



2024

Autumn Newsletter

We believe the planets must be in a strange alignment as 2024 seems to be a difficult year for so many from individuals to whole organisations, not helped by our atrocious Irish summer which has been wet, cold and windy even by our standards. We are fortunate, however, to have 70 round bales of good quality haylage already bought and stored together with some small bales of hay (all sourced by the wonderful Kieran, hay merchant) which will give us a good start into the winter feeding. Grass growth this summer has been slow, thin and patchy so there is no doubt that we, along with many farmers, will have to start feeding early unless someone can wave a magic wand and bring us an Indian summer lasting until Christmas!

In other respects it has been a good year with a greater interest being shown in the donkeys generally, which has resulted in a number of long term foster homes. It is great for the donkeys, especially those bonded in pairs or threes, to find a 'forever' home in a family where they get a great deal more individual attention than they can expect when in a herd of 80-100. Almost without exception they love the extra fuss, cuddles and grooming

Sadly we had our losses too, first with dear old Freddie a 40+ gelding donkey who came to us from another sanctuary, followed by Finch who was only 5 years old and appeared to be in excellent health yet was found dead in the field one morning. There was no sign of a fight or struggle so we had to presume he suffered an aneurysm, stroke or heart failure which is tragic in one so young. The rest of his family, Lark and her daughter Linnet and either his brother or cousin Robin, were upset for a few days but have settled since.

More recently in late August our old warrior Charlie, the tinker's cob, had a stroke from which he could not recover and passed away with us all around him in the shed.

He was the elder statesman of the Sanctuary not just because of his commendable 36 years of but because he had been with us from the concept of the Sanctuary. He belonged to a neighbour and was already grazing adjoining land when the Sanctuary premises were bought in 1989.



He came to us permanently with his friend Sam, another cob who left us aged 29, when his owner passed away so has spent a relatively easy and we hope, happy, life in the Sanctuary giving children 'rides' (a sedate saunter around the yard) when he was younger and enjoying justified admiration for his handsome looks even as he aged and began to lose his sight.

Only two weeks' earlier Mowgli, a stunning 37 year old flea bitten, grey, pony, who came to us at 21 years old and was with us for a few years before being fostered, also crossed the rainbow bridge.

He had spent the rest of his days in a wonderfully caring home not far from here, where he was blessed with years of dedicated support from his lovely foster carers who cherished him in every possible way.

*He is seen below with his friend Jeannie
(Blue Jeans in our Spring 2016 newsletter)*



Despite Jeannie being considerably younger they adored each other and Jeannie was broken hearted at losing Mowgli.

Fortunately HHO came to the rescue as we didn't have another suitable companion pony for Jeannie and Baloo, a 12hh dark bay gelding, joined the family within hours. Another lucky pony to have found such a special place.

A FAMILY OF SIX TO JOIN US

Six beautiful donkeys came to us in June from a family who had fallen on distressing times and been obliged to sell their house together with the seven acres of land where the donkeys lived. The donkeys, if anything, had been too well looked after as they were all verging on the obese, though our poor quality grassland and bigger roaming acreage has reduced most of them to an acceptable end-of-summer weight in super quick time!



Above: Bonnie

To introduce them we have Bonnie and her foal Daisy, beautiful black nosed Jenny, and dark brown Benny, Penny and Rooney.



Right: Her foal Daisy



Above: Rooney



Right: Jenny

Below: Penny

Right: Benny



Seamus

Of our donkeys to be fostered, first was Seamus, who joined a very lonely George in a fairy-tale woodland setting set in Co. Leitrim.

It is always an experience when first introducing 'single' donkeys as occasionally, sociable as they are, they can take a dislike to one another or one become more dominant to the point of bullying.



We try to match their characters using insights from the owners about the existing donkey as well as meeting the donkey ourselves. Happily both donkeys seem to be content with the arrangement. Seamus is an affectionate boy but can be bold when it comes to food: fortunately George is a match so by feeding them separately and a little apart the food fights can be avoided. They both seem to enjoy the company and the extra owner bestowed cuddles.

Aslan

Aslan was also a 'single' ie: unbonded donkey, who went to keep Eiric company. We half expected a problem here as Eiric had lived with cattle all his life and rather thought he was bullock himself.

He had not had equine company since being very young so we were unsure if he would take to another donkey in his teenage years. However, after a few days of circumspection they grew closer and are now contentedly sharing the field, shelter, treats and grooming routines, apparently very happy with each other's company.



The cattle have been moved out of sight and Eiric, gives no impression of missing them at all. Perhaps it is the old story that without company of their own kind, donkeys will latch onto almost any other being just to have company. There are many stories of donkeys that have befriended, sheep, dogs, cats and even chickens rather than spend their time alone.

