



2026 Spring Newsletter

Welcome to the Spring 2026 newsletter! It is hard to believe that it has been just over a year since Sue passed and the Sai team took over. It has been a year of ups and downs, but as Sue wished, her legacy continues.

While the winter was not as harsh as last year, it has been very cold and wet. Indeed, early Spring 2025 was unseasonably hot, but this year has been more the norm with squally showers of sleet and hail still with us at the beginning of April. Thankfully Nathan was well prepared for the long winter, having procured a welcome supply of good quality hay that has seen us through the winter.

.It has to be said that the costs of hay, supplementary feed and bedding have all increased, which has made it more difficult. And it is entirely due to the good will, generosity and donations from you, our lovely supporters, supplemented by a Welfare Grant from the Department of Agriculture of €46,000, that we have managed to maintain the welfare of our wonderful animals.

From the bottom of our hearts, everyone at the Sai team would like to say thank you for your support. We are deeply grateful that your generosity allows us to continue to care for the donkeys, ponies, horses, mules and hinnies at the sanctuary.

Curious Danny straining to look over the gate



Departures

Sadly, we lost two of our beloved ponies over the winter. In December we lost our beautiful Daisy Mae.

Many of you know Daisy and her tragic story - how she came to us eight years ago, when we didn't know what the future would hold or how long she would be with us.

Daisy was a miracle from the very beginning, and she never stopped fighting. Nearly 26 years old, Daisy truly lived life to the fullest. However, she had begun to slow down after developing an abscess in her hoof and sadly, in joint consultation with our vet, we had to make the hardest decision any sanctuary ever faces.



Majestic Daisy Mae looking down on us

We always do everything we possibly can for our animals, but sometimes there is nothing more that can be done except to let them go with dignity and love. Daisy is still greatly missed by everyone at the sanctuary, and the sight of her pretty face at the gate waiting for a bucket is still imprinted on our hearts. John Birch-Coad (one of our followers on social media), penned this beautiful tribute to Daisy and has generously allowed us to share with you all.

Run free Daisy Mae

*Soft hooves upon the meadow green,
A gentle soul, so pure, serene.
Daisy Mae, with eyes so kind,
Leaves earthly fields and pain behind.
The Rainbow Bridge now shines ahead,
A path of light where angels tread.
Her weary body finds its rest,
Her spirit free, forever blessed.
No bridle weighs, no burden near,
Only love and peace appear.
She trots through skies of endless blue,
Where pastures bloom with morning dew.
Though hearts below may ache and weep,
Her memory we'll always keep.
For Daisy Mae, our friend so true,
Lives on in love, in skies anew.*

In March, we also said farewell to Jemima, who had come to the sanctuary three years ago when her owner was sadly facing health problems and could no longer care for her.

From the very moment she arrived, she captured all of our hearts. She was the gentlest, most affectionate girl you could ever meet, always looking for a cuddle and never happier than when she was surrounded by people — especially children, who she absolutely adored.

In her last few weeks Jemima had been suffering on and off with what we believed was colic. We hoped she would pull through like she had before, but sadly her little body had become too tired. Despite doing everything we could for her, the kindest thing we could do was let her go. At the incredible age of 31, Jemima crossed the rainbow bridge.



Jemima waiting for a cuddle

Sadly, in February, we also had to put Ruby to sleep. As many of you know, Ruby came into our care in late October. She was blind and had been rejected by her mother. Her owner was struggling to cope and didn't know what to do, so we stepped in and promised her safety, love and a home.

From the very beginning, Ruby showed us just how special she was. She was the most loving, gentle and kind little foal. Despite everything she faced, she trusted wholeheartedly. She had a way of making everyone smile and very quickly stole the hearts of all our volunteers. Her silly tongue, her happy little trot, and the way she would lean in for affection are memories we will treasure forever.



Sadly, Ruby developed severe scour and wasn't putting on weight. We tried absolutely everything we could to help her. On top of this, she never truly found companionship within our donkey herd. Because she was different, the others struggled to accept her.

The reality we had to face was that she was never going to be able to live the full, natural life a donkey deserves. We may not have had Ruby for long, but the impact she made on us all was immeasurable. She taught us so much about resilience, trust and unconditional love in such a short time.

