



## 2021 Spring Newsletter

It has been an eventful six months for most animal rescue charities and we have been no exception.

Early in the winter we received many calls from, or on behalf of, elderly people with elderly donkeys for whom they could no longer care, usually due to health issues. They wanted to see the old donkeys safe in their dotage and to be able to keep in touch and visit when the Covid restrictions allowed.

### DENNY

One such donkey is a big fawn coloured teddy bear gelding called Denny, a gentle old fellow who was a family pet and who suffers a skin condition believed to be sweetitch which we hope to control with the use of EquiSpot, a product developed in Canada for use against blackflies and sadly not available in this country.



Importation is fraught with difficulties but happily, thanks to an American donkey lover who helped us through the process, we currently have a supply.

We will start treating Denny early in April before the midges appear and hope to keep him sweetitch free throughout the summer.

Denny settled in immediately, as if he had always lived here and obviously enjoys the company of other donkeys since being on his own for the past ten years. He is regularly checked on by the family and friends of his previous owner who will visit again as soon as possible.

### HUMPHREY

When first contacted about Humphrey (alias Neddy Hal) we understood him to be a very elderly stallion and, as we absolutely cannot bring stallions into the Sanctuary with all our mares and very old donkeys/ponies, The Donkey Sanctuary again came to our rescue by agreeing to geld (castrate) him provided he was in sufficiently good health to withstand the operation.



Welfare Officer Joe Prendergast arranged to have him collected from his home and taken straight to the DS hospital at Hannigan's Farm in Mallow, Co. Cork.

There were concerns about Humphrey's health as he was very overweight and needed some remedial treatment on his hooves and teeth. A dental inspection revealed that he is indeed very elderly – his top teeth are almost level with his gums, indicating a possible age of over 30.



Not a good age to be gelded but with no other options available except euthanasia, Chief DS veterinary surgeon, Lawrence O'Sullivan, performed the operation with all the critical aftercare that would be afforded to a human in ICU and Humphrey came through the ordeal with flying colours.

*Left: Denny and Humphrey together*

As soon as he was fit to travel the DS kindly transported him up to us. He is a tiny donkey who thinks he is a Shire stallion, full of character and attitude and has quickly made himself union boss of the golden oldies.

He needs to be fed throughout the winter as his teeth are too short to allow him to graze and even hay and haylage give a few problems, so we have kept the balance between keeping his weight on and overfeeding so he is currently in great form.

He is quick with the heels when eating so we all know not to interfere when Humphrey is having breakfast! The daughter of his previous owner is longing to visit him when the restrictions are lifted and often telephones for news of his progress.

## PHOEBE

We were asked by another organisation to take Phoebe, a pure white donkey mare, who was on death row at Cork Pound together with two young stallion donkeys, where they were due to be shot the next morning.

All stops were pulled out by a young couple, Danni and Aaron, who made the arduous journey overnight from Malin Head in the far north of Ireland down to Cork in order to collect Phoebe and her friends early in the day before the order was carried out in the Pound.



After only a few hours sleep they set off again to deliver Phoebe here to us, then travel to Donegal to drop off the two young stallions with Danny Curran of The Donegal Donkey Sanctuary before heading home to Malin Head.

This was an enormously generous and exhausting act of kindness: we really cannot thank them enough.

Phoebe was naturally tired and bewildered after her journey but as with most animals she just decided to get on with life, found an unoccupied patch in the field and settled down to eat. She remained aloof and mistrustful for several weeks but gradually integrated with both the other animals and us humans, growing into a delightful gentle little mare loved by all even though she remains a little introverted.



In March she found a home keeping company with another little mare donkey of the same age who had just lost her mother, with whom she had shared her entire life so far.

Unsurprisingly she was totally lost, miserable and depressed, spending her days standing over the spot where her dam died. It is early days yet to know how this match works out.

For certain, the bereaved donkey is desperate for company and probably needs an 'auntie' figure so it is to be hoped that Phoebe is happy to play this role. We will keep an eye on proceedings and make changes if necessary as our aim is to provide a happy outcome for both donkeys

## WILLOW

Early in the New Year Willow was brought into the Longford Pound and rescued by Hungry Horse Outside who's first concern was to get help for her enormously overgrown hooves, the like of which we have not seen in at least a decade. Poor Willow could only walk with difficulty and was obviously in a great deal of pain through her whole body from the unnatural position she was required to hold due to the damage and distortion of her hooves.

