

The Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust

Fighting Poverty – Feeding Families

Registered Charity No: 1096814



Autumn Newsletter 2018

“I WILL BE THE VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS...”

We recently celebrated World Animal Day by having a joint celebration with a young but dynamic local NGO, the Animal Welfare Advocates. We invited all the Government Departments who are in anyway connected with animal health in the country as well as local veterinarians to our Makasutu centre. We had our favourite Scout Band, and some of the delegates made speeches about the importance of animal welfare and the state of animal health in the country. The Advocates had planned some sketches or dramas to emphasise their points. We also invited one very special guest who is a super star in The Gambia. He is an internationally renowned kora player and singer, Jaliba Kuyateh. He had sung at a celebration we held ten years ago for a joint event for the opening of Calum's Road, the Nursery School that was built by our sister charity Stella's School Scheme and for our annual show. He said that was his first introduction to animal welfare and he recently wrote a song on the subject to support animal advocacy.

We invited him to our celebration and unbeknown to him we decided along with the Animal Welfare Advocates to appoint him as an Animal Welfare Ambassador. The presentation was made by the Chairman of the Animal Welfare Advocates and Mr. Kuyateh was very touched and appreciative. The speeches then continued. During the course of one speech our General Manager crept up and whispered in my ear that one of the patients had given birth to a foal and the staff suggested naming the baby after our VIP. We then took him to see his new born namesake and when we returned he gave a very moving speech. He begged our staff to continue their good work and take extra special care of Baby Jaliba and he promised to be **the voice for the voiceless** and promote animal welfare through his music. His voice is so famous throughout West Africa that he is in the perfect position to do that. Needless to say it was a very emotional day and we are pleased to report that Baby Jaliba is doing very well.



Maestro Jaliba Kuyateh , the king of kora and animal Welfare Ambassador in white.

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Note from the Director, Heather Armstrong.

"Challenges are what make life interesting, overcoming them is what makes life meaningful"

I recently came across the above quote and I can safely say it has been an interesting and meaningful summer. The rains were late coming and when they did, the incredible storms we had did considerable damage to our aging Sambel centre. The roof of the laboratory blew off and everything inside was damaged, the hay barns were badly damaged and one of the donkey barns partially collapsed. Fortunately no one was hurt. The aging well collapsed meaning we had to go daily to collect water for the animals from the river. It also meant finding funding for a borehole to be drilled together with a new pump and generator. In addition to all these unexpected expenses our old pick-up trucks started protesting at the extra work involved in collecting water on treacherous muddy roads. Their engines also started reacting to the very poor quality fuel that we have in The Gambia so we were inundated with repair bills and it became unsustainable to try and keep one of them on the roads. It reached crisis point when we were called out to emergencies and the staff had to take taxis.

The rains had been late coming so finding fodder was a problem. At one stage we were having to pay £12 for just one bag of groundnut hay that lasts one horse for two days. The heavy rains finally arrived and along with very strong winds and this caused considerable damage but then they finished early so the farmers are now having a really tough time and forage is going to be in short supply.

Although I was in the depths of despair at the relentless expenses, little miracles started to happen. Some wonderful people rallied round to raise the money for the borehole which is now running and the staff and animals are very happy indeed. To add to our miracles three teams of Dutch vets took part in the Antwerp to Banjul car Rally where money is raised for the charity by selling off the vehicles when they reach Banjul, the proceeds are then given to charity. The vets very kindly chose us to receive the money, but we were so desperate for wheels that we actually purchased two of the 20 year old vehicles just to keep us on the road until we can raise funds to buy younger vehicles. Both vehicles had been well maintained for their journey across the Sahara and are helping us until it is their time to retire. Hopefully the funds we paid for them will be donated back to us! At least for now, we can continue to reach our patients and hold our mobile clinics. HUGE thanks to the Dutch vets!

Thanks to some incredibly kind and generous people we overcame the challenges and your support has meant we are able to continue our work. Thank you all so much but if any one knows of any reasonably priced left hand drive Toyota or Mitsubishi pick ups in good condition for sale, please contact us.

On behalf of the staff and patients at GHDT I would like to wish you a peaceful Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year and may you overcome all *your* challenges.

With best wishes,

Heather Armstrong

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Education is the way forward.

We are excited that we are receiving more and more visits both from tourists and from Gambians. Agricultural and teaching students from The Gambia College and University attend on a regular basis for training and we are receiving an increasing number of school children and young environmental and conservation groups. For many of them it is the first time they have been out of the built up city area and it is a joy to watch them interacting with our patients. The animals also seem to enjoy having visitors. Such interactions bring long term results and we know that many of them will have a different perspective after having close contact with our gentle animals.



We have three education officers who go into schools and teach children as well as organising school trips to both our centres. They teach children about animal welfare in general and how to keep themselves safe around animals. They had been teaching children about the dangers of rabies and advising them if possible to have their animals vaccinated against rabies. One quiet Sunday afternoon the peace of the Makasutu yard was shattered as a large group of children arrived at the yard with no less than 29 dogs. They had taken in all they had been taught in their lessons and had decided to be proactive and get their dogs vaccinated! They of course had no concept about making appointments but I was so proud of the staff and volunteers for rising to the occasion and vaccinating all the dogs as well as treating them for a variety off minor ailments. The children were made to feel welcome and now quite often pop in with their animals if they feel they need attention.