Ruby sampling the scenery

Again John Birch-Coad wrote this beautiful tribute to a little filly foal who captured all our hearts.

Ruby's Rainbow Run

*Little Ruby, baby donkey,
With that funny, bouncy trot,
A tiny hooves-and-sunshine spirit
Who gave more joy than she ever got.
Her tongue forever peeking out,
As if she laughed at her own delight,
A cheeky spark in every step,
A softness wrapped in morning light.
One day her journey carried on,
Beyond the fields she used to roam,
She trotted toward the rainbow bridge
And found her freedom in its glow.
No pain could follow where she went,
No shadows touched her gentle face,*

*Just open skies and endless meadows
Where every soul finds perfect grace.
But here, the world feels quieter,
A space she filled now standing still.
Her memory lingers like a warm breeze
That curls around the windowsill.
Ruby, little darling heart,
Your trot, your tongue, your playful ways—
They stay with those who loved you dearly,
A light that time will never fade.
Run free now, sweet and precious one,
Across the bridge where angels roam.
You'll always be remembered,
Ruby— Forever loved, forever home.*

As we have said before, this is the hardest part of our job; letting go of these special animals that make our days richer in so many ways. Losing an animal never gets any easier but it gives us a bit of peace knowing we gave them the best life possible while they were with us.

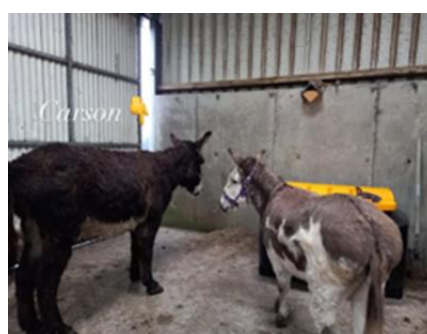
Adoption/Loan Scheme (formerly Foster/Loan)

As always there are donkeys, ponies and horses that benefit from being in a smaller group where they would get more attention from just one or two people and not have to deal with the many visitors we have at the Sanctuary.

When these animals become available, we offer them on our Adoption/Loan Scheme. This scheme works as a permanent loan of the animal(s) to an individual, or family, who is prepared to abide by certain requirements laid down by the Sai Sanctuary. If you are interested in taking part of this scheme, please contact the sanctuary.

We had a very successful year of rehoming animals. The following donkeys and ponies were rehomed since our last newsletter:

In October, Robin travelled to Fermanagh to his new permanent home with Katie, and also mother and daughter, Lark and Linnet, have gone to live with Declan in Claremorris. In December, our wonderful Carson has moved to Killala to live with Mary. Also in December, Brian moved to Fivemilebourne to his new home with Gilla. In March, Lucy and Midnight travelled to Andrew in Monaghan. And also in March, Stanley and Yeats travelled to Newport for a new home with Grainne.



Donkeys in . . . As always with our revolving door, we welcomed some new arrivals. Neddy Hennessy arrived in December after his mother passed away and his elderly owner could no longer cope. We also welcomed Basil and Virginia, after their owner sadly had to move house due to health reasons and was no longer able to care for them.

Hares Corner Initiative

The term 'Hare's Corner' is an old farming expression for the corner of a field or an area of rough or wet ground which wasn't intensively farmed, and so instead was 'left to nature', becoming a refuge for wildlife.



Inspired by this term, the Hares Corner Initiative, run by Burrenbeo Trust, aims to provide practical support to landowners to create new habitats for wildlife.

Sue had been told that the sanctuary was to be named the Sathya Sai Sanctuary Trust for Nature, but she often puzzled about why that was. In later life, she believed that this was essentially because the land at the sanctuary was indeed for all nature, and the donkey sanctuary just happened to be on the same site.

The view from the sanctuary is incredible

Planning

In January 2025 we applied for 50 native trees to plant around the sanctuary and also applied for a Plan for Nature Survey, both of which were successful. In July 2025, an ecologist from the Hares Corner arrived on site and carried out an intensive survey on the land around the sanctuary. From that, a detailed Plan for Nature was developed, outlining ways to protect the land at the sanctuary and increase biodiversity. These include removal of non-native trees and shrubs, rewilding the blanket bog on the southern side of the sanctuary and possibly creating ponds on the wetlands.

