

The Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust

Fighting Poverty – Feeding Families

Registered Charity No: 1096814



Autumn 2022

Twenty years of progress.

Times really are very hard. It has been an incredibly busy and difficult year for us at GHDT and the gremlins sent us lots of challenges and some very sad losses of good and dear friends both four legged and two legged. We mourn and miss them, but they will never be forgotten.

Twenty years ago, in November, a group of Trustees sat down at the table and signed our Trust Deeds. We were all innocents and wanted to do our bit for horses and donkeys and we had no idea of the challenges that lay ahead..... or the rewards! It has not been easy, particularly after we lost Stella our Co-Founder, in 2008, but she has surely been watching over us to enable us to come so far. When we go through difficult times, I hear Stella and my father's voices echoing in my head *"no one said it would be easy", "no problems, only solutions", "challenges are there to be overcome", "When the going gets tough, the tough get going"* and sure enough, little by little and with the help of a lot of very special and wonderful people, we made it to our twentieth birthday and are going for the next 20 years. by which time we hope not to be needed!

Many of the people who began by supporting us have become very dear friends and through social media, others that I have not met have also become well known to us. A growing number of visiting supporters are meeting and getting to know our staff and it has become more like a GHDT family. Not only have we treated a lot of animals in that time, we have helped a lot of their owners as well. We have trained many apprentices, held workshops for Gambian veterinary professionals, welcomed volunteer vets and nurses, taught hundreds of school children and over 1000 university and college students. We are liaising with the Police on animal welfare laws and our Manager has been participating in weekly police radio programmes, the Imams are giving sermons in the mosques on Animal Welfare. There are many references to animal welfare in the Koran. We are working with the Department of Wildlife and some of their rangers are with us at the moment to receive training in animal care and management. Two of their monkeys have joined our little orphan Daynano, in preparation for rehabilitation. We have almost daily school visits from interested school children and many little children bring their beloved dogs to us for attention. The Animal Welfare Advocates are over 1000 strong now and Animal welfare clubs are springing up in schools, they are doing sterling work to make life better for the animals of The Gambia. Despite the awful times we live in there are so many good things happening. Never in our wildest imagination did we envisage this when we signed that Trust Deed.

It has been so gratifying seeing so much change for the better and my greatest reward is having lived long enough to see the results of our endeavours. If you are feeling a bit gloomy this Christmas, please cheer yourself with the thought that change is happening. We have a long way to go yet but the signs are clear, we are on the right track.

In the following pages we will give you a more detailed outline of our activities, but for now we would like to thank you for your wonderful support and send you our good wishes for Christmas and the New Year.



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Letter from the Director, Heather Armstrong.

It has been a very difficult year for everyone. The price of feed for the animals has more than doubled, shipping has increased and for our poor staff a bag of rice has almost doubled in price and is continuing to rise. We completely understand and can identify with you in these troubled times if you feel unable to support us. However without your help we will not survive. If you are unable to help financially, perhaps you can think of inventive ways of raising money, possibly holding a car boot sale or declutter and sell it for us, have a coffee morning and sell some cakes, hold a charity dog walk followed by soup and crusty bread, or even just tell others about the work we do. We achieve a lot thanks to the goodwill of our supporters and volunteers and we can assure you your contribution will not be wasted.



Despite the doom and gloom that this year has brought to us, I never cease to be touched by the kindness of people. I just wish that the media would publish more of the good stories rather than the bad. There are so many good and kind people in this world and we never hear of them and recently we have received so much kindness

Our X-Ray machine broke down and after much online support from **IMV Imaging**, the fault was found. Sadly the part needed was expensive but the company decided to gift it to us so that we could use what it would have cost on the animals that need it. The new part which was rather large was couriered to our UK office the following day. The next challenge was to get it to The Gambia, but **Redcoats Express**, our shipping company, came to the rescue and airfreighted it at very reasonable rates. On arrival in The Gambia, Momodou Jallow of **Redcoats Express** was very helpful as was the lady responsible for customs clearance who recognised the urgent need for the part. The machine was up and running the same day as it arrived in the country thanks to all these wonderful people.

