



Spring Newsletter 2011

The Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust

Fighting Poverty – Feeding Families

Registered Charity No: 1096814

Meet our wonderful team!



The last year has been a very busy and productive one for us and I would like to dedicate this newsletter to our superb team in The Gambia who are ably assisted by the many volunteers who come out to help us. One of our team's greatest assets is that every member is capable of

multitasking and in the last year they have turned their hands to so many things, from holding training courses and all that entails, to organising a veterinary conference and helping to build a road for the community, not to mention the annual show, which this year also covered the opening of the nursery school and the official opening of Calum's Road. All this was done on top of their routine work of educating the farmers and school children, treating and caring for sick and injured animals and despite extreme fatigue on occasions, they still get up in the middle of the night to take a critically ill person to hospital or to help with a sick animal. After a year of extremely hard work and dedication, I would like to congratulate them on what they have achieved and thank them sincerely for their incredible efforts. We are lucky to have such a skilled and enthusiastic team!



Horse and Donkey volunteers decorate nursery school in Sambel Kunda



We rely on volunteers for everything, but particularly in December when we usually have a group coming out to help with the running of the annual horseshow. They help in many ways from putting up tents to fitting head collars and bits and helping with the day to day organisation of the centre. In addition to the show, we had to prepare a village nursery school that was built by our sister charity, Stella's School Scheme, for its official opening. We were also opening Calum's Road, the road that we built for the local community last summer. Our wonderful volunteers were not daunted and set to their extra work with enthusiasm. The results were astounding. Thank you ALL so much. It was a happy and memorable time.

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Can you believe...



...that thanks to you, these horses have gone on to lead useful and productive lives?



**Above
Lazarus
the first
horse
who
came to
us.**

**Left
Hope, a
very
sick
orphan
foal,
now
better!**



Cedemas, the mare on the left, suffered a severe fungal infection and her recovery is one of our many miracles. She is fortunate enough to have a very caring owner who regularly travelled by bike for a couple of hours each way to visit her. On the day she left to go home he was asked if he was anxious to have her home to work. His reply touched us all. He said he wanted her home because she was his friend. The prognosis for this condition is normally poor, so congratulations to all concerned with her veterinary and nursing care.

At times our work can be heartbreaking, but the rewards as seen above, can be immense too. It is a real joy to help these animals make such remarkable recoveries. Every donation made has helped these animals. Thank you.

The Horse and Donkey Show



The annual event was a very busy and a happy occasion. We would like to thank the many people who made it such a success, from the wonderfully generous people who sponsored the classes and prizes, to the 35 volunteers who flew out to assist with the organisation of the show, the opening of Calum's Road and the opening of the Nursery school which had been built by our sister charity Stella's School Scheme.

Handlers travel from far and wide to bring their animals for judging and it is very satisfying to see the increase in the standard of the animals coming forward. The opportunity really demonstrated to the community the value of the work we do and the impact that knowledge (through education) and care of their animals has on livelihoods and poverty reduction.

We have now reached the stage where we are seeing the next generation of young stock from our winners and everyone can see that selective rather than random breeding really counts.

The shows provides opportunities for support, guidance and help

The show provides the opportunity for our local handlers and those coming for the first time to access all the 'services' they need – farriery, harness advice, dentistry and excellent professional veterinary care. More importantly it gives them the opportunity to learn and to discuss their problems with our experts and with each other. Unfortunately we still have complex disease problems that need to be addressed and we are working on these with the help of many vets and scientists.

We must thank Patrick Pollock and David Sutton from the University of Glasgow Vet School who came out and blood tested every single animal that attended the show and who provided veterinary supervision for our graduates. They came to help and to take advantage of the top class veterinary instruction that was available. We would like to thank the Donkey Sanctuary for their generous support in helping to investigate the mystery neurological disease that is causing so many problems and to Merial for generously supplying drugs that may help to control it. We feel very fortunate to have their support.



Below, donated headcollars awaiting distribution at the show

Calum's Road Celebrations in Sambel Kunda

December 2010



In addition to the show, this was an occasion to celebrate the opening of Calum's Road, which was built last year. The old road had deteriorated to the point where it was unusable for seven months of the year and this caused great hardship to the local communities who needed to reach the nearest school, clinic and market. It also provides access for the women to reach the rice fields. We had a very moving ceremony. The vets from Glasgow doubled up as musicians and



tribute was paid to the Scotsman, Calum MacLeod, whose dogged determination inspired us to build the road and provided a Scottish element to the ceremony. The bagpipes were played by Patrick Pollock and the Strathspey, 'Calum's Road,' was played on the violin by David Sutton. The beautiful tune "Stella's Dream" written by Mairi Leach in memory of Stella and to celebrate the building of the road was also played.

