



2025 Autumn Newsletter

To start we would like to apologise to all for the fact that you did not receive our Spring Newsletter. The newsletter was written, but we simply ran out of time to post it. Hence the two newsletters in one sitting!

The Phrase “running to stand still” has often sprung to mind as we at the Sanctuary have attempted to do all that Sue did. A frequent comment during the year has been, “How did Sue manage to do this all on her own?” and it has taken a small army to accomplish the myriad of tasks she appeared to deal with effortlessly.

Her passing was a devastating blow to all of us at the Sanctuary, and the Sue sized ‘hole’ we have had to fill has proved difficult at many times. Her depth of knowledge and understanding of the animals in her care, and the various policies involved cannot be overestimated. Sue leaves us with an amazing legacy.

Her presence and direction are sorely missed, but we will continue her legacy at Sai Sanctuary. Two questions are repeatedly asked of us by visitors and followers: will the sanctuary close, and how are things organised now that Sue has gone?

Right: A mindfulness event run by Anja, in the field where Sue's ashes are spread.



As many of you know, Sue ran the Sanctuary pretty much single handed, apart from the support of her two fellow directors, her yard manager and a small group of invaluable volunteers. With a view to the future, she started the process of moving from a Charitable Trust to a Charitable *Company Limited by Guarantee* (CLG).

The process is lengthy and fairly involved but the intention was to safeguard the future of the Sanctuary, giving everyone, including followers and supporters, great peace of mind. Effectively nothing changes except the title; which will become The Sathya Sai Donkey Sanctuary *Company Limited by Guarantee*.

At our 2025 Annual General Meeting, the board welcomed new directors to the board, Anne Stevenson, Rebecca McKeown and Mike Rennoldson (Sue's brother), to serve beside existing directors Hilary Robinson, Michael Matthews and Joost de Jongh.



In addition, Rebecca McKeown has been elected to be the Company Manager, with a role to direct the administrative activities of the company as well as oversee the day to day running of the sanctuary & provide supervision and support to Nathan.

Left: Nathan with foals Tilly and Benji

New Volunteers and Future Projects

A very successful campaign for new volunteers to help throughout the year has allowed the staff and volunteers to complete several projects, including completion of the new floor in the hayshed, fencing of the 10-acre field and perimeter of land, ongoing upgrade of the electrics across the premises, a very successful re-homing project and improvement to the feeding facilities.

Moving forward into 2026, the Board decided on the following actions: that we would further engage with the Sligo Voluntary Organisation asking for further volunteers to help with the daily workload, engage with conservation groups to aid rewilding of land not used for equine grazing, manage the land to allow separation of the herd into manageable sizes for better animal care and protection of the land, investigate events to be held at the Sanctuary and improvement of staff facilities and the possible building of a new information centre/shop.

As you may well understand, this will require funding, so we gently ask if you could continue to support us with your kind donations.

Projects

The major project for this summer was the re-flooring of the hayshed. The surface of the shed resembled craters on the moon and every morning it took us at least thirty minutes to clean. When we did a deep clean at least once a week, it took up to two hours, and we wasted a lot of money on bedding having to fill all the holes and dips so it was level and comfortable for the donkeys.

During the deepest part of winter we were going through a pallet of bedding every two weeks.

Right: The new floor in progress



In July, Nathan and a number of volunteers dug out the old floor and replaced it with a beautiful new floor, allowing us to now also use the hayshed during event days as a public area.

Our sincerest thanks go to those that undertook the work to achieve this.

Right: The new floor in progress.



Events

We reopened to the public on Saturday 12th April, and welcomed many visitors during our regular summer opening times. In addition, we held some larger events across the summer months.

Memorial Walk

On 21st June we organised a Memorial Walk in Sue's honour, crossing to Coney Island and Michael J. Ward pub. Blessed with sunshine, and the company of old friends of the Sanctuary, we underestimated the number of people that would join us.

It was an amazing day. We raised more than €600, which will greatly help towards the care of our donkeys, and we will definitely be doing it annually in memory of our beloved Sue.