I recently put out a plea for help to collect dog food from **Animal Support Angels** as I was in The Gambia and unable to do it. Our many dog patients depend on the shipments of donated food that we receive, and several people were kind enough to respond, huge thanks to everyone but especially to **Joss Cleveland** who volunteered to not only collect it but to also take it to the shippers. Thanks to the nurses who went above and beyond to get medicines in time when I was flying to Gambia and received last minute requests for items that were not available in The Gambia. These are just a few of the many, many acts of kindness that we receive, they are too numerous to mention all of them, but they lift our spirits, bring positive energy and reaffirm our faith in humanity. Thank you all so much for the kind and thoughtful ways in which you help us. If the media would report all the very wonderful people and give them the recognition that they deserve, it really would be a wonderful world.

Best wishes for the festive season and New Year

Heather

Zahra

You may recall in our last newsletter we told you that we were able to help a young Afghan vet who as a young female professional, faced difficult and dangerous times with no future in Afghanistan. She could only leave Afghanistan if she had somewhere to go and it seemed impossible to find anywhere who would help her. Thankfully dear Gambia provided her with a visa to study with us in order to get more experience and therefore be in a better position to sit the exams required to work in UK. A British vet company, **Vet Partners**, came to the rescue and have offered to kindly prepare Zahra for her veterinary exams and she will now be spending her first Christmas in UK. She will be sorely missed in The Gambia, she has been a great help to us and she has grown to love the country and will I am sure return to visit her friends. We wish her a happy and very successful future and we are so pleased that our small charity has been able to assist someone in such desperate need of help. Zahra will be leaving her beloved cat, "Puss in Boots" but we promise to take good care of him for her.



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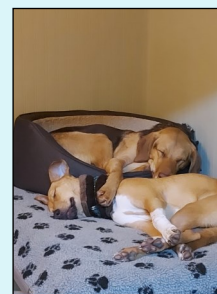
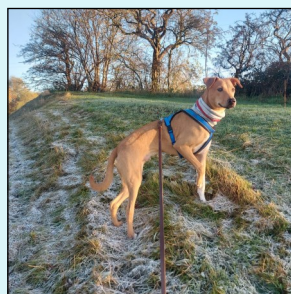
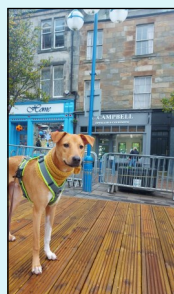
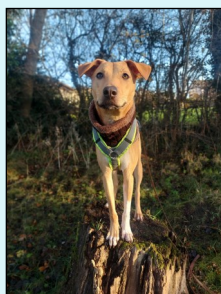
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Koa

In April a little pup called Koa came to us in very poor condition and the suffering that pup must have endured must have been indescribable. We cannot put images of his original injuries as they are too graphic but I will leave Christina, his new “mother”, to fill you in.

