



2022

## Autumn Newsletter

Recently we were reminded of a donkey's true nature, a mixture of humour, stubbornness and an unflinching determination to take their time on (what are to them at least) big decisions (like stepping over a puddle, changing fields, or in this case loading into a trailer for transportation).

We were offered a dream home for Mum Feathers and her two boys, Falcon aged 3 and Chickadee aged 2, just down the road from us at Ballygawley. The three of them would have their own devoted human family, lovely grazing fields and a choice of shelters so we were as excited as their new guardians about the move.

Feathers and Chickadee were happy enough with the idea and walked straight into the trailer, more interested in the treats they were being offered than the loading.

Falcon had different ideas. Move? Load? Never heard of the words. We tried all the usual modes of persuasion but he was having none of it, so as Feathers and Chickadee were growing restless we decided to take them and leave Falcon for another day, when maybe a spell without his beloved Mum and little brother would render him more amenable. We should have known better!



48 hours later we tried again hoping, even half believing, that he would walk up into the trailer, no bother. Nope! Again Gail and I tried all known methods of push me/pull me, bribery, arm flapping. . . everything short of actual abuse, but Falcon remained intransigent.

When little short of desperate, Gail phoned for help from her ever patient and immensely strong husband, Stewart. Falcon continued to edge towards a bucket of treats, first one step on the ramp and soon, all four. 'Cracked it' we thought. That one final step into the trailer was within sight. . . but. . . No! Falcon sat down, bottom on the floor just like a dog. He was calm but adamant: he was not going in that trailer!

Knowing that equines see things in a panoramic strip very unlike our own view of the world, we were prepared for him to be hesitant, even afraid, but he was neither, so having decided he was just playing with us we sent for more reinforcements in the shape of Gail and Stewart's son Gaz, a veritable mountain of a man with the strength of a horse. Meanwhile Falcon continued to nibble at any treats he could reach without showing the slightest sign of upset.

But enough was enough. When Gaz arrived he and Stewart literally 'wheelbarrowed' him into the trailer only to be met with a gaze of complete innocence which clearly said " Well, if I'd known THAT was what you wanted, you only had to ask!"

The story ended happily with a still serene Falcon travelling the few miles to his new home without mishap, followed by a rapturous and noisy reunion with Feathers and Chickadee.



Once together again all three settled in immediately to a luxury life of being loved and nurtured (spoilt rotten) by their new family - while we exhaled audible sighs of relief. I think I heard a whisper of "for certain, he is not coming back!"

Only a short time later the family contacted us again looking to expand their donkey herd as they were so enamoured with them, so to everyone's delight the friendly and affectionate Song, now nearly 5 years old and her 2 year old son Pip came under discussion as did other possibilities. No final decision has been made yet but watch this space !

## EDAN

Around the same time little Edan, a tiny, young looking 12 year old gelding with 'little man syndrome' found himself a forever friend with Georgie, a lonely gelding donkey near Drumsna in Co. Leitrim. Georgie had been rescued as an unwanted stallion by his current owners who had him gelded as soon as the season allowed (no flies, no frost being the general rule), arranged for him to be microchipped and passported and then asked if we had a suitable companion.

Edan seemed to fit the bill and although a little superior in his attitude towards the more naïve Georgie they are rubbing along well and seem to enjoy each other's company. Georgie at last has a friend and Edan, who by nature is confrontational when challenged, no longer needs to prove himself to 90 other much bigger donkeys. Peace at last.

By mid summer we were way beyond capacity with 94 donkeys and 21 horses/ponies and were unhappy at having to refuse requests to take in more. We did our best to help the most needy cases but the priority was to find good guardian/foster homes for as many as possible before the tough months of winter set in. Happily homes were forthcoming.

## BRAMLING AND BUNTING

Bramling and Bunting went to join the expanding family of the Meehan sisters in North Leitrim who already have 7 of our mini Shetland ponies but have always hankered after donkeys.

They have plenty of room and shelter but needed to donkey-tighten the fences around the paddocks as donkeys are escape artists of Houdini standards. On completion the mares moved to the farm, where it seems they spend more time in and around the house than they do in the fields, adding a totally fresh dimension to the animal energies of the farm. They have grown into an affectionate pair and are deeply loved.



## BETHANY AND BRONWEN



BETHANY AND BRONWEN also moved to a new guardian home but sadly, haven't settled quite so well, becoming timid and afraid of being handled within a short time after arrival. Whilst this is unusual in donkeys, it does happen occasionally and not knowing their history it is difficult to isolate what they perceive as the problem.

Their new people are taking their time in trying to gain their confidence but it may be that we have to bring them home and work with them again here which is disappointing for all concerned, especially their new guardians who were so much looking forward to regular donkey cuddles and have done their very best. Meanwhile another pair may well settle happily with these lovely people and enjoy their new lifestyle. We shall see how it works in due course.

