



2023 Spring Newsletter

Hello everybody and welcome to Spring 2023! On the whole it has been a good winter. Although starting very wet the new year brought drier conditions with only a few desperate days of cold, sleet, snow and worst of all for us, gales and storms. The hardy ponies rarely took shelter in the sheds, preferring to find a more natural refuge in a clump of bushes in the lee of the wind whilst the stronger of the horses wintered out until early January, on sheltered land at Ballinafad, before returning here to the option of a warm haybarn and extra bucket feeding plus hay and haylage.



Charlie and Daisy Mae

The donkeys, crammed though they were, chose to cuddle up tight together and create a cosy place in the main housing sheds where the special cases had extra bucket feeding though most, happily, were content to tuck into their daily ration of hay and haylage before mooching outside on the better days to trim bushes and search for a pick of grass.

Old Charlie pony, now in his 36th year and his best friend Daisy Mae, also an elderly pony in her mid 20's who is compromised with a contracted tendon on one front leg (see Autumn 2022 newsletter), usually joined the donkeys in the mornings for extra feeding, some human attention and a snooze out of the elements before returning voluntarily to the fields.

THE DONKEY CRISIS

Regrettably, the donkey crisis continues. Numbers of take-ins peaked suddenly in 2015 and have remained high ever since, though 2022 shows a slight decline. Sadly these numbers only reflect the many refusals we are forced to make (between 2 and 8 every week!) due to being so overstretched and overcrowded. As it is, we now have over 90 in a facility originally built to hold a comfortable 60.

Some are genuine cases caused by such as terminal illness and loss, or severe accidental injury of the carer, when we do our utmost to help in some way, but most are simply that the donkeys are no longer wanted.

Reasons range from 'I am 65 and too old to look after a donkey now' to 'I bought a male donkey for someone but they are not allowed to bring it home. Will you take it?' In the latter case, further enquiry confirmed that the 'someone' is a child and the donkey is a full stallion.

It seems the parents are more responsible by far than the thoughtless and irresponsible (even if well meaning) person who bought the donkey without first asking the parents' permission, or establishing if there were suitable facilities for a donkey. To make matters worse, the donkey was a young and boisterous stallion, an unsuitable choice for a child at the best of times!

It is heartbreaking to have to turn away so many, not knowing what will happen to them, as it is to be unable to help so many distressed people: animal welfare charities are an easy option and it comes a great shock to naïve owners to discover that all rescues/sanctuaries have a limited capacity due to suitable facilities, available manpower and of course, finances. So although we apologise from the heart to all the people and donkeys we have let down this winter, please understand that to take more when we are already so overcrowded would defeat the object of our mission and place in jeopardy the health of those animals already in care.

PLEASE DON'T BREED DONKEYS

Many of these 'surplus' donkeys are coming in from older people and farmers returning to keeping cattle instead of making up their stocking rate with donkeys but there is a good proportion resulting from inappropriate and irresponsible breeding.

We all know baby donkeys are one of the cutest living creatures on the planet but please, please, if you are considering breeding a donkey foal ask yourself if you are prepared to look after it for the next 40 to 50 years (a possible donkey lifespan) and if not who, where and how will it be cared for when you can no longer do so!

Do you have proper dry facilities including a permanent and accessible shed, a farrier, an equine dentist and a vet who will attend on a regular basis and a companion for the animal at all times (preferably another donkey)?



Do NOT breed just because the children would like a foal (both foals and children grow up and children often lose interest once the novelty has worn off) or under the misconception that donkeys are worth a lot of money or 'rare'.

They are not!

If they were, we would not be under unremitting pressure to take more and more into care!

NUMBERS IN AND OUT

Naturally the number we can bring in relates directly to the numbers we can rehome.

Disappointingly, our supposed success with rehoming last summer and autumn resulted in 5 of them, Feathers, Falcon, Chickadee, Song and Pip, being returned within a couple of months, along with a 6th called Byron from a long term foster home where his donkey companion had died. The fosterers were facing serious health problems and, justifiably, felt that they were unable to take on another new animal just then and would not leave the surviving donkey on his own.

Later in March we were notified to expect the return of 2 mini ponies for similar reasons. In these circumstances we did not hesitate to honour our commitment to take back the fostered donkey, and ponies, on either a temporary or permanent basis.

DAPHNE RETURNS

Daphne returned to us again just before Christmas (the best present ever) from the Anglesey Equine Hospital in Kildare where Veterinary surgeon Juan Perez had been treating her for several months.



