



2022

Spring Newsletter

Our winter was blessed with an enormous amount of help from several volunteers, who really eased the load a few hours at a time. Apart from our usual faithfuls, Gail, Stewart, Geraldine and Sasha without whose consistency we would really struggle, we thank Bart who asked if he could join us for 'an animal fix' following the huge void left when his beloved dog passed away, quickly becoming a valued member of the team and a regular Sunday worker, the one day of the week that is often not manageable for people with family commitments. Later, David joined us one day a week for 6 weeks from The Living Network in Sligo, slotting in as a willing and capable worker; then Sarah from Kildare and Kate from just down the road near Keash fulfilled their work experiences, Sarah for a week from school and Kate for two weeks from the animal welfare course at Ballinode College, Sligo.



Left: Gabriella and her young friend Zara having a breakfast treat in the snow.

Both were excellent help and as they were already used to donkeys and horses/ponies they were responsible, perceptive and reliable and it was a joy to be greeted each morning with their cheerful enthusiasm.

Kate brought along Mike, a fellow student, who also quickly became part of the team, volunteering regularly especially at weekends when not restricted by the commitments of the college course, until he bravely took off to help in the Ukraine crisis.

Bart brought Carolina who due to family commitments, a full time job and studying, is only able to come occasionally but is a wonderful help when she can. All are donkey converts (if not previously) whilst we are left wondering how we would have managed without them during a winter when we were severely overloaded.

Sasha, a third year student at UCD studying Equine Science, had the opportunity through the University to spend 6 months in Kentucky, working and gaining experiences at a very large Stud Farm. She travelled on 22nd March to start her big adventure taking with her all our very best wishes and a promise to keep us informed.

Good luck Sasha and thank you for your many years' dedicated help here at the Sanctuary. You will be greatly missed while you are away.

In January a follower from Virginia, USA, joined us for a week purposely to help out during the worst of the winter weather, an amazing commitment given that it was a very long way to come just to feed and muck out!

In fact, Kelly did much more; she brought with her perhaps the easiest spell of weather this winter just when we all needed a break. We wished she could have stayed until April at least!



Sasha with Perdito



*Above: Kelly and Mr Mac enjoying a rub . . .
hard to tell who is enjoying it more!*

She will be back – this much we know as despite having her own beautiful horse in the States, learning to wrangle cattle, lasso and otherwise train as a fully fledged cowgirl, Kelly has an undying love and fascination for the donkeys and their welfare.

Thank you Kelly – come back soon!

Kelly also brought with her a gift of more Equispot, an excellent product originally manufactured for the control of Canadian blackflies but equally effective again our virulent Irish midge, which makes the summer months torture for so many equines, especially those who suffer the intense irritation and subsequent pain of an allergic reaction called (incredibly!) 'sweetitch'.

A 2 to 4 week spot dose completely prevents this in most animals, allowing them to spend their summer months unrugged and out grazing as Nature intended. If you have such an animal do please get in touch and we will give you more details.

How Many?

With our numbers an unprecedented 87 donkeys and 25 horses and ponies we were put in the unenviable position of having to refuse to take in more, whilst remaining aware of that one urgent and undeniable welfare call which always comes when least expected and may result in just one extra set of hooves, or a dozen.

Technically we were overcrowded though in practise, with donkeys being of such a gregarious nature, they all cuddled up and we managed. The horses and ponies were mostly kept separately as they have a strong tendency to bully the donkeys (just because they can) though some of the old and quiet pony family were allowed to mix in, usually without hiccups, as was Johnny Rainbow, Pharoah, and to some extent Ruby, all older horses with a greater tolerance of the long eared fellows.

RIP dear Johnny Rainbow

Sadly, though not altogether unexpectedly, we lost Johnny Rainbow in January over his own rainbow bridge at the grand old age of 35 years. Johnny was a bright chestnut, 15hh ex showjumper who came to Ireland through Appleby Fair in the UK in 1996 and soon made a name for himself as a courageous, forward going little horse with a jump in him as big as his heart.



In his later years he was bought by David Forcardi, Equine Chiropractor and Therapist where he worked in David's riding school teaching the more advanced pupils their jumping skills. When David's decided to close the riding school in order to concentrate solely on his therapy work Johnny was already 21 so David asked if we would give him a well earned retirement, a word Johnny had difficulty understanding after such a busy life with so many adoring fans and we would often see him galloping around the field jumping the old, derelict stone walls just for fun!