## LISSA AND DELLA

LISSA AND DELLA are a much happier story. Seized from their unpleasant owner only a few weeks before by the Department of Agriculture, after several warnings for non-compliance of welfare, these two big, strong and undeniably beautiful donkey mares met their 'forever guardian' when Eimear came on a casual visit, primarily to ask about our fostering scheme.

It was love at first sight for all three of them – we were not even consulted as they so obviously all belonged together! As an experienced horse and donkey owner Eimear is perfect for these girls as Lissa especially is lacking in manners and, delightfully friendly though she is, needs a firm hand. Della is the follower with a more reticent temperament but with Lissa's example can also be a handful.

Certainly this is a match made in heaven and we wish them all a wonderful life together.



## RUBY

RUBY was a similar story, shipped out with fingers crossed to answer an emergency call from a couple of experienced horse people for an older horse mare to keep a recently bereaved and pining mare company - and again it was love at first sight.



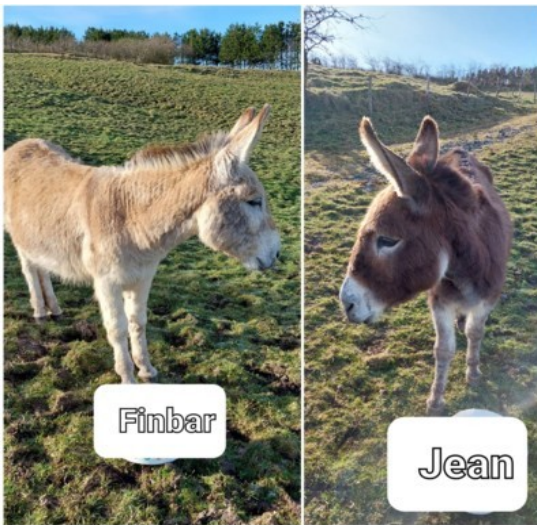
*Right: A scruffy Ruby meets new friend Ebby*



The two mares took to each other immediately. Ruby also bonded with Brian, adoring his special attention and grooming sessions, whilst Ebby, always a Mum's girl, continued to have Alison to herself. A dream outcome!

*Left: Groomed and happy with Brian!*

## FINBAR AND JEANNIE



FINBAR AND JEANNIE were returned early this year due to the ill health of their carer and were quickly offered another home together with a long term foster home family where they joined five other donkeys, four of which belong to the Sanctuary.

There is a mixture of ages and sexes so altogether they make a jolly little herd, much loved by their family.

There is plenty of playtime with the younger ones and a 'wise corner' where the grannies and grandpas can gossip and mutter about the youth of today.

## BELLE

BELLE was next to move as companion to another donkey mare called Abigail, who was left alone and very miserable when her cattle friends were moved on. The home is nearby at Culfadda so close enough to be on hand should there be any problems as Belle can be quite a dominant girl in a crowd.



*Photos show Abigail (right) and Belle, eating as always.*



Abigail was obviously delighted with the company but seemed bewildered that her new companion didn't look like a cow! (Belle was more interested in the grass and practised her 'aloof' mode whilst assessing the situation).

We have little doubt, however, that they will get along fine together - we hope so as our single unbonded donkeys are few - and splitting lifetime friends is never an option. Belle came to us originally paired with Lucy, not a good match as Belle bullied Lucy, so it was no surprise when Lucy bonded with the gentle and elderly Winnie and her younger friend Whilma happily leaving Belle free for Abigail.

## NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK



Victor was one of the first to join us this summer. Found abandoned on the road, a local gentleman took him in. Victor proved to be a gentle, soft mannered old fellow who allowed his new carer to have his grossly mismanaged hooves properly trimmed. Although the man would have enjoyed keeping Victor he had no land or sheds, so contacted us.

Gratified by his genuine act of kindness towards Victor we were happy to take him into our oldies herd where he has continued to flourish. He is a striking, pure white donkey with a sweet nature and very easily handled. We can only imagine that he probably worked in his younger years as he is so biddable.

## AND A SAD STORY WITH A HAPPY OUTCOME FOR HICKORY

As it happened the gentleman offering Midnight and Twilight a home (see below) decided he would prefer to wait for Hickory, a 15hh bright bay horse who was one of five horses/ponies and donkeys we rescued from Drumcong Forestry in Co. Leitrim where they had been abandoned in dreadful conditions, many getting trapped in bog/sink holes, Hickory included, as reported in an earlier newsletter.

Hickory had been companioned with Spruce, also from Drumcong, a registered New Forest pony whose history traced back to a riding school in England before he fell on hard times, most likely because he was covered in huge and messy sarcoids.