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Beach Horses

Sadly, due to the weather conditions and the cost of feed, we have seen some severely emaciated animals this year. We have two ex beach horses at our centre being rehabilitated as they were admitted in very poor condition. There are some extremely good and kind beach horse operators, but unfortunately all too often well meaning tourists will buy a horse to help someone to earn a living without thinking it through. The person receiving the animal should have training in horse management and should have some understanding of equine welfare and business management. Good money can be earned during the season, but in the off season when there is no money coming in and the cost of feed is very high as well as the disease challenge during the rains the animals can suffer badly. We are hoping to work with the Beach Riders Association to help them address the problems that they face. If you visit The Gambia, choose your mount carefully, do not ride if you think you may be too heavy for the little Gambian ponies and please report anything you are unhappy about either to us or to The Gambia Tourist Board.



Biscuit as she was when she arrived, emaciated and covered in ticks



Worms passed after her first treatment.



Three months later and she is just beginning to fill out and head in the right direction.

BISCUIT was admitted in appalling condition. She had been a beach horse. It takes a very long time and a lot of expense to rehabilitate them when they reach this level of emaciation. She is much brighter now and three months later you can see that she is now beginning to pick up condition and is hopefully heading in the right direction. We believe that through education, incidents of animals neglect like these will become fewer but though there are encouraging signs that things are improving, we still have a long way to go.

Thank you, thank you and thank you again!

Over the years we have found it impossible to thank everyone individually for their help and support without omitting someone and now with the new GDPR rules one wonders if names should even be mentioned! We have received wonderful support from so many people this year. It is not only donations of money or tack, but people have given their time to help with packing or at Hickstead or by holding jumble sales or vet practices who have given talks to raise money for us. We have even had vets from Holland driving over the Sahara Desert for us! We would like to thank all the vets, nurses, farriers, dentists who not only volunteer their time and expertise, but they also bring out equipment and share their knowledge to train Gambians. It has all made a huge difference and enabled us to reach more people for training and provide help to more animals. To the horses like Biscuit (above) and many others like her, it has meant the difference between life and death. To relieve suffering and to help an animal to live a better life is an immense gift to give and to each and every one of you we thank you from the bottom of our heart.

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Animal Welfare

We are animal lovers and find it hard to refuse help to animals in need. Thankfully our trust deeds allow us to look after animals other than equines. Earlier this year we were told of an animal collection that was suffering as the owner had gone into exile. We arrived to find that both the animals and their carers were in a bad way. Many of the animals had sadly died but we found a collection of hyenas, zebras, antelope, crocodiles and snakes some horses and a camel that had not been fed for considerable time. We were asked to make a report to the Government and were asked to help the animals. The herbivores are not too bad as they can free range and browse, however the hyenas and the crocodiles had not eaten for weeks. The camel came to join us at Makasutu. He has gained weight and has become a great favourite, his name is Prince Harry. The hyenas and crocodiles are fed on a regular basis. We required two large freezers to enable us to store meat and fish and we are very grateful to members of expatriate community in The Gambia who purchased one freezer for us. Together with the Department of Wildlife, we are trying to work out a long term solution for these animals. We are very grateful to all the people who have helped us to find meat and fish for the animals involved.



The Show 8th December 2018

We shall be holding the show at the Livestock Showground at Abuko again this year. We use the show as a way of providing information and encouraging owners to improve standards of management. If anyone would like to sponsor a class, the cost is £70.

We would like to thank Durham Rosettes for providing the beautiful rosettes.



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Linda

When people show compassion and seek our help, it is very hard to turn around and say we just look after equines. We have spent many years teaching animal welfare and when Gambians show concern for an animal but are not in a position to help it, we are of course very happy to do what we can. One such case was a little dog called Linda. A kind and caring student reported her to us. She was in a dreadful state with a swollen and infected head and was having problems breathing. We took her to a local vet and apart from an overall infection, it was discovered that she also had cancer. She was operated on to assist her breathing and came home to Makasutu to live out the few weeks that we thought she may have left. With love, food and good care she blossomed. She learned the joy of soft beds, playing with other dogs, taking her own person for a walk and never having to worry where her next meal came from. Linda lived with us for almost seven months before her cancer developed to a stage where her welfare was being compromised and she was quietly put to sleep at home on the 3rd of November. She is much missed.



Hay urgently needed!

We know that the year ahead is going to be a difficult one for buying hay. We want to avoid being so desperate for forage that we have to pay twice the normal price for a bag which occurred last year. We have even invested in extending our hay stores. The harvest is about to begin and we need to buy and store as much as we possibly can in order to be able to provide the animals with the food they so badly need. It is heart-breaking to have to limit rations to animals that we know need far more in order to recover. Please could you consider buying a load of hay as a meaningful gift this Christmas or making a donation for our Hay Fund. We cannot just go out and buy the odd bale as we do in Europe. We have to drive around all the small farms and collect from each farmer. We need to acquire a year's supply quickly and we desperately need to raise the funds to allow us to do this. If you are able to help us we would love to hear from you.



