



2024 Spring Newsletter

Thank goodness Spring is on the horizon. It has not been an easy winter with incessant rain for the first half and storms, high winds, snow and yet more rain in the second half. We have kept the donkeys, ponies, and our few bigger horses in the best conditions we could, cleaning and bedding twice if not three times a day, feeding hay both in the sheds and two bales outside in the fields, both protected by a JFC haybell cover and have still often felt sorry for them in the endlessly dismal weather.

The cost of bedding, when we have been able to get it, has almost doubled in price, as with the various supplementary feeds, which has made it more difficult for all animal charities to survive and it is entirely due to the good will and donations of our lovely supporters, supplemented by a Welfare Grant from the Department of Agriculture, that we have managed to maintain standards.

It has been an unprecedented year in terms of volume needing rescue/sanctuary so, sadly, we have been forced to refuse to take in more donkeys and ponies on far too many occasions.

It is an uncomfortable position to be in when we just want to help, but we can only do so much with the resources, facilities and manpower we have.



By allowing our hearts to overrule our heads we could easily arrive at a situation where those already in care could end up suffering too. Without doubt ALL animal charities are in the same situation: we work together as much as possible to juggle more animals into care or help in other ways yet demand outstrips supply.

We firmly believe in the need for sanctuary for all animals unable to survive and find their place in a world geared to profit and performance so give preference to those who cannot, through no fault of their own, like the blind, the permanently lame, the old which have probably served families well over many years but are now discarded because of their advancing years. Likewise, we try to help the many older owners who have found themselves in poor health and no longer able to look after their beloved animals, but even here we have had to encourage many to search elsewhere first.

It is heartbreaking. And humbling when it is only through the goodness of people like yourself that we are able to help even these! Thank you all from the depths of our being for making even this small contribution possible. Your support is invaluable!

HOMING

Rehoming into Foster Homes has continued to be slow with a few enquiries for later in the year Including a definite for a Shetland pony to companion Colombo, a black cob who found himself a superb forever home a few years ago, and a few for which we couldn't supply the right animal(s) for the situation. These we passed on to other charities, HungryHorseOutside in particular as they give us so much help in return, happily with good results every time, so it is not all gloom and doom! One such was a blind donkey needing a blind companion and by some miracle HHO had recently taken in such a one. The two donkeys bonded quickly and are now the best of companions.



Our concern is primarily for the donkey and the small, unusable ponies who are able to live out all year with regular feeding, checking, farrier work, dosing etc.

Many of these ponies are happier in an outside environment provided they have accessible shelter at all times, but the donkeys, with no weather proofing in their coats and consistent hoof problems on our wet, acid land, definitely need the choice to be inside in bad weather.

We have one old gelding called Amos, who fervently believed he was a Shetland pony and much preferred to live out with them in all weathers (with a good shelter and daily checking) but even he decided in the New Year that he had had enough bad weather and asked to come inside to the 'oldies' section!

GOODBYE TO THREE OF OUR 'GOLDEN OLDIES'

It is never a good day at the Sanctuary when the realisation comes that we have to say 'goodbye' to our older residents, many of whom have been with us for years. This winter we lost our little Jetsie, a much loved jet black Dartmoor pony mare whom we brought back from Drumshanbo Mart in April 2007, where she had been dumped by a ruthless dealer in some unused sheds at the back of the Mart and was only found later by some children playing in an unsafe area.

She was pitifully thin, had a badly damaged front leg where the knee seemed to be either dislocated or broken and she was totally bewildered and scared. However, after her trauma of being shipped on a transport lorry first from Dartmoor in England, together with a large number of Dartmoor foals, then later

to the Mart and no doubt abused in many cases along the way due to her inability to move easily, she did begin to thrive without appearing to be in any great pain.

She was excessively scared of everyone and everything but Jetsie's curiosity eventually won the day.

It took months but once the day came that she allowed gentle stroking she improved in leaps and bounds, growing into a cuddly tactile soul who loved attention. Her teeth were so neglected we cannot be sure how old she was except that however ancient she still preferred to live with the other old ponies outside in a small herd as she never completely lost her fear of being confined.



Jetsie passed away in the early hours of a morning up on the hillside, in a sheltered place, out of the wind and weather.

Liam spent the whole day, and most of one night, sitting with her as we were unable (unusually) to raise a vet and, because of the terrain, unable to bring her into the sheds. We don't know how Liam did it as it was so cold.

Fortunately, Jetsie herself sported the usually thick, weatherproof winter coat of all indigenous moorland ponies but how Liam didn't catch pneumonia remains a mystery! We are still trying to find a medal big enough to warrant Liam's bravery and patience!

On Christmas Eve we lost GRACIE, a white donkey mare in her 40's well known to visitors at the Sanctuary for her cheek, and love of ginger biscuits. Danny, her son, is still with us.

To our utter surprise he was not overly upset at losing his dominant little dam in spite of being with her for his entire life. Danny is into his late 20's or even 30's and had been aware for some weeks that Gracie was failing.



Happily Gracie was in the shed with her companions when she finally decided she wasn't going to get up that morning and passed away soon afterwards.

Gracie was one of the biggest donkey characters known to us ever, with a penchant for knocking over full wheel barrows in the pretence of scratching herself and standing in the way, especially in front of cars and tractors trying to come and go through the yard and all the better if you were in a hurry so she could create a real fuss!



As for the barrows, empty ones were occasionally knocked over but held little interest compared with those already full with heavy manure and bedding, especially if they were up the field with a good distance to be pushed before they could be emptied into the tractor for removal to storage.

Even barrows containing bags of feed or garden rubbish were subject to Gracie's evil eye!

It helped to park the barrows tightly in a corner or at least against a wall but even so she generally managed to catch the handles and tip them full length before dashing away to play 'It wasn't me!'