At the very end of April 2022, a post showed up on my Facebook newsfeed. A sad-looking ginger puppy with big eyes and huge ears. “Oh, he’d fit in so well with my gang”, I commented. It is now nearing the end of November, and Koa (which means “fearless one”, warrior, brave) has been living with me for 39 days. But let’s rewind. I was born and raised in an animal-loving family in The Gambia in the 90s, and as such, I have always been aware of the reputation that Gambian bush dogs hold in comparison to imported breeds. The stereotype was that they are dirty, stubborn, not very intelligent, and not useful for much. I remember other families keeping both local dogs and pedigree dogs and allowing only the pedigree dogs inside the house, for instance. Even as a child, I thought this was a bit strange. Looking at it now from a more experienced and knowledgeable perspective, I think the main attraction of foreign breeds, novelty factor aside, is that they have usually been selectively bred for specific purposes, whereas local Gambian dogs have not. My 39 days with Koa are suggesting to me that this “disadvantage” is in fact their greatest asset, and something that we can use to help improve their reputation. Heather and I hatched a plan to bring Koa to Scotland (if he survived) and we would try to showcase what Gambian dogs are capable of learning and achieving. Whilst I really hoped there would be something impressive to showcase, the long-standing stereotype of the breed was prominently perched in the back of my mind. Would I even be able to teach this young dog anything of value? Would he even want to work with me? My personal experience of Gambian dogs had been that they generally appear to be very independent and aloof. Well, fast forward to today and Koa has already disproven pretty much every single stereotype of the Gambian bush dog. I was expecting a dog who would be quite happy to “just exist” without my input – much like the beach dogs. A dog who would be difficult to motivate. A dog who may work for food, but probably wouldn’t be motivated by toys. A dog who, without a carefully curated selection of early socialisation experiences during puppyhood, would struggle with the weird and wonderful environments we have in the UK and perhaps be quite fearful of all of these new stimuli. One of the first things Koa did when I first met him at a motorway service station halfway down the country, was to engage in a great game of tug with the toy I’d brought along. He is full of beans, always willing and needing to learn, play and explore. Understandably, he was initially a little bit suspicious of my intentions, which makes sense given that sadly the majority of interactions with people for local dogs are to be told to bummer off, but he quickly learned that with the clicker training method, he always has a choice and does not need to worry. He has learned that I actively want him to think, to bring his ideas to the table, to be creative, to show me what he’s got in him. He adores training and he learns new things just as easily and quickly as other breeds. The biggest surprise for me though is probably how easily he handles new experiences. The general research with regards to puppy development would suggest that, given the kind upbringing he likely had, he shouldn’t find new stimuli this easy to deal with. But he does. Busy roads, shops with sparkly Christmas decorations, party poppers, new equipment to wear... everything I’ve thrown at him he has taken in his stride without even batting an eyelid. And here is my theory: without having been selectively bred by humans, Gambian bush dogs would likely have self-selected for the ability to adapt. Living in the bush? Moving to the beach? Living in the markets? A dog who can adapt quickly and easily to changes in the environment would certainly have the best chance at survival and procreation. And this ability to adapt easily is something our selectively bred pedigrees often lack, especially if they haven’t been raised very carefully with that concept in mind. With Koa, my main aim was to show that Gambian bush dogs can learn simple skills just as easily as other breeds – that they aren’t dumb or stubborn. But my secret hope was to show that they can learn more complex skills which actually bring value to their families’ lives. In particular for people with disabilities, life can be very challenging and there isn’t much support available in The Gambia. Wouldn’t it be amazing if our little Gambian bush dogs could help people in wheelchairs navigate their surroundings better by picking up dropped items? Or if they could provide psychiatric support to those with mental health challenges? Or if they could help young women feel safer and more confident with a well-trained companion by their side? There are so many potential ways for Gambian bush dogs to bring true value to their owners’ lives, and I am beginning to think that their adaptability and versatility is just what will help them to do this. Koa is in the very early stages of life in the UK, but I am hopeful that I can teach him a variety of skills which can be helpful to people with disabilities, and that we can prove that you don’t need to be a yellow Labrador to have that ability. I also want to emphasise that, whilst Koa is of course very special to me, he isn’t unique in his abilities, and he wasn’t chosen for this role through particular aptitude. I just saw a little face whose eyes spoke to me. But theoretically, any little Gambian dog can learn what he is learning right now.



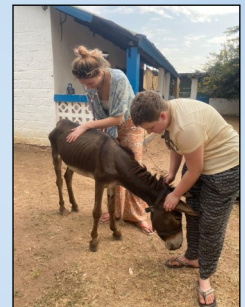
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Disease Challenges – Appeal for help.

The rains lasted a long time this year and we have seen a lot of trypanosomiasis. It has been in all the animals from horses and donkeys to camels and dogs. It is very serious in dogs and even though you think you may have cured it, it inevitably raises its ugly head at a later date. We seem to have it under control for the moment but we are desperate to get more research done and find out which species of tryps. are affecting us. We need to find out more about what we are dealing with. Our animals are precious to us, we put our hearts and souls into helping them and it is heart-breaking if they then go down with these diseases. For the farmers who depend on their livestock for a living, it is far more serious. We need help from experts on tropical diseases and we need researchers to help us. We are very happy to provide accommodation and board. If you are a University or a research institute looking for a project, we can help you to research something that is affecting all Gambian farming families so badly.



Riding for the disabled.

We had to stop the riding for the disabled programme due to Covid and we were about to resume it when we had the tragic news that the Founder of Hart House, Geoff, had died. Imagine our delight when they recently arrived at Makasutu and said they were back. We love having the children, the donkeys enjoy their time with the children and the children absolutely love it so it helps us all. Truly a win/win situation.



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Alves

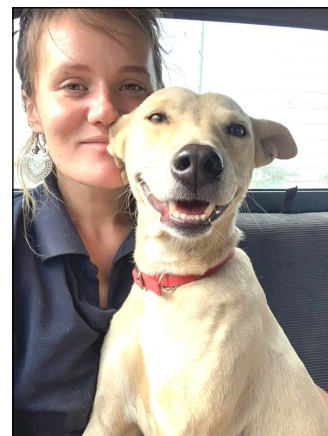


Alves joined us without any experience whatsoever. He has progressed well and recently dealt with these nasty wounds very professionally. He likes working for us because we he likes equines and working with farmers, but he also likes the education side of our work and the fact that our sister charity SSS helps with educating the children of poor farmers.