The ribbon was cut by Anette Poulson, the widow of Gert de Jonge, one of the bikers who had helped to raise funds for the road and whose tragic death we announced in the last newsletter. As space is short and pictures paint a thousand words we will describe the story in pictures and hope you have a small flavour of the fun as well as the tears that we had at this very special event. The building of the road has made life for everyone very much easier and the community is delighted to have it. They also enjoyed the Scottish music and dancing!



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Community Development

Poverty is responsible for a great many of the problems that we encounter when dealing with the horses and donkeys and their owners. It may be the cause of poor nutrition or the reason that the animal has poor a harness that rubs. It is also the reason that carts are invariably overloaded. It seems reasonable to assume therefore that if we help to improve the economy as a whole, the condition and welfare of the animals in general will also improve.



One of the villages in our area benefitted from a borehole with a solar powered pump that had been funded by Stella's Rotarian friends, Richard and Sue Burnett. It is noticeable that the animals from that village always look far better than from any of the other villages in our area. We wondered if this was because there are particularly kind people in that village, or whether it is because the owners have more time for their animals and can water them far more easily if they simply have to turn on a tap to water them, rather than standing at the well in a queue and having to pump each bucket of water by hand. Fundraising for Stella's Charities by Ros Harris has meant that there is more money available for more boreholes, so it will be interesting to see if this pattern is repeated in other villages. Recently we invested £250 in sending four village

ladies for training in crafts at the capital, Banjul. Two of the ladies had never been out of the area before so it was a big adventure for them. They were taught to do tie dye and batik, make soap and soap powder for washing and to make bead key rings and necklaces that might have more appeal to tourists than their traditional local beads. They were also given marketing advice and introduced to traders down at the coast who might be able to sell their products for them.

Since their return the ladies have already earned good money with their version of "Omo" and are selling it within their communities and at market. On my recent trip, visitors to Horse and Donkey seemed to really like their products and they were already making good sales. Please look out for their products on our website, at our fundraising events and at Hickstead this summer. The ladies are passing on their skills to others and it is providing an excellent source of revenue for the community. Not only will this benefit the families, but hopefully we shall also soon see the animals reaping the rewards of our investment.



We'll feed your dog our raw, fresh, ethically sourced foods FREE for a week. BARF made easy. 0844 656 1566. www.darlingsrealdogfood.com

An Hour at Njie Lower Basic School *Max Hannan*

Education is huge part of Horse and Donkey's work. Even at the busy lumos (markets) whilst treating horses, time is always taken to give advice on how to manage the current problems and help to prevent them recurring.

The children of The Gambia have a great responsibility. Young boys are the primary carers of the family donkey and have no source of animal care information other than from other boys or their fathers. This is where Horse and Donkey steps in. Every fortnight we spend a week touring the 8 local Lower Basic (*primary*) Schools in our area, teaching the students how to look after their donkeys. They learn the names of the different parts of the donkey, correct feeding, basic first aid and the best method to harness their donkey.

Every day we see the results of poor harnessing on the horses and donkeys of The Gambia through ignorance or poverty. The biggest problems are wounds from the saddle where it rubs the withers and along the chest from dehydration, a poorly made or badly fitting breast harness and lack of



swingle trees. Breeching straps are seldom used, especially on donkeys and so the cart often rubs the base of the tail causing hair loss and terrible sores.

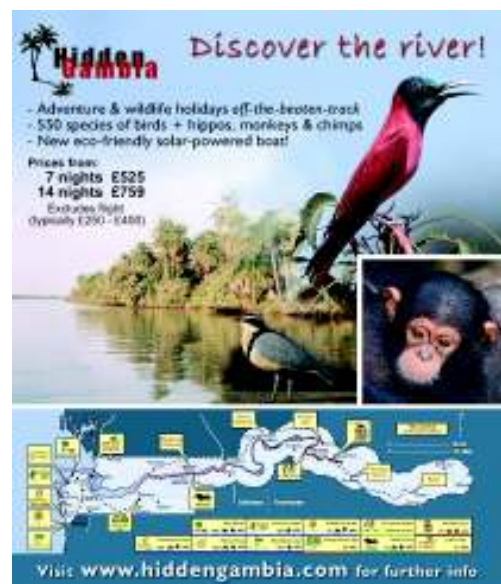
The children are eager to learn and I believe they enjoy their lessons as we try to make it fun with as much interactive learning as possible.