He continued to be ridden in a very casual manner by neighbouring children for a number more years until he was finally content to spend his days with other retired horses of similar ages and sizes. He was always extremely friendly and interactive so a great favourite with visitors to the Sanctuary. When he collapsed one day in the sheds from a devastating stroke and lost the use of one back leg we knew it was his time and he leaves a space that is impossible to fill. The overwhelming feeling here is not one of grief, however, but of great privilege for having known him and been entrusted with his retirement years.

. . . and Jack Sparrow

A month to the day we also lost Jack Sparrow, an immensely aged character of a donkey who had come to us many years before, already an old fellow with very few remaining teeth, following his owner suffering a disabling stroke.

Jack was a local donkey so his history was known to us. Always a personality he developed even more of a character as the years went by until he was unmissable.



Mornings will never be the same for us without Jack standing at his own special gate hidden behind the sheds (territory breached at your peril) 'mooing' loudly for his breakfast, (he really did sound more like a cow than a donkey) then later complaining that it wasn't enough or perhaps we had forgotten after all?! No further response resulted in Jack commandeering one of the hay racks all for himself and woe betide any cheeky youngster who dared to challenge the elder statesman!

He was a dark brown gelding with a heavy overhang of a laminitic crest so it is possible we were slow to notice that it was thickening further.

What we did notice was that he was becoming increasingly stiff and sore in the neck. Chiropractic therapy eased the stiffness a little for a few hours but made no lasting difference. Soon we could both see and feel a huge hard swelling on the side of his neck partly covered by the existing heavy crest.

It was sad if not surprising to learn from our vet that this was a massive and aggressive tumour as within a few days it was obvious the old boy was in pain, still putting on a good show of 'mooing' and eating but standing the rest of the day with his neck lowered, unable to lift or turn his head, miserable and not wanting to mingle with the other donkeys, perhaps because he was too sore to tolerate being bumped around. He was sedated before the final injection so it was a peaceful passing for him. As with all of them he leaves a space that is hard to fill.

Opening Hours for the Summer

The Sanctuary opened again to visitors from 1st April until October, weekends 10am to 4pm and other times with notice please.

Due to our very small team it is not always possible to greet you personally but we hope you will come and enjoy the horses, ponies, donkeys and mules as they just adore having visitors and being the centre of attention! Enjoy your summer and so far, our continued Peace.

REHOMING

Our rehoming remains slow although we were happy to try and fulfil a debt to Hungry Horse Outside, who had taken in four donkey stallions on our behalf last summer, by passing on a wonderful home for two young boys (now gelded) not too far from them. We had another home lined up for the other two but frustratingly it fell through at the last minute.

Two of the donkey mares who came in last October have the offer of a lovely home in the spring when the weather improves. They will be joining 5 other donkeys, 3 young geldings and an older mare already from here, and one other mare, so they will have plenty of company but a bit more room to move in their newly erected shelter. They are a friendly pair we expect to settle well in a family situation where they will be much loved. We will keep you posted! Later in the year once fencing is restored and a new shelter built, we hope to home another pair of donkeys locally.

Great news for Willow



Willow of the excessively overgrown hooves (see the last autumn newsletter), a sweetheart of a 24 year old donkey mare, unexpectedly found herself a forever home as companion to another 24 year old donkey mare who had recently been bereaved; she had lost her lifetime bonded friend and was utterly devastated.

Her owners feared her pining would soon make her ill and made contact with some urgency hoping for a solution. We would not normally expect to rehome an older donkey but Willow fit the bill so as all parties were in agreement we decided to try her.

Willow's overgrown hooves



If the two mares didn't take to each other we would bring her back immediately and think again but to everyone's joy they were delighted with the arrangement making friends immediately.

Subsequent checks proved it was not a 'flash in the pan' – they really did like each other. Thank you to Mary and Francis for giving dear Willow such a lovely chance to enjoy a special and worthwhile friendship in a loving home.

New Arrivals

Thunder and Archie (also alias Alfie)

Two Shetland geldings, came to us when their main carer died suddenly leaving no one to look after them. They are both healthy, sturdy little men who would not normally require space in a Sanctuary but the circumstances were untenable: sooner rather than later they would have become a welfare case through enforced neglect. Thunder is the larger of the two, a showy piebald of 15 years with a hectic, dominant personality, convinced he is still a stallion and Lord of all he surveys. Archie, chestnut in colour, is more typically Shetland in stature and although only 6 years old, a much quieter more biddable character who spends as much time with the mini ponies as he ever does with bossy-boots Thunder. We think he enjoys the reprieve from being ordered about!