Action

In January 2026, we again applied for 50 more native hedging plants, and also for funding for creating a pond in the boglands above the isolation field. While we were unsuccessful with the pond application, we were successful with the hedging, so at the end of February, we collected 100 plants which included Hawthorn, Hazel, Guelder Rose, Grey Willow, Spindle, Holly, Crab Apple, Cherry, Rowan, Oak, Alder, Downy Birch, Burren Pine, Aspen and Black Poplar.

We were delighted to welcome a corporate group from BEYOND, Sligo, to fence and prepare the land for the trees and hedges. This was our first ever time hosting a 'Corporate Volunteering' group and it couldn't have gone better. The guys were enthusiastic, interested, hardworking & fun. A fence line was put up, hedges were trimmed and holes dug for future tree planting; they helped with everyday Sanctuary chores too and of course spent quality time with our four-legged residents. A big thank you to The Sligo Volunteer Centre for all their help in making it happen. May this be the first of many.



The following week we were equally delighted to have a small group of volunteers to come and plant some of the native shrubs. Our sincere thanks to all involved.

Training Day

On February 17th, we welcomed Deidre and Fran from The Donkey Sanctuary Ireland (based in Cork) as they held a training day for our volunteers. It truly was a day full of fun, laughter, and learning from start to finish. Our volunteers had an amazing time while gaining so much valuable knowledge and hands-on experience.

Throughout the day, they learned how to correctly fit headcollars, safely pick out hooves, understand donkey body language, follow general safety procedures, assess body condition, and so much more.

The practical guidance and expert advice shared were incredibly insightful and empowering for everyone involved. All those volunteers who could attend were extremely appreciative of the opportunity and finished the training feeling more confident, knowledgeable, and inspired. We're so grateful for the support and expertise — we will definitely be doing it again!



The Donkey Sanctuary led training day.

Ireland AM at the Sanctuary

Deric Ó h'Artagáin is a popular Irish television presenter and weatherman, best known for his long-standing role on the Virgin Media Ireland breakfast show, Ireland AM. Deric is famous for his "on the road" segments, where he travels across Ireland to report from different communities, and there was great excitement when he and his camera crew joined Nathan and Rebecca at the sanctuary on February 5th for early morning updates on weather and all things donkey.

This was a much-appreciated visit as it shared the existence of the sanctuary with a new audience.

Thank you to the volunteer who contacted him and suggested he visit.



Special Visitors at North West Hospice



We were delighted to take Yeats and Benji to visit the patients at The North West Hospice in October. Their visit brought smiles, comfort and lovely memories to patients, families and staff.

Director of Nursing Jess Kelly thanked the Sanctuary team, noting how animal assisted therapy can ease stress and bring moments of light during emotional times.

Our visits have temporarily halted due to building work on the new hospice building, but we are already looking forward to visiting our new hospice when it opens in 2026!

Fundraising

A number of fundraising actions took place over the winter. These included selling Toy Show boxes and merchandise including calendars and Christmas cards at markets around Sligo. We even took Yeats and Benji to visit the Farmers Market in Sligo ATU!

Thank you to Ruby and her mum Fiona for setting up a wonderful book exchange library in the Carrick Post Office, with all proceeds from the book exchange going directly towards supporting the sanctuary.

Thank you to Inishfree Veterinary Hospital, who very kindly donated €150 to us. They have a donation box in their clinic in support of our sanctuary, which we deeply appreciate. It means so much to have local businesses standing behind what we do.

In April, we were incredibly grateful to receive a generous donation of €2,062, raised through the "Road to Sam" competition in Riverstown. Each year, the winner of this local competition chooses a charity to support, and we were deeply honoured to be selected. This year's donation was made in loving memory of Kevin McDermott from Riverstown, who sadly passed away in 2025.

A heartfelt thank you to David McKeon, who runs the competition, for organising such a meaningful initiative, and to John McDermott, Kevin's brother.



The Spirit of the Donkey Paul Williams (Volunteer)

Before I talk about the Spirit of the Donkey, I would like to say a little about shamanism. As a Shaman I connect with the Spirit of or within "things". While ultimately Spirit is one undivided entity on a higher level, on this level or realm that we are living in we encounter spirit splintered into separate "things".

This is akin to the collective consciousness and wisdom of humanity. Each element within nature has its own collective consciousness, the spirit of the trees, of water, the wind, fire, all hold wisdom and guidance as does the spirit of the animals which can share their essence and qualities with us if we are open to receiving.