Emily

We had a big scare earlier this year when Emily, our long term volunteer (She came for a year and three years later, she is still with us) went on leave. Within days of getting to UK she became very seriously and gravely ill. Everyone thought it was a dreaded tropical disease or something she had caught from the animals, but it turned out to be something she could just as easily caught in UK. She of course returned to be with her animals as soon as she could (against doctor's orders). We think it was the Universe telling her she shouldn't leave us to go back to UK! Thankfully, she is much better now, but we thank everyone for their prayers kind messages and healing thoughts.



Job Vacancy (Voluntary)

Are you an extraordinary person with a huge sense of adventure? Do you want to get away from the daily routine of life and experience sunshine, laughter, tears, responsibility and live life to its fullest?

We are looking for a qualified vet or nurse with a sense of adventure, some experience and a great deal of patience. Good clinical skills, an ability to communicate and think outside the box, a passion for both animals and the people they work for. You will need good social skills. You have to be unflappable, well organised, have a sense of humour and preferably have experience of working abroad, particularly in Africa. Being able to teach would be a valuable asset. It is hard work, can be frustrating and sad at times, but the rewards are also immense. You get a lot of experience in a very short time and you meet many other fellow professionals who come out on short term visits.. If you are faced with a problem you cannot tackle, there is constant digital support from past volunteers and experts from all over the world. Air fares, insurance, accommodation and board provided along with generous pocket money. Please apply to the address on the bottom of the page.

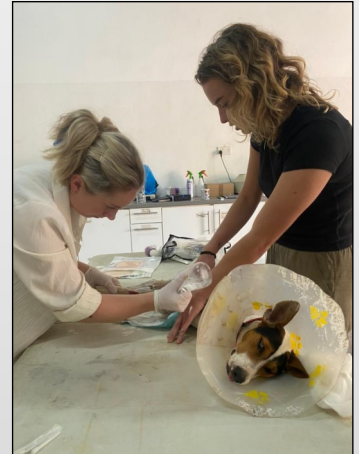


Volunteers

This charity has always relied on voluntary help from professional volunteers. More recently we have had applications from a number of nurses and they have been a HUGE help to us and have really enjoyed their time with us. If you are considering volunteering with us, please come. You pay your own fares which range from £450 -£750plus according to airline, time of year etc. We will meet you at the airport and we make a small charge to cover food and accommodation. We are looking for professional volunteers only, vets, nurses, farriers, equine dental technicians and physiotherapists and other veterinary therapists Our staff are in need of continuing veterinary development and we want everyone to be as well trained as possible so we ask our volunteers to leave behind some knowledge.

The time I have spent here at Makasuto with GDHT has been great. Initially it takes time to get used to the differences between here and the UK. However, once you start mucking in and working with the team you easily feel welcomed and learn how things work. I have managed to be heavily involved with treating the patients which has been great fun and very satisfying. I have loved my experience here so far and can't wait for it to continue.

Kirsty Steward



As a recent veterinary nurse graduate, this is a great experience. With very nice other volunteers and the local workers, it is fun, educational and adventurous. Creative thinking and working with what materials you have is a very nice and educational challenge. Besides that, Gambia, The Horse and Donkey Trust compound and the surroundings are beautiful. I enjoy the environment and nature immensely. I get the chance to practice what I have learned, which is what I need as a recent graduate. There is also plenty of time to play a game, have a beer, and take a splash in the river while we walk the dogs. I am absolutely having a tremendous time! Although I haven't left here yet, thank you so much in advance for everything!

Eva Roben

Coming to Makasutu has been an amazing experience for me, I was under the impression we would be doing a lot of teaching but I have learnt so much! The team are so friendly and everyone has welcomed us with open arms. I've had so many opportunities not only to work on my nursing skills but also to see the real Gambia! The food has been great each day. I'm not ready to go home, ever!

Megan McLeod



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Our dog Manager Moss, gives his perspective of working with us.

I love working for The Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust because everyone shares the same vision and is dedicated to a mission. This truly creates a family environment where everybody is there for each other and it's a honour to find a job that's enables you to sleep in peace knowing that you make a huge difference in some animals lives. There is never a boring moment as there is always something to cheer you up. I love having my pack of dogs and going for the evening walks. Seeing all these rescued dogs smiling brings so much joy and comfort! Some days I think these are large numbers and we're full and should not take in any more but guess any dog that we let in leaves a paw print in our hearts.