NELLIE UNDER THE BRUSH



Nellie, on one of our very rare sunny summer days, enjoying a much need grooming from volunteer Aimee.

The year has been so cold and dull that many have not shed their winter coats as they should, so in some cases we have had to go on the attack with a pair of shears or sharp scissors to relieve them of the burden of their heavy coats before a new winter coat grows underneath, causing problems such as felting and skin infections.

ELLIE and MEGANA

Ellie and Megana went into a family situation with two little girls who were bursting at the seams to love and look after 'their' donkeys.

Both Ellie and Megana are pretty little mares who adore being fussed.

Right: Ellie



The family is embracing the learning curve that goes with fostering donkeys with open minds and hearts.

Left: Morgana

BUDDHA BOY and BLUE

Buddha Boy and Blue, two big but gentle, well-mannered boys, joined a couple who have a goat farm but have held a long term longing to add donkeys to their family. The donkeys have certainly fallen on their hooves as absolutely everything was put in place for their arrival. There is no doubt they will be valued as important members of the farm and looked after like babies. They even bring love to the local community and holiday hikers who are enchanted by their friendly nature as they lean over gateways to greet all who pass by their 'day' field. (Lucky donkeys are stabled overnight).

Below is Buddha Boy and right, we see new foster Mum, Claudia, sneaking a cuddle with Blue



TULO and THORSTEN

Tulo and Thorsten found themselves a valuable role as therapy donkeys in a nearby centre for Alzheimer's patients. Both gentle giants, they had an horrendous time suffering extended cruelty before being confiscated and brought to the Sanctuary five years ago. Perhaps this even explains in part the amazing empathy they show to people who's own now confused pasts would likely have included a donkey or two.

The centre is enroute for many Sanctuary staff and volunteers so we hope to see them regularly and keep in touch with the progress of both donkeys and people.

Tulo had several dangly growths removed from his under parts a couple of years ago, but fortunately they show no sign of regrowth, though regular check ups will do no harm.

Right: Tulo and Thorsten



DAISY and her foal ROSIE

Daisy and her foal Rosy found themselves a similar but different therapeutic role with a couple who had kept donkeys for years before one donkey died and the other was returned to The Donkey Sanctuary for reassessment.

Further family tragedies followed by serious illness of one partner decided the couple not to take on any more donkeys -though it soon became apparent they could not live without!



Daisy and Rosy have taken to their new situation with their hearts full of love in return for endless cuddles, treats and attention thus fulfilling a valuable role as healers of the soul, mind and emotions even if the physical cannot be mended immediately.

They are an adorable, empathetic pair who absolutely wallow in the extra fuss so it seems all are happy!

MILO

Then came Milo (shown here on the left still looking a little shy of the bolder Molly).

He is a very tall, affectionate, easy going gelding donkey who has gone to keep company with a bereaved mare, Molly, after her loss of little Oakley, another of our donkeys who was originally rescued from starvation in Drumcondra Forest, Co.Leutrim.

He was little more than a foal when he was fostered with Molly, apparently appealing to Molly's maternal instincts as they rubbed along very well.



Poor Molly was devastated when Oakley, like Finch, was found dead in the field without apparent cause and we couldn't be sure she would accept another partner. It took a few days of Milo doggedly following her around but now they seem to be the best of pals with only the odd spat over food to disturb the peace.

ARCHIE joined COLOMBO

Last but certainly not least our chunky little Shetland Archie joined Colombo in north Co. Donegal where he is showing his true colours as an absolute star! Right from the start he has slotted in, showing great aptitude for learning new things and in no time at all he was out hacking, carrying his young charge with ultimate care.

Emboldened by such success his carers entered him into a few local shows where once again he has excelled himself, though more importantly, seems to enjoy every minute of it!



Power to your elbow Archie - we are amazed at your progress and delighted at how happy you are with your new home and companions. And, of course, enormous thanks to his foster family for making it all possible.

Above and Left: Archie and his charge

Colombo

Poor Colombo has been having a rough summer this year suffering a metatarsal medial meniscus tear which has caused arthritis in the hip joint. Steroid injections have improved his mobility but more rest is needed before it is clear whether or not he may need surgery.

No doubt all as a result of his horrendous injury that resulted in him coming into the Sanctuary seven years ago. The verdict from the vet is mixed so we shall have to keep our fingers crossed for a good outcome.

He has an amazing home for life provided he is not in unbearable pain (which doesn't seem the case): we remain hopeful of a good outcome in the end.