Remedial farrier Brian Horohoe attended immediately applying his expertise to trim the hooves into a more natural shape but it was soon apparent that Willow needed more help.

So he returned a couple of days later to fit a remedial boot on one front hoof to help take the pressure off the hoof and some of the stretch out of the tendons, which had shortened due to her unnatural posture and needed to readjust to the new balance.





*Willows remedial boot and one of her overgrown hooves.*

Sadly Willow remained immobile and depressed until the decision was made to bring her here into the 'golden oldies' section where she would have company of her own age (at least 25) and wouldn't be threatened by younger, more ebullient donkeys.

Once again we saw for ourselves the beneficial impact that having company of their own kind has on donkeys generally and in particular one that is low in both body and spirit. Willow picked up almost immediately and within a few hours was mooching around the shed, following the others and occasionally venturing out into the garden on a pleasant afternoon

She is a lovely, well mannered, affectionate girl! she may always be a little lame but can now look forward, we hope, to many years of a chilled out, comfortable life. The remedial boot was removed some weeks later and she has been 'flying it' ever since!

## HOPE

Soon Willow was to find another friend in Hope. A very distressed phone call late one Saturday afternoon alerted us to the plight of a donkey mare in nearby Ballymote who was down, seemingly unable to get up and trembling with either cold or pain. Her back was red raw and bleeding with rain scald which had been aggravate by birds pecking at the scabs, creating quite deep holes in the skin along the backbone.



Her fetlocks and elbows were rubbed raw so she had obviously been lying far more often than standing. Neighbours who had been befriending her for some time reported that she was often left with no water and that recently she had had great difficulty walking or even standing.

We had had dealings with the owners before, as had the ISPCA, but didn't know their current location or telephone number, so with authorisation from the County Vet under The Protection of Horses Act, and a signature from the Gardai, Neil and Rebecca set off immediately to bring her home.

Both loading and unloading into the horse trailer was difficult as she was so sore but she seemed to know we wanted to help and made her slow painful way with encouragement. That night we treated her wounds and settled her down with Willow and Little Nel under a heat lamp with a warm bed under her and food and water on hand. Initially she was too traumatised to eat and for several days she remained bewildered and numb, allowing us to dress her wounds but not responding to us or her surroundings. Whatever had happened had left her feeling threatened and insecure.

Once again Brian Horohoe came to the rescue to trim and dress her badly misshapen hooves, bandaging the front feet heavily to pad them from unnecessary pressure, but even then it took another week of helping her to her feet whenever she had been lying down as she just didn't have the strength to manage on her own. Happily as she regained her strength she also regained her will to live: she started eating – at first only a few ginger biscuits and a little haylage, but finally tucking into a mix of grain and soaked sugar beet nuts.



Her back took time to heal and her elbows even longer.

Later, a few sessions with equine chiropractor Annet Siggins corrected displacements in her back and neck (she couldn't turn her head to either side) and Willow's, leaving both donkeys freer in their movements and without the pain which had been locked into their bodies over years of mismanagement.

It is heart warming to see these two lovely girls, now good friends, sharing standing side by side to munch on the bale of haylage. Hope still flinches whenever we go to touch her: we can only pray time will heal her emotional wounds.

We have many people to thank where these two donkeys are concerned for their interest, compassion, information and donations. Their stories have touched the hearts of many. We will always do our best but our first alert is often due to information from the public without which we would be denied the privilege and opportunity to help. Huge thanks to you all for caring enough to take action and not walk by believing 'it is none of my business'. Animals cannot call for help themselves. We owe it to them to act as their voices in these situations.

*Hope's rainscald covered the length of her back. We discovered later that her owner had treated her with Alamyacin spray which in our experience is far too severe to use on open wounds or sensitive areas.*

*Fortunately, it looks as if Hope's hair will grow again, which is not always the case. We have in care a young gelding donkey who was similarly treated and who's hair has never regrown leaving him forever vulnerable to the effects of the elements on his bare skin.*

## CHERRY, NAN AND PUKEY

Three lovely and extremely well cared for lady donkeys came our way for an entirely different reason from the norm. Their owner had been unable to renew the lease on land he was renting and was well into negotiations to buy a couple of acres when the deal was pulled from under them with an ultimatum to remove the donkeys from the land in three days' time – or they would be put on the road or shot!