The Spirit of the Donkey is a step closer to peace than most people are. They embody a calm happy temperament and a high level of intelligence. They have the ability to tune out of this world and connect to the collective spiritual energy, this is like an out of body experience, hence their capacity to carry great burdens and still maintain a strength of character that is imbued with dignity.

They have chosen to be of service to humanity and have helped people shape their world for thousands of years. They are silent sentinels working in service on both sides of the veil between worlds. While they can carry a physical load, they also have a healing role in helping people unburden, even if it is only for the briefest of time. Their generally passive disposition draws people to them. When most people interact with these kind loving beings, they leave feeling the better for it, mostly unaware that they are on the receiving end of a spiritual healing from these natural "givers" as they are almost constantly "plugged into peace"

What's seen as stubbornness is in fact a strong will and perseverance, some of the qualities of courage or the ability to stand your ground. They have great patience, (although you wouldn't know this at feeding time at the sanctuary) and the overall gift the donkey spirit gives is one of acceptance and peace.

They can also be a mirror for people's stubbornness or inability to change their position or point of view, after all one cannot have peace if they are hellbent on holding onto what has passed. To connect with the healing energy of the donkeys, approach with an open mind an open heart and open hands that are not tightly holding onto the past, or at least be somewhat willing to loosen your grip.

Volunteers

As we always do, we must thank all our volunteers, past and present, as we could not survive without them. In January Anja kindly accepted the role of volunteer manager, to help ease the workload on Rebecca and streamline our volunteer application and induction. In December 2025, we attended an International Volunteer Event hosted by Sligo Volunteer Centre. Anja has kindly allowed us to include the speech she made that day, outlining her journey to and with the sanctuary.

Volunteer Day Celebration

My name is Anja and I am here to speak as a representative of the volunteers at the Sathya Sai Sanctuary Trust for Nature. My journey began just over a year ago when I spotted a lonely and neglected donkey in knee-deep mud in a field in the middle of the countryside.

You have probably all come across this heart-breaking scenario: an animal with overgrown hooves, a wet coat or even bald patches as a consequence of prolonged exposure to rain, body language and facial expression that convey a sense of hopelessness and shut-down and eyes SO sad you just cannot forget them. And I could not and over the course of several weeks, I managed to persuade the owner to let me take this donkey.

So, as 2024 drew to a close, my partner Alastair (who is also here today) and I borrowed a trailer and after much coaxing and persuading, managed to extract Stanley the donkey from the mud bath that was his home and brought him to my place, where he took up residence in the garden and polytunnel. He settled in well, his physical health improved and we learned how to manage his painful condition that resulted from years of neglect.

As my friends would confirm, I could now talk all evening about the wonderful months we had with Stan and what an amazing character he is. However, as time went on, it became apparent that as a herd animal, Stanley was desperately lonely. Unfortunately, he felt the urge to communicate this to the world particularly strongly at 5 in the morning. Relationships with my neighbours never did recover again...

So – operation 'Finding a Herd for Stanley' was launched and it was in this context that I first came across Sathya Sai. I learned that the Sanctuary was set up in 1991 by an amazing lady called Sue, who had sadly passed away earlier this year, but that there was a group of committed staff and volunteers that carried on her legacy.

I liked what I saw online and decided to give them a call. And despite the sanctuary operating well above capacity and caring for far too many rescued, neglected or surrendered animals, they agreed to take Stanley in.

His life changed dramatically on that day in late May, but ours did too, as we began our volunteering journey at Sathya Sai. It is hard to capture in words just how rewarding it is to be involved, high up above Castlebaldwin, on Donkey Hill.



So – what does a typical day of volunteering look like? Well, there's no such thing, as every time we go there, it is different from the last. Sure, the animals need to be fed, buckets washed and the stables mucked out every day, but after that, there could be Physiotherapy exercises with an elderly mare or assisting the vet with an Acupuncture treatment, there's a blind foal that needs a bottle feed or a visit by a group of special needs kids that has to be facilitated.