DAPHNE

Daphne, a tiny fawn coloured donkey girl, known to many regular readers of our newsletter, has unfortunately had to continue her journey through the traumas of cancer. Brought to us at only a year old with an egg sized sarcoid tumour over her left eye as can be seen in the picture to the right.

This had already been surgically removed but soon grew back .



At this point we contacted the Somerville Hospital near the Curragh, Co. Kildare, who agreed to take her and remove the tumour a second time. At first all seemed well but within months it had grown back even larger and even more aggressive than before.

We were extremely fortunate to meet with the marvellous Juan Perez, chief veterinary surgeon of the now amalgamated hospital, Anglesey Lodge, who agreed to take Daphne and inject the sarcoid with chemotherapy, a process we were warned could take a while before results were obtained. As indeed it did! But thanks to Juan's patience and dedication the sarcoid did eventually burst spilling out its disgusting contents to leave clean, healthy skin underneath, that with fastidious aftercare first at the hospital and then later here at the Sanctuary, healed beautifully leaving only the tiniest scar.

All was well again until early this summer when we noticed some redness and swelling in the corner of the eyelid, so once again Daphne returned to Juan's expert care with good results. We expect (and hope) to hear very soon that she is ready to be reunited with her friends at the Sanctuary and ardently pray this is last time she has to endure such a journey.

Some would criticise us for spending 'so much money' on just one donkey when there are many others waiting for care but the truth is that thanks to Juan's generosity and the kindness of all the staff at the hospital the costs to us have been small. Juan has donated his time and skills to the cause and the hospital itself waived most of the costs of livery. We cannot be more grateful!

Daphne has become an icon, touching the hearts of all who meet her and building a fan club within the hospital staff who visit her regularly in breaks to have a cuddle and bring treats.

At just 4 years old now we firmly believe she deserves the best opportunity to heal; thanks to all these wonderful people and the financial support we receive from our followers, she now has this chance to live a happy, we hope stress-free, life for the next thirty or forty years.



Above: the sarcoid as it was when Daphne returned to the hospital under the expert care of Juan Perez

WILF, KAYDEE, PEPPER and COCOA

Wilf and Kaydee, Pepper and Cocoa have all been out on grazing duties nearby with a friend of the Sanctuary and were ready to come home when the ladies who have been looking after them realised they couldn't bear to part !



So, at the moment, it looks as if the four of them have found themselves a lovely new home, at least for the foreseeable future.

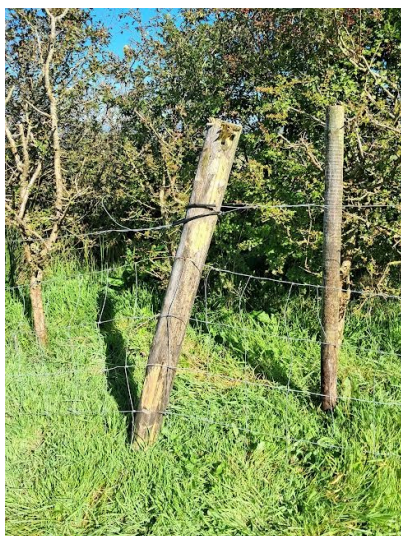
We fully understand: they are such an adorable foursome, gentle and friendly but full of character and mischief. Who wouldn't fall in love.

THE DOWNSIDE OF KEEPING DONKEYS

Even these wonderful animals have their downside however. As we know to our cost. They absolutely love chewing on wood! Being desert animals who would be travelling 20-30 kms a day looking for food, which would comprise mostly brush and dry, tough grasses their digestion is designed to cope with large amounts of fibre which is invariably missing in Ireland's wet climate diet which grows soft grass and loads of leafy shrubs.

Consequently they crave fibre—which they find in fence posts, post and rail fencing, timber constructions of any sort, trees, bushes and especially thorny shrubs like gorse and roses. They are notorious for stripping the bark off hardwood trees and will even destroy young conifer saplings despite their more resin based bark and timber, Hence if we find a fallen tree or shrub we leave it on the land, or drag it out for easy access, so the donkeys can chew away to their heart's content!

There are many high fibre commercial feeds available like the huge range of different chaffs , sugar beet pulp and good quality barley straw, though the latter is expensive and hard to source these days. Generally speaking these are considered an extra and unnecessary expense during the summer months though if there is an availability of barley straw it is a good idea to feed it all the year round as the fibre aids digestion and may even save damage elsewhere!



Left: an almost new post chewed and knocked over.