Needless to say she taught others to follow in her footsteps! Our farrier solved this problem by making a scratching post as a surprise. They love it! Thank you Brian – you have saved many an expletive from exploding!



The day following St Stephen's Day (Boxing Day) ASHTAR a dark brown gelding, decided to follow Gracie over the Rainbow Bridge, happily just as quickly and peacefully. Ashtar had been with us since 1994 when he was brought back from Ballinasloe Horse Fair one very wet and miserable day early in October together with another 4 month old foal, Ayika.

Their mothers had been sold early in the week and the two little mites had been left standing alone outside in torrential rain and bitter cold for at least two days. Both had contracted pneumonia; with great regret Ayika died within the week but Ashtar, who was probably a month older, survived somehow despite the rather primitive conditions available at the Sanctuary at the time.

He spent several years in a foster home but was never a strong boy and was returned to us for his twilight years where he lived out his days quietly with the other oldies, He was always a quiet, unassuming character, often overlooked by visitors as he was neither forward nor vocal in his ways. To us he was always a special boy due to his horrible start in life and his quiet fighting spirit.

As if this wasn't enough grief for one winter we sadly had to say goodbye to another firm 'golden oldies' favourite, TEDDY.

He came from the same home as Danny and Gracie in 2018, when his elderly owner became terminally sick with cancer. Teddy had already lost his best friend and was at the time a very unhappy bad tempered boy, though he soon settled and became a universal favourite.

He was cuddly, gentle and although inclined to kick on arrival, later became well mannered and easily handled, visibly grateful for all attention and care. He was around 40 years old, with poor mobility so when he started falling regularly and was unable to get up without considerable assistance we realised it was only kind to let him go. Yet another heartbreaking decision!



FOSTER HOME DONKEY NEEDING OPERATION

Darius, a young dark brown gelding who was fostered with two of his friends into a wonderful home which already had four of our donkeys and one of their own, developed a nasty sarcoid growth in a very sensitive place over the past months so their carers phoned us to ask advice on the best way to remedy the situation.

Thanks to the skills of veterinary surgeon Paul Barnes, we were able to collect Darius on the evening of 12 th March so we could fast him here ready for an anaesthetic the following day at Kilcoyne and Barnes, Tubbercurry. Paul operated to remove the sarcoid.

It was huge- easily the size of a woman's fist and surprising heavy. Two smaller secondaries were removed at the same time leaving a clean wound which has healed without problems and, we hope, will not return.



Darius before the operation

We took Darius back to Paul on 26th March to have his stitches removed and he was given the 'all clear' so was returned home to a rapturous welcome by both humans and the other donkeys, seemingly none the worse for his ordeal.



BELLA

On 16th March BELLA joined our donkey family from Carrigallen in Co.Cavan. It is thought she was originally found in forestry in poor condition and was misguidedly given as an unwanted 21st birthday present.

Subsequently she was passed to another couple where she birthed a dead foal after just one week.

The couple were most distressed as the little mare was so traumatised she wouldn't let them near her, so after a couple of months of frustrated and very well intentioned attempts to gain her confidence they asked if we would take her and gentle her, after which they would decide whether to take her back with a friend or foster two different, more confident donkeys.

On arrival we could understand that part of the problem was a lack of knowledge about how to approach a timid donkey: without meaning any harm one of them in particular was confrontational and interfering so the little girl was getting confused messages and didn't know how to react. One of the most common mistakes in these circumstances is to hold the hands above the animal's eye level and wave the arms around in attempt to move the donkey forward.

Once left to her own devices Bella soon decided to join up with a group of 10 other quiet donkeys in their own shed and with the freedom to decide whether to wander at will round the yard. At the end of the day she was approaching us with curiosity, 'talking' as donkeys do with little squeaky noises.

There is still long way to go to gain her complete confidence but we are hopeful it may not take too long when she sees the other donkeys volunteering for titbits and cuddles. She is already far less afraid than she was.

ABCESSES

It has been an awful winter for hoof abscesses, no doubt because of the weather damaged land which is worse than we have ever seen it. The result of the number of animals in our care and the unprecedented amounts of rain.

Donkeys are great for cuddling up tight in a confined space but even so we struggle to house 95 of them permanently, plus the three bigger horses and a handful of ponies. So, whilst they can come and go as they wish, we have not been able to keep them off the land entirely.

Under about 10-15cms of boggy top soil most of our land is 'lack' which consists of sharp flinty compacted gravel. This has never surfaced before, even in a normally wet winter but sadly it has done great damage this year by piercing hooves already softened by constant wet land.

Many have suffered this painful condition until the abscesses could be released by our farrier, poulticed and drained. If ever we needed confirmation that donkeys are only really suited to hard dry land, this winter has proved it!

Here are two of the stones we removed recently. Imagine the agony of having these stuck in the sole of your foot!

Even today there are many who believe that hooves are solid. They are not! They are like a finger or toenail but wrapped right round instead of just at the front, with bone, nerves, tissue and blood inside.



WILF AND KAYDEE



Late in March (it seems everything happened in March this year!) two teenage gelding donkeys were returned to us after spending almost 6 years in a lovely foster home near Ballinamore, Co. Leitrim.

They had previously spent a short time in a different foster home locally but we were dissatisfied with their care and brought them home again, so they deserved a caring home this time round.

Their current foster carers relinquished them reluctantly but found that with advancing years and the undeniable climate change, they needed to change the use of their land, which unfortunately did not include keeping livestock.

Despite being away for so long Wilf (left) and Kaydee seemed to recognise where they were and settled down overnight, virtually demanding to be allowed to join the main herd the next day, where they integrated as if they had never been away. Oh! That it was always that easy!

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.

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