Regular followers may remember that Daphne came to us originally with a chicken-egg sized sarcoid growth on her left eyelid that was threatening to expand into the eye itself. We took her to Somerton Equine Hospital (since merged with Anglesey) where it was removed but, as is often the case with equine sarcoids, it regrew aggressively within the year.

We were all blessed when Juan at Anglesey agreed to inject the growth with a chemotherapy drug over a period of a few weeks.

This is a highly skilled procedure with a good success rate (not as painful as it sounds as the growth itself has no pain registering nerves) but unfortunately there were complications and Daphne ended up staying almost 6 months! The remaining small growth appears to be dead tissue so we are keeping our fingers crossed it continues like this.

The staff at Anglesey were amazing in every way even to modifying what would have been a huge bill for the Sanctuary to a very fair and reasonable charge.

We are humbled that such a professional hospital which deals primarily with racehorses and highly bred sport horses should cherish one little donkey to the same value. Such kindness was unexpected and deeply appreciated. Daphne is still barely three years old and with the sweetest nature is loved by everybody. It seems in her time at Anglesey she won many hearts! At present all looks good with her but only time will tell if the treatment has been 100% successful.

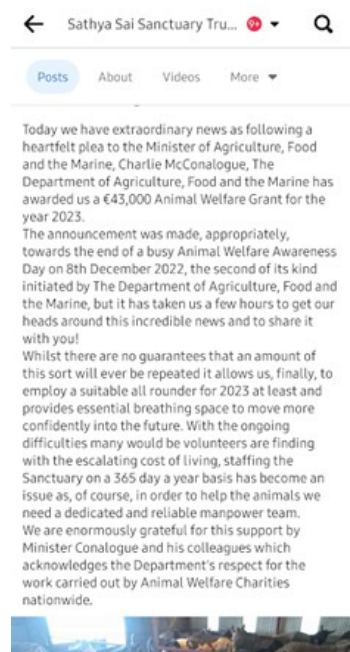
HELPERS

Thanks to great promotion and follow up through the Sligo Volunteer Centre we have been blessed with a steady supply of much valued volunteers in the latter half of the winter.

We say a huge thank you to you all, whether you can come only one day a week or several. Shauna, Tricia, Maggie, Brigit, Sasha and Kate have been buoying up the girl power while Stewart, Liam and Bertie tackle the men's (often heavier) work. Liam later joined the payroll on a small part-time wage, possible only because of a generous welfare grant of €43,000 from the Department of Agriculture for 2023, but continues to come in with partner Shauna as a voluntary helper on many other days as well.

We express our gratitude to the Department for this increased grant as we would not have been in a position to commit to employment without it.

Those who follow our Facebook page will have seen this gratitude expressed as shown, just before Christmas.



Bertie comes three mornings a week all the way from Castlebar, never missing an agreed day even in bad weather and shames us all by invariably being the first to arrive! We pay him on an expenses only basis to cover the costs of his regular journey, again courtesy of the Animal Welfare Grant.

Having two extra men around the place to help out is an absolute joy as much of the manual work is heavy and quite laborious. Both are wonderful workers and share a genuine interest and concern for the animals.

The 'girl power' has its own strengths: overall we consider ourselves blessed to have such a happy and dedicated team.

Trish and Maggie come whenever possible on a Sunday morning and Sasha and Kate are great at filling in emergency times when we find ourselves desperately needing extra hands. Brigit, a keen and skilled gardener unexpectedly offered to tackle part of what was once a wild flower garden that has since been overrun by apple mint and ground elder, both excessively invasive plants that need a heavy and persistent hand if they are to be controlled.

Bertie, who has worked with gardens in the past, has offered to help. It is a relatively small patch but being right outside the living room window of the 'volunteer/family/friends' house' is unsightly for most of the year even though it smells wonderful. The mint grows tall so also takes the light from the window and blocks the view to the rest of the re-wilded garden, itself a haven for birds and insects.



Left: Bertie and Shauna sharing their coffee break with some of the golden oldies'

Below left: Geraldine with Gracie.

Below right: Liam with Victor.



DONKEY NEWCOMERS

Late in the Autumn we took in Babs, Daisy and Daisy's filly foal, Rosy, and a very elderly Exmoor type pony mare called Jemima from a lady who had suffered a stroke resulting in her necessary return to UK to be with her family.

Babs is an elderly girl, nearer to 40 than 30 years, fortunately in good health, and the other two are young. Daisy is quite timid but Rosy is a forward and affectionate character who loves her own way and doesn't know the meaning of manners: she always has to be first through a gap and is no respecter of toes!