DONKEYS in WAITING

As we have quite a list of donkeys and ponies waiting to come into the Sanctuary, when and if possible, we have tried to rehome a few directly from home to home. Some have gone through our foster scheme on the way, others have taken over ownership from the previous owner. This is largely a matter of choice: bearing in mind that donkeys often live into their 40's most prospective new owners enjoy the support of the foster scheme, knowing they can continue to call on us for help of all kinds if necessary throughout the donkeys' long lives and having the security that we will take them back if, at any time, they are unable to continue looking after them. As many of these donkeys will outlive their current owners this can be a great comfort.

For those who prefer ownership we stress the importance of changing ownership names on the animal's passport, or if not already chipped and passported, getting this done. It is not just a question of bureaucracy; creating a national database of equines is essential protection in the event of any of the fatal equine diseases coming into this country and running riot.

We have seen first hand the devastation caused in humans with Covid and its variants. Imagine the difficulties involved in controlling the spread of a fatal or grossly debilitating equine disease without a contactable database of the location of these animals in the country, in order to notify their owners of the necessary precautions, vaccines, etc for their protection. A couple of these diseases have already made their presence felt in the east of the country but thankfully were contained immediately and controlled, without resort to a major culling of valuable and much loved animals. If you truly care for your equine companion, chip, passport and register!

Our direct homing this winter included two separate Shetland geldings, one as a companion to a big skewbald gelding who had to be moved to new grazing and lost the companionship of other horses, the other to fulfil the void when an older horse mare lost her lifelong companion.

Shetlands always seem to think they are the biggest and best horses on the block so we rarely encounter problems when buddying them up with much larger horses.

In both these cases the two pairs took to each other immediately solving a very real problem of potential equine loneliness and the behavioural hiccups that subsequently have to be dealt with by their carers. We really should not underestimate the ability of animals to feel emotion in exactly the way we do ourselves, loneliness and bereavement being high on this list.



Right: New owner Ciara with a very overweight Buddy (alias Alfie) often a problem with minis who can live happily on a 'see ' food diet. Fortunately Ciara's Mum Antjie, is an experienced horsewoman who soon got his weight back where it should be before the summer grass glut!



Biscuit (left) joined a lovely family very locally where he settled immediately with his new friend Bella, who having spent a few very lonesome days after losing her lifelong friend welcomed him with lots of attention and a marked improvement in her demeanour.



Once again she was happy and little Biscuit had a renewed purpose to fulfil. Such a joy when it all works out!

WELFARE CALLS

Most of our winter welfare calls have been about animals with overgrown, split and generally neglected hooves causing the animals great discomfort and difficulty in walking. This reluctance to move about naturally leads to a reluctance to graze and search for other food sources, which in turn invariably leads to depression and apathy when the poor creature loses the will to continue, even to seek shelter, especially with animals kept alone.

We thank all the caring people who reported such cases, thereby giving us the opportunity to try and get help before it was too late, and we especially thank everybody involved in locating these animals and remedying the situation, in particular Oliver Hamilton, a Department of Agriculture vet, who tramped for three hours in the Ox Mountains on a bitter cold day to locate two donkeys mares in trouble and later help their owner locate a farrier. These two mares were later rehomed locally as they were an unappreciated inheritance.



Two examples of hooves needing urgent, skilled remedial attention.

POSTAGE INCREASE

This newsletter is shorter than usual for two reasons, mainly that it has been a 'heads down' winter of continual demands due to the huge quantity of unwanted donkeys around the country which has kept us stretched looking after the ones we have and sadly unable to look too far afield.

The other is that as the cost of postage has increased again, along with everything else, we need to keep costs as low as possible by keeping the weight below the minimum 100gms. Most charities have long since moved to digital and online newsletters but we know from our followers that most people, especially the older generation, still prefer a paper version 'in the hand', so for as long as we are able we will continue to provide the printed booklet and hope you all continue to enjoy it. It will also appear on our website in due course, as usual, thanks to our wonderful techo whizz volunteer Kate.

WELFARE GRANT (from our Facebook page on 22 December 2021)

We would like to thank the Minister of Agriculture, Charlie McConalogue, for the generous welfare grant of €20,000 awarded to help with the overall costs of our work of rescuing, rehabilitating and rehoming abused and neglected donkeys, ponies and some horses during 2022.

This is a challenging time for all charities, including those of us engaged in trying to deal with a national crisis of unwanted, surplus, low value donkeys who have no commercial use or value in a world centred on profit.

At present we are overwhelmed, so are immensely grateful for this invaluable support. We shall, as always, continue to do our best.

Warm wishes to everyone for a New Year of hope and renewal.

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