The day was shared with the RNLI and Shanty Singers which brought such an amazing atmosphere to the event. Most importantly we would like to say a big thank you to anyone who donated prizes and Maire Perret from the MJ ward pub who took amazing care of us and was so welcoming and kind.



National Heritage Week

On 24th August, the Sanctuary hosted an event as part of National Heritage Week. This was the first time that the Sanctuary took part in Heritage Week and it was with some trepidation that "A Donkey's Eye View" was organised.

Heritage Week was an opportunity to highlight the work undertaken by the Sanctuary and to raise awareness of the place of the humble donkey in Irish society and heritage. As this was our first time to hosting a Heritage Week event, or indeed any large event at the Sanctuary, a huge amount of preparation went into getting ready for the day.

The team of volunteers was mobilised in the weeks beforehand to get ready for the first big day. Helping out according to their skills and interests; with activities ranging from a detailed “spring-clean”, erecting an awning in the glade, trimming back overgrown vegetation, arranging parking, putting up signage and Heritage Week branding, arranging information displays, and publicising the event by as many means as possible. Some of the younger volunteers are very adept at the use of social media, and the event was marketed across multiple social media platforms. Coverage was also secured on local radio, Ocean FM, and on the Heritage Week website.



Left: Just some of the team .

Left to right: Ellen, NPWS ranger Dave, Nathan, Rebecca, Shanara, Anja, Anne & Aimee.

It is generally accepted that donkeys were absolutely core to the development of Irish Heritage over the past 1000 years. Donkeys hauled and carried people, turf, seaweed, building materials, and food up and down the bóithrins of Ireland and, quite literally, shaped the Ireland of today.

The event sought to raise awareness about the status of donkeys in Ireland today but also hoped to raise awareness of the spectacular nature and archaeology of the uplands of the Bricklieve Mountains (also known as the Curlews). The area is currently on the Tentative List for World Heritage status based on the “Outstanding Universal Value” of the Sligo Neolithic landscape. The Sanctuary is right in the heart of this magical, mythical, and ancient landscape and it seemed appropriate that the donkeys and volunteers should share this special place for Heritage Week.



We arranged for a catering horse-box to provide refreshments throughout the day, kindly facilitated by Caoimhe and James from Brewed Le Gra, and local pottery artist Jenna set up a mobile workshop and invited visitors to “have a go”.

Shire horses, Ned & Ted from Kilmovee Shire Horses also paid a visit, with Ted currently being the largest horse in Ireland at 19.1hh, and the quiet and affectionate demeanour of these giants led to them being (one of) the stars of the show.

We set up a working display of traditional woodworking skills, and wool spinners from Collooney set up a display demonstrating traditional spinning and weaving techniques. The local National Parks & Wildlife Service Conservation Ranger set up a display on local biodiversity matters and our volunteer Ecologist Anja arranged nature scavenger hunts which had small people squealing with delight as they explored our woodlands.

Spooky "Oíche Shamhna Day

On Monday 27th October, a Bank Holiday, we hosted our Spooky "Oíche Shamhna Day". With a nod to the fact that Hallowe'en actually derives from ancient Celtic traditions, we decided to focus our events on the old ways of celebrating Hallowe'en, including carving turnips as opposed to pumpkins.

So, we asked the public to join us to mark the turning of the season and the festival of Samhain, the time when the veil between the physical world and the spirit world is at its thinnest.

A chance to take the donkeys for a walk, as well as Spooky Stone Painting and temporary tattoos and Pin the Tail on the Donkey, Apple Bobbing, Snap Apple and Shave the White Friar among the games. And, in all honesty, we have never seen so much fun had with a bowl of flour and some Minstrels sweets as the kids played Shave the White Friar! We hope to make this an annual event as well.

The new shed floor also played its role in this day (and Heritage Day) allowing a safe area for the spinners and kids games.

Right: A Spooky carved turnip.



Hospice Visits

During the year, we engaged with the North West Hospice in Sligo and started bringing donkeys to the hospice to see the patients (and their families) and the staff of the in-patient unit. We had actually started visiting last year whilst Sue was an inpatient and had brought donkeys, ponies, and even our big horses to see her while she was there.