Jemima is independent and undemanding, perfectly happy to live out with the other hardy ponies and despite her age requiring neither supplementary feeding nor a winter rug. Although she could ill afford it the owner kindly contributed €200 towards the cost of getting the donkeys microchipped and passported.



Babs and Jemima



As it happened Babs scanned as already having an English chip but as yet, despite considerable research, we have been unable to establish the authority who issued the microchip and are therefore unable to gain knowledge of her history. Ultimately it may mean poor Babs will have to be re-chipped and registered with an Irish body – as if having a giant needle stuck in your neck once isn't enough!

Left: Rosy and Daisy

Much later in the winter we took on a 40 year old stallion called Freddy from HungryHorseOutside who were currently going through a major trauma with a key member of their team on life support after contracting leptospirosis from a dog brought in through the dog pound, which they manage on behalf of Longford County Council.

Despite suspicious assurances that Freddy was 'very quiet and not interested in mares' the Springlike weather of late February proved otherwise so despite his age and following long discussion with our vet, we decided we would have to 'bite the bullet' and have him castrated.

Many vets would not consider castrating a donkey of his age but as he is strong, in good health, and easily handled we decided the alternative of euthanasia was not an option without giving him a chance.





With some trepidation the date was booked for 14 March . . . and happily all went very well with Freddy showing no signs of swelling afterwards or distress of any sort.

He has to remain away from the mares for a few weeks to be sure he is definitely no longer fertile, so Victor is keeping him company in a separate field and shed, all cosy with an over night heat lamp and warm rugs until the current spell of cold weather improves.

Left: Freddy and Victor

REHOMINGS



Early in March we were delighted to re-foster Song and her coming 3 year old son to a farming family near Tubbercurry, Co. Sligo.

The two main carers are young daughters. Although the girls have been farm trained and very responsible around large animals, it was important they start their donkey career with two quiet, affectionate and well mannered donkeys.

Song and Pip fitted the bill perfectly. Both are easily handled, adore being groomed and fussed over and are reasonably tolerant of hoof care.

Song arrived here in the February of 2020, one of 11 severely neglected mares, foals and one stallion, all suffering malnutrition, rain scald and mud fever.

All were extremely weak and exhausted from struggling through a wet winter without shelter or feeding on an inadequate area of 4 acres. (One donkey is designated one livestock unit and requires one acre of land each). Their only fresh water was virtually inaccessible due to tummy deep mud surrounding the trough.

Two of the mares, Song and Feathers, turned out to be pregnant and Pip was born later that year at the end of July to a doting Mum and much relieved Sanctuary staff who were delighted that all had gone well. Neither foal will grow into big donkeys due to the malnutrition suffered by the mares during pregnancy but happily, are strong and healthy. We truly hope the donkeys enjoy their new family and the girls enjoy their donkeys!

AND AN UNUSUAL GIFT FOR OUR YOUNGER VISITORS (OF ALL AGES)

The photo shows two donkeys out of two boxes of small plastic cartoon donkey models we were donated to give away to visiting children.

They are quite tiny so not suitable for very young children and babies but other visiting children may enjoy this little memento of their time with the donkeys.

Numbers are limited of course though we have been promised that there may be more to come.....big thanks to the kind lady who thought of us when she no longer had a use for them instead of just throwing them away.



GRACIE

Early in March one of our very elderly donkeys had a stroke. We were gravely concerned as she was unsteady on her legs and hanging her head to the left. However, in Gracies indomitable style, she continued to eat, shout at us if weren't quick enough with her food and generally hold her own. A couple of days later, she returned to her annoying habit of knocking over the wheelbarrows (always full to overflowing with manure and ready to be offloaded into the tractor to be taken to the manure storage). As Gracie is in her 40's, we know, realistically, to expect another stroke in the not too distant future but while she is content and still able to boss her son Danny around (now also elderly) she is happy and we're happy to enjoy her colourful, if sometimes frustrating, character.

HORSES AND PONIES



As most of our news centres around the donkeys, we dedicate the next bit to a handful of our horses and ponies, both here and in foster homes.

Left: Pharoah, still looking good at 32 years old

Below left: Bebe, Mini Mo, Jetsie and Cobbie, all elderly shetlands, each with their own problem, who will remain with us for life

Below right: A delightful little herd who are very happily fostered in Co. Leitrim



DONKEY BRIDGE



Most animal lovers will be familiar with the 'Rainbow Bridge' but until this photo was sent to us by a friend we were unaware of The Donkey Bridge!!

It is the work of surrealist artist Ingo Lindmeier.

Wouldn't you just love to see it actually in solid stone?

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