We sent Spruce up to the Somerton Equine Hospital in Kildare where he underwent surgery and laser treatment to remove the growths but, as is often the case, many of them regrew. Rebecca took charge by moving the two ponies to her parent's farm nearby, away from the main herd so there was less chance of cross contamination by this fly-borne virus. She treated Spruce over a period of 18 months (at her and her boyfriend's expense) with a specially mixed blend of herbs.



*Spruce on the left and Hickory trying out his new bridle*

There was temporary improvement; but after a final explosion of growths this summer on previously unaffected parts of his body there was no alternative except euthanasia if he was not to suffer miserably through the fly season and beyond. We were all devastated. RIP beautiful boy.

The question of how Hickory would handle the loss of his friend was on everyone's mind so it was amazing for him to be offered this home with an experienced horseman and with other horse and donkey companions. Hickory was moved as soon as he accepted Spruce was gone and being a laid-back sort of pony, quietly moved on with his life. We wish him a long and happy life and thank Michael for his patience in waiting until Hickory was available.

## ROSIE

ROSIE a white mule mare, and her friend FINN a black nosed donkey gelding came to us out of their owner's desperation. As an 80 year old lady, looking after her 89 year old husband, neither of them in good health, with a seriously sick daughter and 35 cats, this lady was at her wits' end and unable any longer to continue caring for Rosie and Finn.

Both were disoriented and afraid on arrival but Finn soon gained confidence as he blended with the donkey herd. We weren't sure which way Rosie would move, though in our experience mules seem to identify more easily with horses and ponies than donkeys.



*Finn (left)*



*Rosie (right)*

It took Rosie a few weeks to decide but eventually she befriended the kind and placid Merlin, a 14hh piebald pony mare of 24 years lifetime experience.

Gwillan, a 13hh black gelding also hangs around with Merlin so perhaps we will have a black and white threesome. Since the merger Rosie has become noticeably quieter, more confident and content.



*Left: Rosie and Merlin    Above: Midnight*



Earlier in the summer we took MIDNIGHT, a pure black donkey gelding with no white or pale markings at all, and TWILIGHT a dark grey gelding donkey, from Hungry Horse Outside when we needed a couple of geldings to satisfy the offer of a good home and had no suitable pairs ourselves. For now they are still here. As it happened, the gentleman offering them a home decided he would prefer to wait for Hickory, as mentioned above.

## END OF AN ERA



Although it has been a busy and positive summer we have had our sad moments, most profound when we lost our elder statesman Mr McNulty (or Mr Mac as he was affectionately known).

We knew he was an old gentleman and could trace his history to 40, possibly 45 years, yet when our equine dentist attended him she was adamant "This donkey is 50 if he's a day!"

Certainly it was his time to walk the Rainbow Bridge: he hadn't been himself for some weeks and had really lost interest in carrying on so our vet helped him slip away peacefully and gently.

He is hugely missed as for years he spent his time in and around the yard, meeting and greeting visitors, stopping cars to demand a titbit and generally slowing the pace of the Sanctuary to donkey speed, whether we liked it or not.

Visitors from all over the world fell in love with his loving and tolerant character, especially small children whom he adored to the last and any 'challenged' soul whatever the problem. We honour you Mr Mac.

## MEDICAL AND FARRIER CHALLENGES

We have an ambivalent situation with Daphne, a small, super natured filly donkey of 3 years who came to us with an enormous sarcoid growth over her left eye. This was removed surgically last year at the Somerton Equine Clinic in Kildare. We had our fingers crossed but as so often happens with sarcoids, it began to grow back. We contacted Somerton again and they agreed to take her for chemotherapy injections into the sarcoid (not as painful as it sounds as the sarcoid itself has no nerves though I'm sure the surrounding area was, and is, sore).

This treatment has a high, though not infallible success rate, but especially as Daphne was sponsored by a lovely lady who has supported the Sanctuary very generously for many years, we felt we owed it to them both to give Daphne the chance. It may be a while yet before we can be sure of the outcome but have everything crossed for success.

Both DaisyMae, a 24 year old 12hh pony mare who has a contracted front tendon which causes her to walk on the front surface of her hoof, and Maple, a fine and pretty 13h skewbald pony mare of around the eighteen who suffers with malformed hooves due to years of mismanaged laminitis, had corrective shoes made and fitted by our brilliant remedial farrier, Brian Horohoe.

DaisyMae's shoe, is a feat of engineering, specially made to accept heel studs into which coach bolts can be screwed to give support to the heel, or later, a solid heel wedge of hard rubber rather like a platform shoe for humans, but just on the heel.