These visits brought Sue much comfort as it was apparent how much she missed the sanctuary and her four-legged friends.

After a short break, we resumed visits in September and these have been enjoyed by not just the patients and their families, but also the volunteers who bring the donkeys to the unit.

We get asked how we decide which donkey to bring: the answer is quite simple. It's whoever we can catch and get to load onto the horsebox! However, one little fellow has made every journey since we started – Benji. Perhaps we just start calling him the Hospice Donkey. Bless him.

When we realised that people love interacting with the donkeys, we decided to start offering donkey walks to the public. These are a chance for folks to meet and greet a donkey, learn about what makes them different from horses, some basic handling skills and a chance to take the donkey for a walk (or in some cases that may have been the donkey taking them for a walk!).

It has proven an excellent way to educate the public about the status of donkeys in Ireland today.

Right: Denver visiting Sue at the hospice.



We also held several nature walks and incorporated these into a mindfulness session.

Left: Anja talks us through some of the flora & fauna at the Sanctuary.

Re-homing

We had a very successful year of rehoming animals.

The following donkeys and ponies were rehomed since February.

Puzzle – in February to Noelle in Dunboyne
Malibu – in March to Rita in Manorhamilton
Daphne – in May to Caroline in Tubercurry
Bodhi and Poppy Rose – in June to David in Ballaghadereen

Right: Bob and Flanagan



Also, **Chickadee, Bob and Flanagan** – in June to Dromahair. **Feathers and Falcon** – in June to Claire Martin in Mayo and **Meredith and Morgan** – in June to John in Castlerea.

Followed by **Guinness** – in June to Aideen in Claremorris and **Whiskey** – in June to Esther & Mikaela in Claremorris.

Prada – in July to Ollie in Boyle

Lyric – in July to Sabrina in Carrick

Lucy and **Whilma** – in August to Greg in Lisnacul

Right: Whiskey



Tulo and **Thorsten** – in September to Kevin in Mayo

Betsy and **Lucy** – in October to Brian & Tara in Roscommon

Nala and **Pamela** – in June to Evan in Ballintubber

Robin – in October to Lady Katie in Enniskillen

Lark and **Linnet** – in October to Declan in Loughglynn

Left: Nala and Pamela

New at the Sanctuary

However, as always, we seem to have a revolving door system, and as these guys found their new homes, we also had a series of new arrivals.

Susie was the first arrival this year in February, due to her owners not coping.

In March, Lily, & Teddy were found wandering on road with bad hooves and little Tilly was born at the Sanctuary in June.

Betsy arrived in June as her family couldn't look after her due to work commitments.

Benji also arrived in June after he was rejected by his mother

And also arriving in June, Stanley, who came to us when his owners realised he was unhappy due to loneliness.

Right: Benji with Nathan and Aimee when he first arrived to the Sanctuary



Betsie & Shirley came in July from two lovely ladies Jane and Ellis from Wicklow.

Joanie & Rodney – in October, temporarily until Rodney was weaned due to difficulties feeding. Unfortunately, and despite the best efforts of our team and our vets, little Rodney passed away at the beginning of November due to underlying conditions.



Left: Joanie and Rodney

Ponies Umachan & Boxty arrived in October (temporarily) until they went to their new home due to their owner passing away.

And last, but not least, Ruby. A 10-week-old partially sighted foal with possible neurological issues, and currently undergoing treatment for the same.

Fundraising

We receive a grant each year from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), and a second small grant from Sligo Leader to maintain the historic route that runs through the Sanctuary. For everything else we are dependent on the generosity of the public, and to each and every one of you who help us, we offer our sincerest thanks. It is so appreciated and helps tremendously with the care of our beloved donkeys.

If you are considering donating, there are several ways to help raise funds for the sanctuary.