Under this threat, real or not, the owner and his friends set off to travel the locality in search of anyone who would help them even if it was a short term rent, or borrow of some land, in order to buy time but despite covering a good distance between them they had no luck at all.

In desperation they contacted us. Initially the mood was one of caution as we are already overstocked and would always prefer to leave whatever space may be available for welfare cases but having been convinced the story was genuine we agreed to take them on a temporary basis.

Their owners are desperate to have them back even to a willingness to buy land nearby Castlebar in Co. Mayo, but so far no luck. If anyone reading this newsletter has any suggestions please do get in touch! Owners and donkeys adore each other so the happiest outcome would be to have them reunited. Meanwhile, they visit regularly; despite the one and a half hour journey each way with the lady of the house spending hours at a time grooming them – and anyone else who joins the (long) queue!

## NEW HOMES - KESTREL AND JAY

Kestrel and Jay, two young stallions who came to us in February 2020 and were subsequently gelded, found a loving family home where they have settled well.

We believe Kestrel is the father of Jay: although there were three other young stallions in this group at the time and two more born since, these two bonded closely and were soon inseparable.

Jay has his Dad's self confident, inquisitive spirit which must make the adventure of settling into a new home far easier than for the more timid natured.



## OAKLEY

Little Oakley found a home locally as companion to a mare called Molly who had recently lost her lifetime friend and was desperately lonely.

Molly is larger than Oakley so at first glance they look rather like a mare and foal but we are hoping Oakley will enjoy having a Mummy figure having been abandoned in Drumcong Forest at only 5 months old, and that Molly will enjoy the nurturing role.



So far they are getting along great even if they do look rather like the old fashioned English holiday postcards of the large lady with the little skinny man!



#### NEW HOMES - WISHY AND WAVERLEY

Wishy and Waverley would fit into this last bracket.

We are not sure if Waverley is Wishy's mother or if they are sisters but again they are extremely bonded and although Wishy is quite confident, Waverley is shy and needs time to get to know people before interacting.



They found a home on a farm where they would be the prime responsibility of an animal mad teenager but under the wing of her father's experience. The time and attention available has undoubtedly helped to build the donkeys' confidence.

Certainly they are adored and probably very spoiled!

#### THOUGHTS ON REHOMING

Recently we have had a spate of timewasters when it comes to finding foster homes, with a few people even getting as far as having homechecks and a suitable donkey/pony found to suit their needs before deciding they were not interested after all . . . not a good use of our precious resources!

To be clear - foster homes are required to meet with certain standards such as having enough, and suitable land, a shelter available at all times, a vet and a farrier willing to attend regularly as required, a Herd Number or and Equine Premises Number as required by law and to agree to us having the right to visit on request and bring the animals home without notice if, for any reason, we believe they are not being treated properly.

All animals are microchipped and passported but ownership (and the passport) remain with the Sanctuary so no animal can be placed elsewhere without our blessing and certainly not sold or used in any way for profit.

Some people ask why we are so strict when there are so many donkeys and ponies needing homes. The answer is that sadly, we have found, through experience, that it is necessary in order to protect the animals from being returned, as sadly happens all too often, to another bad situation, either through malpractice or ignorance, and having to be 'rescued' again a few months or years down the line.

Fortunately there are many wonderful people who, whilst enjoying the safety net that we provide, take full responsibility and enjoy their charges enormously, looking after them beautifully and giving them the benefit of a safe, often family, environment with far more individual attention than we could provide here.

## BILBO, FRODO AND JACK

In September we helped out by taking in three Shetland stallions for castration, Bilbo and Frodo from one situation and Jack from another.

Jack was quite an elderly pony but flew through the operation and was soon home with his owner.

Bilbo and Frodo had to stay for a while as they were to join a small herd of geldings and mares and would have caused trouble with the mares and probably fought with the geldings until the male hormones had dissipated – not, as many believe, an instant occurrence after gelding, especially if, as a stallion, they had served mares. This can take from six weeks to several months and occasionally even years before the stallion behaviour is modified.

However, as soon as they were returned to their herd it was Bilbo and Frodo who started fighting between themselves. Bilbo was eventually accepted into the herd but little Frodo was being horribly bullied: the only answer seemed to be to fetch him back!



He settled immediately with our own small ponies of both sexes and vastly differing ages and has developed into a cheeky little man with loads of character and an innate ability to charm everyone he meets. He often challenges another pony or donkey into 'playing' (which sometimes looks a lot like bullying!) by setting off at full gallop, tiny legs pumping, the epitome of a Thelwell cartoon. He seems to think he is a racehorse.