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More about World Animal Day

The Scout band were rather carried away with the moment and marched off playing round the stable yard which rather alarmed the animals. The consequence of this was that during the speeches, one of the donkey patients gave birth to a beautiful foal which was named after our super star (see front page). The Animal Advocates then decided that we needed to have a naming ceremony for the foal and there was much joy and celebration. Three days later one of the mares who we didn't even know was in foal, also gave birth! We named her colt Scout! On my way home late that night we came upon a group of tiny kittens in the middle of the road. It was World Animal Day so they came home and are now happily training children at Maksutu.



Scout Band

If any of our readers have any old musical instruments that they no longer require, our scout band are desperate for new instruments. They have to borrow and share and I noticed welding and holes stuffed up with chewing gum on some of the instruments. They try so hard, it would be lovely if we could help them.



In addition to treating animals, a great part of our work is about training Gambians so that they can address the problems that they see. We have groups of students visiting our centre on a weekly basis to learn. We are immensely grateful to all the volunteer vets who give us their time and expertise and to the British Equine Veterinary Association Trust who fund some of the vets to come out. Over the years they have given so much and they have increased the knowledge and skills in the country. Thank you to all the vets who have supported us this year.

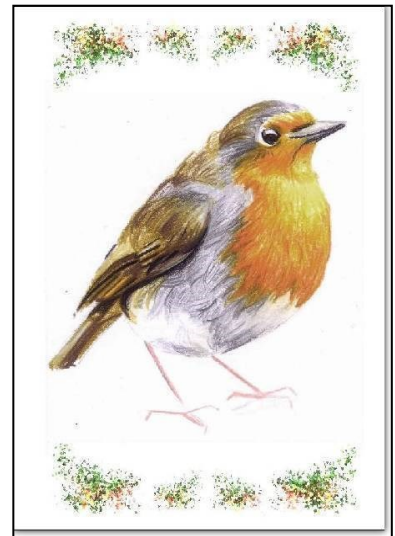
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<http://www.gambiahorseanddonkey.org.uk/christmas.htm>



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As we were going to print with our newsletter we received the devastating news that Lazarus, the horse who inspired us to found our charity had died at the age of almost twenty years . He had been with us for just short of 17 years. This is a tribute to a great horse.

Lazarus



Many years ago our co-founder, Stella Marsden, was sent out by the Wildlife Department to investigate a baboon that was being held in captivity. Whilst she was there she saw the horse pictured on the left above. Apart from being emaciated, he had was so weak he had fallen on a fire and burnt his leg badly. He was so thin his hip joints were protruding through his skin. She sought out some food and water for him and went off in search of a vet who could euthanize him. It is a remote part of The Gambia and it took four days to find a vet. When they arrived back at the horse Stella said there was just something about the horse that told her he was not ready to die. He had managed to stand and with the little food and water she had given him was tottering about and trying to eat. She continued to provided food for him and visited daily.

Shortly after this episode, she was due to come over to UK on leave and showed the pictures to her sister Heather Armstrong, the Director of the charity. She said that there were more and more horses like this one who was named Lazarus because he rose from the dead and that something needed to be done to help them and on his back The Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust was born.

Lazarus and Stella had an incredible bond with each other and he seemed to know when she was around. The staff said they knew when she was in the village because Lazarus would start to whicker gently to greet her.

Lazarus gradually regained his strength and although he was a bit of a character he was always incredibly gentle and loved people and attention. He was nicknamed the Boss by the staff and was allowed to get away with lots of mischief because he was the boss. He was able to undo stable doors and slip off headcollars and was frequently seen streaking across the African Savannah at high speed in search of a mare .



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Lazarus inspired us daily with his passion to overcome all obstacles both mental and physical and his absolute joy of life.

We have so many happy memories of fun times with him such as the time we took a picnic on the back of the cart to a local viewpoint and whilst we were eating it Lazarus untied himself and made his own way home for his dinner leaving us to carry everything home ourselves, or the time we had a Ministerial visit and whilst presenting him to the Minister, Laz, who had never seen The Director in a skirt before grabbed the hem and lifted it over her head. Lazarus would turn his hoof to everything, cart work, ploughing, he loved being a demonstration horse and he loved going for hacks, he even had the great honour of having a set of harness made and given to him by the late, great Cynthia Hayden. He helped us in so many ways and always shared his stable with a succession of his pet bantams who would raise brood after brood with him in his stable.

In his later years Lazarus started to develop arthritis but more disturbingly he started to have bouts of colic which became increasingly severe. It was due to a serious colic that he was put down on the 18th November 2018.

Lazarus was given a Gambian burial with prayers and all the staff present and was laid to rest under the big old tree in the yard. He leaves a huge legacy and we owe it to him to continue what he began.

We would like to give our sincere thanks to Alex Raftery and Lauren Gummery and our staff who cared for him during his last illness. Thank you Lazarus for your love and loyalty and rest in peace old friend.



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