- On both PayPal and iDonate, there is an option to donate as little as €5 per month to help with the costs of the Sanctuary.
- For €30 / year you can sponsor one of our Sponsorship Scheme donkeys, and in return you will receive a small welcome pack and the knowledge that your donation will go directly to help your chosen donkey.
- Buy or sell our Christmas Cards and Calendar. Every year we produce a small range of beautiful Christmas Cards and Calendar. Buy a small quantity for personal use, or sell them among your family network. If you have a retail outlet, we would be delighted if you could stock our cards.
- From time to time we are remembered in wills, support for which we are immeasurably grateful. Since these sums are often substantial, they allow us to tackle projects that may have been put off for some time.



- For any of our supporters in the Republic of Ireland, perhaps you and your place of work, or your kids and their classmates would consider use of the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) that launched on 1 February 2024.

If you live nearby and have any plastic bottles or drinking cans that you are dumping or would like to donate you can drop it up to the sanctuary, or ask for a volunteer to collect. One large bin bag can raise as much as €10.

Professional Treatments

We have been fortunate through the years to have had access to Sabine Conboy (Veterinary Surgeon), Annett Siggins (Veterinary Surgeon and Equine Chiropractor), Shane Gaffney (Equine Dentistry), Brian Horohoe (Irish Master Farrier) and Evi Stabler (Veterinary Surgeon and Equine Acupuncturist).

Without the services that these professionals offer, it would be impossible to care for the physical needs of the animals in our care. Indeed, often the services have a crossover, especially between Annett, Evi and now Caoimhe Sweeney, a fully qualified and registered animal physiotherapist.



One of our donkeys, Kylie, came to us in September 2024 with sacral injuries, and arthritis in her lower spine and pelvis. Annett provided chiropractic care, and on her suggestion, we approached Caoimhe and she assessed Kylie and developed a physiotherapy routine to rebuild the muscles along her neck and back.

Along with this, Evi has also performed several acupuncture sessions to further assist the healing. Testament to the success of this combined approach, when Annett returned some five months after referring us to Caoimhe, the improvement had been such that she didn't recognise Kylie!

Left: Kylie during an Acupuncture treatment

Evi checked Benji out after he arrived as he was struggling to stand. She identified issues in his spine and did a limited session of acupuncture, which definitely helped.

Evi has also started to work on little Ruby and her neurological issues. Hopefully this will help the little one with her balance and co-ordination.

Right: Evi and Nathan during an acupuncture session



Caoimhe has also started working with one of our most favourite elder ponies, Daisy Mae, who has a contracted tendon in her off foreleg. Hopefully, by using ultrasound and a physio plan we may be able to partially rectify this.

Volunteers

As always, we must thank all our volunteers, past and present, as we could not survive without them. They are the lifeblood of our organisation. We have several new volunteers, but some of the long serving stalwarts are still with us. We also acknowledge the continuing enormous help we receive from The Volunteer Centre in Sligo who are great at finding us new people (victims?)

Future Newsletters

As you can imagine, Sue had accrued an immense list of people to send newsletters to over the last 20+ years. As we have only managed to retrieve this information in parts, and we fear it may not have been kept up to date in the latter part of 2024/start of 2025, we have decided to offer newsletters digitally.

This would prove to be less time consuming for our small team, work out a little cheaper, and help us be a little “greener” by not using so much paper. We plan to move all newsletters to digital form unless otherwise indicated. So, if you would like to continue receiving your newsletter in paper form, please do not hesitate to contact us via our email address sai.donkeys@gmail.com.

Best Wishes

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.



IMPORTANT MESSAGE

Following our recent incorporation into a *Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee* we will eventually be known as: THE SATHYA SAI DONKEY SANCTUARY CLG. We will have new Bank account and new IBAN numbers in the future but, for now, our Bank Account, IBAN and BIC codes remain the same. This is a lengthy process and we ask for your understanding as we make the transition.

Sathya Sai Sanctuary Trust for Nature, Castlebaldwin, Co. Sligo, Ireland F52 H046

Tel: 00353 (0)861031932

Email: sai.donkeys@gmail.com

Charity No CHY 10840

Registration No. 20028350

Equine Herd No. U324043

IBAN IE48 BOFI 9052 8032 9838 06

BIC Code BOFIE2D