## CEDAR RETURNED

Talking of racehorses, Cedar, our beautiful thoroughbred gelding who was rescued by Neil and Rebecca from a bog hole in Drumcong Forestry, Co. Leitrim late in 2019 and was subsequently rehomed to a young lady, was returned to us unexpectedly.

We had been plied with photographs of Cedar's progress over the past months and led to believe it was a match of a lifetime so we were shocked at the abruptness of his return without satisfactory explanation. Perhaps the novelty had just worn off! A shame, as outwardly it was a lovely home where he received the best of care of plenty of attention.



Cedar was sold as a yearling for a high price at Tattershall Horse Sales in UK and had a brief racing career. Obviously he wasn't successful and was sold on. Sadly we haven't been able to fill in the time between his racing days and being found abandoned in a bleak forestry, emaciated, weak and with severe rainscald.

Happily for Cedar the Irish Horse Welfare Trust in Co. Wicklow, who are very experienced with ex racehorses, agreed to take him. Here we have no doubts whatsoever that he will be treated with the utmost care and respect. Everything will be done to ensure any 'issues' are solved and to see him safely placed in a good and loving home in due course. Good luck beautiful boy – you have had too many changes already in your short life and truly deserve a forever home.

## OUR GRATITUDE

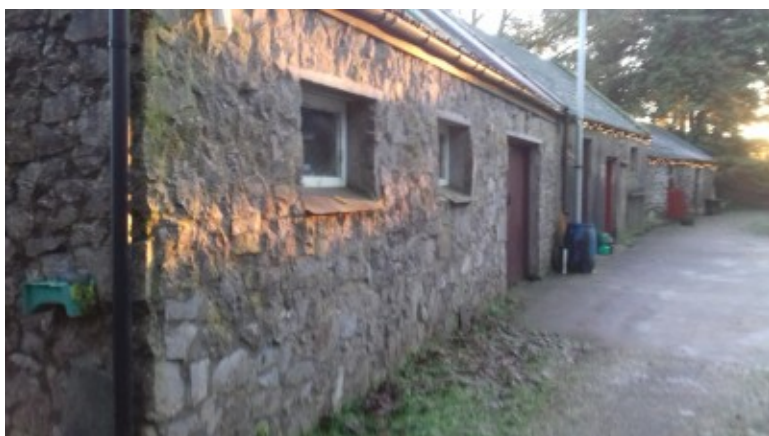
As always we have many thank you's to make to all who have continued to support us throughout this strange year of the pandemic. We have received so much good will, some from regular supporters who have done everything in their power to keep sending that little bit extra on a regular basis and others who have surprised us with generous and unexpected donations. Some have held fundraisers on Facebook, given a donation in lieu of sending Christmas cards and found other novel ways of helping.

The volunteer team deserves a commendation too (for which read lots of very big shiny medals!), as without exception they have all rallied to keep the everyday wheels turning, from putting extra hours slogging away at the mucking out, grooming, feeding and caring for the old, sick and injured in our care, to covering welfare cases, homechecks and transportation. The Sanctuary thrives only because of all who support, encourage and help in so many valuable ways.

## TO HONOUR AND REMEMBER LAURA

The saddest moment of the winter came in February when we learned of the sudden death of 30 year old Laura Keogh, a supporter for many years and an avid lover of donkeys. We first came to know Laura several years ago when she 'adopted' (sponsored) a little donkey mare of the same name who has passed away since. Only this Christmas her sister had 'adopted' her another donkey.

Of course the family and her many friends were bereft, many sending donations to the Sai Sanctuary in Laura's honour. At the suggestion of another family member it was decided to try and do something special with this sum, which amounted to c.€500, rather than have it disappear into everyday expenditure.



After discussion it was decided we should have new half doors (the current ones being well chewed and battered) made for the two old stone built stables near the house which we use as a sick bay/isolation unit and replace the now defunct heat lamps in each.

We are blessed with having a neighbour who is a skilled carpenter: he has agreed to make the two new doors plus lift off top frames of metal gridwork for the times we need to keep in a boisterous stallion. The family has provided a beautifully carved wooden plaque saying 'Laura's Gate' to screw onto the bigger shed door. We will include photographs in the Autumn newsletter.

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