Right: typical donkey damage, a post almost chewed through at the base



DONKEY DENTISTRY IN PROGRESS

Our regular equine dentist Lisa Molloy has recently given birth to her second son so has her hands full for the time being, so we were extremely grateful when equine dentist Shane Gaffney came to our rescue to help some animals in trouble. We were particularly worried about Byron, an elderly gelding who seemed to be very 'down in himself'. He gave the impression of eating but was cleverly disguising the fact that he wasn't actually chewing and swallowing much at all. He had become thin and frail so we decided to start with the teeth and see where it took us before getting into blood tests etc.

Sure enough, once Shane had the speculum firmly in place so we could see right to the very back of Byron's mouth, it was clear that the last tooth on the lower jaw had grown very long and pointed and had not only pierced the upper gum but was locked into it to the depth of almost a centimetre. Byron also has canine teeth that are overgrown, sharp and locking upon chewing, plus razor sharp edges on most of the other teeth. Put this all together and the poor boy must have been in agony. It is doubtful he has ever had his teeth checked in his life and would have starved to death over the winter without intervention.

Shane worked on the offending back tooth for some time, finally managing to reduce it so it was not causing problems, but decided Byron had suffered enough for one session. In a few weeks time when the gum has healed at the back, he will return to work on the canines, sharp edges, and realignment. Byron is already a much happier donkey as he is able to chew and swallow far more food than before though he will improve even more when the rest of his teeth are done.

CHRIS

Chris was another problem child of about 15 years old who, again, had obviously never had his teeth checked in his life. We knew something was very wrong when he suddenly and rapidly lost weight and became permanently agitated to the point of being manic around food. Yet it didn't seem to matter how much we fed him; Chris remained hungry, becoming increasingly evil tempered and desperate. Soon he became dangerous to be around and had to be handled with great care to avoid being bitten or kicked.

Once again Shane discovered similarly locked teeth, points on some teeth like needles and razor sharp, edges all of which prevented Chris from grinding whatever food he was given. His frustration was evident: it would have been so easy to write him off as a bad tempered, difficult donkey when he was just permanently hungry.

He is far more comfortable now and eats more quietly (though as yet is still protective of any food on offer – who can blame him?), has gained some weight and has more or less returned to his original cuddly, if busy, self.

The photo shows Chris being restrained by both David and Liam so that Shane could work on his mouth. He also will be checked again in a few weeks' to ensure all is well



OUT ON THE LAND

Apart from the donkey work, a lot has been achieved around the Sanctuary lands, though much of it not immediately obvious as it entails, amongst other things, massive fencing repairs after the attention of many winter bored donkeys who just love to destroy fence posts, or anything else wooden!

Tracks have been relaid after the winter storms had washed them away, land has been levelled and reseeded, new gates hung, sheds have been repaired, gutters cleaned, sheds and yards power washed and disinfected and a host of other land and building maintenance. What hasn't happened is the painting! With so few dry days only the bare essentials sport a new coat so we really hope for a drier summer next year in order to catch up. Meanwhile the lads are cracking on with what they can!



SUMMER VISITORS

Our summer visitors have been a huge support as always, bringing the donkeys great entertainment at weekends (and vice versa) with the distribution of apples, carrots and ginger biscuits. We are certain the donkeys know when Saturday comes around as from having seen little of them all week they suddenly appear, only to disappear back into the fields again after 4pm (closing time).

We hope everyone who came, whatever their age and challenges, enjoyed their visit. We are closed now for the winter months but look forward to welcoming you back in April 2025.



Right: Victor watches on quietly waiting for his turn for cuddles.

Left: a crowded shed with us all hiding from the incessant rain!



VOLUNTEERS

We also thank our volunteers, new and longterm, without who's help we absolutely could not manage. Regular volunteer Aimee stayed with us on a summer job and is missed now the school term has reclaimed her, though she still helps out as much as possible at weekends. Another long standing volunteer broke her leg badly while on holiday early in the year and has spent the summer recuperating, a long and uncomfortable process, but true to form she informs us she will be back for winter when we really need her help. A true stalwart!

Our sincere thanks to you all. We also acknowledge the enormous help we receive from The Volunteer Centre in Sligo who are great at finding us new people (victims?)

Finally, we are happy to have our usual calendar for sale at €10 plus P & P (sorry to have to charge this but postage really has become expensive), They can be collected from the Sanctuary or posted out and payment can be by cash, cheque, through Paypal or through our 'Donate' button on the website www.donkeys.ie which takes you to Paypal. Your own account is *not* necessary. We hope you will enjoy flicking the pages throughout the year for little insights into the lives of the donkeys and ponies here.

Now it remains only for us to wish you all a good winter, a Happy Christmas when it comes and a healthy, productive New Year.

To keep in touch meanwhile follow our posts on Facebook and Instagram.

Warm Wishes to everyone and thank you for your support.



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