Secondly, learning never stops at GHDT. I always see things that I've never seen before and we're so lucky to have the chance to meet so many good vets and nurses from overseas who share their knowledge and experience with us and this helps us to update our skills and understanding more, but it's amazing what we do here with the limited resources we have.

I enjoy going for the neuter clinics and educating the kids about the importance of getting their dogs neutered and vaccinated against rabies. I notice the huge difference it's making in the country and I'm sure the younger generations will be different because now every child wants a dog and they are kind to them and willing to bring them to us when they need help. This isn't only helping the dogs but also helping Gambia to be a Rabies free zone in the near future .

The other thing I love about GHDT is that we learn, we teach, we save lives and we care.



Calling all dog lovers...

We would like to bring you details of our Dog Project. You could not have failed to notice that in addition to horses and donkeys we now have a lot of dogs and cats. We help caring owners who cannot afford vets fees but we also take in strays who are in need of treatment. These we rehabilitate and rehome. Unfortunately more seem to come in than go out as we are very particular and conduct homing checks for each dog. Only people who can demonstrate that they care and have good facilities for their dogs are permitted to have one and we will always take the dogs back if the new partnership does not work out.

We are taking a multi faceted approach to solving the problems which we call the Dog Project. We are preparing kennel free paddocks for the dogs we rescue, there will be a lot of enrichment for them and there will be an attached training arena where we can train them and teach the growing band of children who visit us with their dogs. Funding for this kennel free area has been made available thanks to donations made in memory of Miles Dawson, the son of our vet and Trustee who tragically died earlier this year.

In addition to this we have an education programme starting in February which will be managed by Ali Scott BSc an Animal Behaviour consultant together with a dog trainer. The aim of this project is to try and reduce the incidence of dog bites and Rabies , particularly in children through training them to understand dog behaviour. We hope to also train a team of demonstration dogs together with their handlers who can take the message further. Our dream would be to make the training part of the National Curriculum so that every child in The Gambia is made a little safer and perhaps with more knowledge of dogs, there will also be more respect. Koa is leading the way on that!

We don't have the full funding for this yet, so if you are a dog lover and would like to help this project, please mark your donation "dogs" Together we really could make life safer for children and dogs.

In conjunction with this project we are also running regular neutering clinics and a Rabies vaccination campaign and would welcome small animal vets as well as equine vets. This year alone we have vaccinated 764 dogs against Rabies at £5 a time and neutered 283 dogs and cats, some may say that is a drop in the ocean, but we believe that every journey begins with a single step. It is said that you can prevent 67,000 pups in 6 years by neutering one bitch and one dog so we have potentially prevented over 9 million unwanted pups already.



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It would be impossible to complete our twentieth year without remembering our co founders . It was Lazarus, the horse in the pictures above who inspired us to begin the charity. He was found by Stella Marsden, our Director's sister and she nursed him back to health. We used to say that if the only thing we achieved was to give him a good life, we would have achieved a lot and anything over and above that would be a bonus. He was with us for 18 years. Looking back at all that has happened I think they would be happy. Lazarus and Stella had a very special bond and she could never make a surprise visit to the yard because he would start whickering his welcome when he sensed she was in the area. They were such a special pair and both are much missed. I hope they know just how many animals they have both helped.

Daynano

Is a little Red Patas monkey who was brought to us as a tiny baby with a broken leg. Monkeys so young are attached to their mother for most of the time so our volunteer, Emily became his mother. We work closely with the Department of Wildlife and the plan is to rehabilitate him and two monkeys of the same species, in a group together. We are very grateful to the Department of Wildlife for their help and advice. We are currently training some of their Rangers in animal care and management and hope to work together on the rehabilitation.



THANK YOU...

Space does not permit us to thank everyone who has supported us this year but please know that we are very grateful to every single person who has helped us in any way. We must give thanks to The Aqualia Foundation, The Jean Sainsbury Animal Welfare Trust, IMV Imaging, IMS Euro Ltd. Vets with Horsepower, Animal Support Angels, Redcoat Express, and Shirley Watts for their continuing and very generous and much appreciated support.

Thank You!

Have you forgotten or do you need a last minute gift for some one? Why not give them a special meaningful gift that shows them you remember them and that you care. Please visit our website and see what is on offer. We can send them digitally so that we don't need to rely on the post.

www.gambiahorseanddonkey.org.uk/giftcert.htm



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