set up in two spare bedrooms of her small home) are pipistrelles, a small and common type of bat.

D 'Bats are such social creatures. They thrive on the warmth and companionship of humans,' says Ginni. 'The comfort of the heartbeat makes an ideal nesting place. I've also had bats which loved to nestle in my hair and others that would hang on to my earrings while I went about my work.'

E Others, like Rupert and Natalie, whose wings are irreparably damaged, will spend the rest of their days as treasured pets. They spend most of their time in one of Ginni's spare bedrooms, where they can be found hopping and gliding among a range of plants she has put there for them.

F Eleven years ago, her love affair with bats became much more hands-on when she found a large family in an old building while on a camping holiday. On her return home, she contacted a local bat group to see how she could get involved in caring for sick or injured bats.

G 'That was Batty,' she says about her first patient. 'She was bald and covered in scabs. It took several months to help her get well,' she explains, telling me how she put blankets on the floor to protect Batty from her first crash landings.

Vocabulary

1 **For questions 1–8, read the article below and decide which answer (A, B, C or D) best fits each gap.**

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