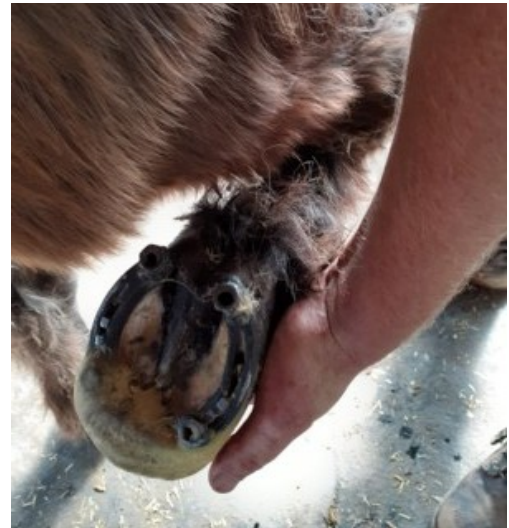


The front part of the hoof was built up with a mix of resin and fibreglass moulded to give a small lip at ground level to help restrict the roll-over effect when walking. The mould, once hardened, can be rasped and drilled as necessary to give the optimum shape on an ongoing basis.

Without doubt DaisyMae is walking faster more fluidly and with comfort. She is a much happier pony altogether and has returned to her position as matriarch of her little herd - Charlie, Frodo, Poco and donkey Hope.

*Above: the finished mould over the toe to help reduce the roll over effect when walking.*

*Right: The underneath of the shoe showing the heel studs.*



## GRATITUDE IN ABUNDANCE

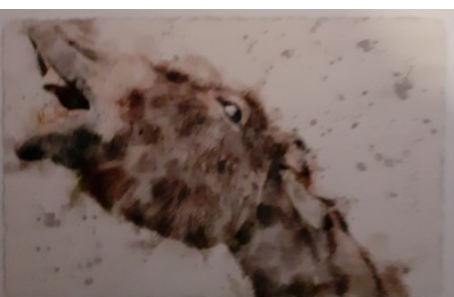
As always we have a list of people to thank, not least the many groups and visitors who came to enjoy the donkeys, usually with carrots, ginger biscuits, apples or a donation, sometimes staying to help with chores or grooming.

Huge thanks go of course to everyone who has supported us financially and with the gift of goods. Some people have been embarrassingly generous and all have done as much as they could, straight from the heart. In every case we thank you so much. Without you we would be unable to continue the work. You are at the core!



We had a most unusual gift from Volger and Sandra Bleckman of Germany who have been visiting for c.20 years whenever they could get to Ireland.

As a result of a photographic hobby and some exceptional skills they produced a set of unique postcards of famous scenes and buildings of Ireland and naturally, half a dozen donkey pictures.



We are currently testing out their popularity for distribution to B&Bs and small hotels and meanwhile have had 200 printed of just the donkey pictures, sample of a couple shown, to be available direct from the Sanctuary during our summer visitor months or by post + p&p. Your input and comments would be appreciated - we think they are stunning!



## NEW SIGNS

More recent visitors may have noticed that we have magnificent new signs, created and fitted by Blair and Zoe Scales of Ballast Signs in Sligo as a gift towards our work and a way of saying 'thank you' for 5 guardian/foster donkeys who wormed their way into the family's hearts and landed on their hooves in their wonderful home only 30 minutes away.



It all came about because we had our signs vandalised one Saturday night. The Gardai called up just as Blair and family had arrived to ask about fostering donkeys and when they learned the story, unhesitatingly stepped into the breach!

The Universe provides!! Very generously too – thank you so much for this amazing gift Blair and Zoe, and to the signs' creators.

## SECRET GARDEN

We are enormously grateful to Howard and Annette Preston who opened their beautiful gardens at Carrigeens, Ballinful, Co.Sligo during the Sligo Secret Gardens Weekends, raising an amazing €400 for each of their designated charities. Once again we were the lucky beneficiaries along with the North West Hospice who received the same amount. The only regret is that we are too busy with weekend visitors to allow ourselves the chance to view the gardens! We understand they are a real credit to all the Prestons' dedication and hard work. Good soul food.

## CALENDARS AND CARDS

We have our usual calendar for sale at €8 / £8 + p&p (sample pictures below) and two blank greetings cards at €1.50 / £1.50 each plus p & p. We hope they meet with your approval.

A selection from the calendar. . .



And the cards. . .



Finally, a few photographs kindly sent to us of happy rehoming and groups visiting the Sanctuary this summer.



*Top:*

*Left: Buddy (alias Alfie) now companioning a big skewbald called SweetBoy*

*Right: Biscuit with big friend Bella*

*Bottom:*

*Left: 35 year Brandy enjoying a show in Donegal*

*Right: Kelly and Kirsten from the States with Mr Mac.*

Have a good winter and splendid Christmastime, with every possible good wish for 2023.

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