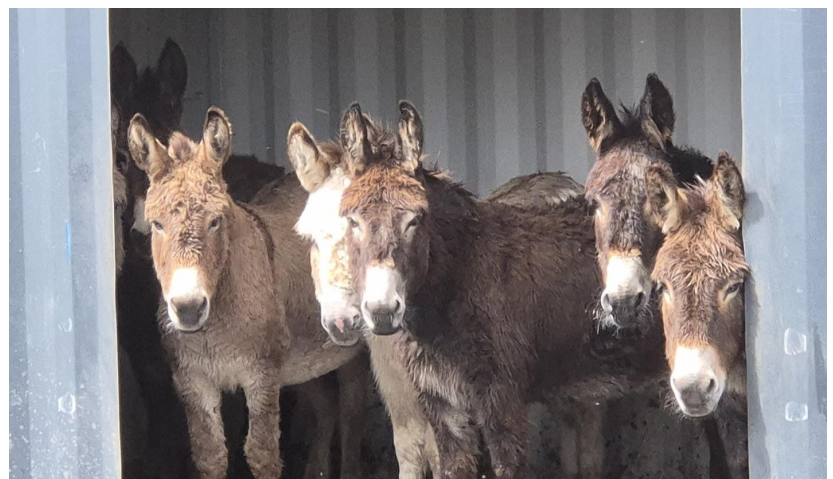
There's such a sense of community, connection and shared purpose amongst us all; there's laughter, banter, endless cups of tea and deep conversation. It's only been six months since I have come onboard, but I have had the opportunity to help with several public events – Heritage Day, Donkey Walks and Halloween Family Fun to name just a few..... I try to be at the Sanctuary at least one day a week and I have to say it's the highlight of my week.

Donkeys are amazingly sensitive and intelligent animals that have served humankind for millennia and do not deserve the level of cruelty and neglect they are sadly objected to all too commonly, often as a result of ignorance - so education and outreach is another area we are involved in and are hoping to expand on.

I feel a great sense of satisfaction in serving these wonderful creatures the best I can, alongside our brilliant and committed team, some of which are here tonight. Caring for the magic landscape, the biodiversity and ancient heritage up in those hills is also an important aspect of what we do. As humans, we often do not treat our planet and the creatures we share it with in a respectful and kind way, but the work that happens at Sathya Sai goes some way towards putting that right. I never met Sue, the Sanctuary's founder, but her presence can be felt around the place. Her spirit and ethos live on in all we try to do.

So – whilst Stanley has finally found a herd, I certainly feel like I have found my tribe and I can't wait to see what new adventures 2026 will bring, up on Donkey Hill.

One of our commitments is to welcome corporate groups to assist us with our nature conservation efforts and to expand on offering equine-assisted wellbeing sessions. And if you have never been, then please come and visit us when we re-open to the public in April 2026.



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.

Until next time, blessed be. 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.

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Charity No CHY 10840

Registration No. 20028350

Equine Herd No. U324043

IBAN IE48 BOFI 9052 8032 9838 06

BIC Code BOFIE2D

For Fun!

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Across

- 1 A Place of haven (9)
- 4 Swamp (5)
- 7 A jumpsuit to keep clothes clean (5)
- 9 Quality of land to the north of the sanctuary (5)
- 10 Land of the Sphinx (5)
- 11 A donkeys natural habitat (6)
- 13 Asiatic wild ass (6)
- 14 Some of these are spectacular at the sanctuary (5)
- 16 Rock ... (3)
- 20 A favourite donkey with a lead role in Grease (5)
- 22 Alternative to donkeys mutually scratching (8)
- 23 Donkey cross used as a pack animal (5)
- 24 & 19 down This mother and daughter duo like flowers and music (6/5)
- 26 Native tree getting on in years (5)
- 27 You can move hay with this (9)

Down

- 1 Some workers lean on them (6)
- 2 Big wheels at the back of these (8)
- 3 Sanctuary mule with a blooming name (5)
- 5 An extra layer to keep donkeys warm (4)
- 6 Tied with twine (8)
- 8 Friend of Poohs' (6)
- 9 A type of straw (6)
- 11 Group of animals moving along together (5)
- 12 to the skin (6)
- 15 A horse colour (3)
- 17 Something to trip over in the fields (7)
- 19 & 24 across This mother and daughter duo like flowers and music (6/5)
- 18 Crows (6)
- 21 Padding under the saddle (6)
- 25 Parson bird (3)