This week our practical session is "Harnessing your donkey to the cart".



Being outside it is something different for the children who are usually cooped up the classroom. NjieKunda School is a small friendly school about an hour away from Sambel Kunda. The children look after a Project donkey called Jamie. Under the shade of a Neem tree, Jamie helped us teach the children about proper harness that works and fits. During the previous lesson, Jibbie, out Education Officer, had taught the children about the different parts and functions of the harness and I was impressed with how much the children had remembered two weeks on. Both boys and girls were enthusiastically jumping in to pick up the pieces of harness, eager to explain what it was and what it did. Jamie waited patiently whilst the children harnessed him up, taking it all in his stride. Finally everything was correct and a child was chosen to drive him around the yard. Up Jamie stepped, his grey coat shining in the sunshine, delivering the boy and the cart back safely to the group waiting under the big Neem tree.

With Jamie out of the cart and unharnessed, he graciously accepts all the pats and praises of the children as they run past him back to the classroom. Jibbie and I are left with the school caretaker of the school. He too pats Jamie and proudly says "Jamie is a good donkey!" I cannot help but agree.



Thanks Thanks Thanks

We owe a huge debt of thanks to so many people who have helped us to achieve so much in the last year. Space prevents me from listing you all individually. We would like to thank absolutely everyone who has donated in cash or kind, especially those who have taken out standing orders and who donate regularly every month. Thanks also go to the very kind people who sponsored classes at the show, those who have held fundraising events for us and those who have so generously volunteered their time and talents to help us.

The veterinary profession has been incredibly generous with their time, advice and equipment. Special thanks must go to the following individuals and companies:

- Professor Chris Proudman and the staff from the University of Liverpool vet school
- TAWS
- Suzanne Rogers
- The Donkey Sanctuary
- The many kind veterinary surgeries who have supported us
- Ann Varley , Ros Harris, Vicki Miller, Liz Serinken, Sue Adams, Anna Saillet, Hannah McIlwraith and all the wonderful volunteer vets and administrators who have helped us
- BCF Technology for so generously donating an ultrasound scanner
- Mary May, for the new colouring book she has designed for the school children of The Gambia.
- Patrick Pollock and David Sutton from The University of Glasgow,



A warm welcome to Nicky Brain and her partner James Bevard, who after just 3 months are doing excellent work. As a veterinary nurse, Nicky is already performing mini miracles and James will long be remembered in The Gambia for planting trees that are transforming the Horse and Donkey compound.



Our wish list.....

- **Reflective jackets** Thanks to everyone who responded to our appeal for reflective jackets, it has made a big difference to the accident rate, but we would like to extend it to the busy town areas, so we are still looking for jackets and reflective tape for the backs of the carts. *In the pictures of the show you will see how the handlers appreciated the ones that were handed out at the show*
- **Trees** We are encouraging our local community to plant indigenous trees in the forest park and fruit trees in their gardens. It costs just £3 per tree.
- **Honey Project** We would like to introduce bee keeping to the area, partly to provide a cash crop but also to provide honey for use as a wound dressing. Funds are required to pay a trainer and purchase equipment.
- **Sponsor a horse or donkey Please** consider sponsoring one of our permanent residents at £20 per year. *Details can be found on the website.*
- **Swingle trees** £5 purchases a swingle tree. *These considerably reduce the risk of breast harness wounds.*
- **Attachments for breeching** £3 will pay for a pair to be made locally. *The breeching stops the cart and the straps need to be attached to the shafts to make it work. This considerably reduces serious wounds to the hindquarters.*
- **Vehicle** We desperately need a new (or good second hand left hand drive) vehicle. If anyone can help we would love to hear from you.
- **A Solar pump** For our well in Sambel Kunda - to save having to use a fuel to pump water up by generator.

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Impressions of a volunteer

By Freddie Reynolds

Flying towards The Gambia I crossed the Sahara for the very first time. The endless stretch of rich ochre dunes, divided by patterns of ancient riverbeds and giant, sleeping waves which panned out beneath had separated me from sub-Saharan Africa for all of my 23 years. As I looked below, that vast emptiness, so asymmetrical, so unattainable spoke volumes about the distance we were travelling between home in the UK and The Gambia.



Fortunately perhaps I was travelling with Heather, who knows more about this tiny West African country than just about any other toubab (*white man*) you will ever come across. She brings with her an insatiable knowledge and love of this country, its people and of courses its horses and donkeys! I was hoping to gain some sort of understanding myself and also hoping that she would impart just an ounce of her knowledge to me as we travelled together, deep into the bush towards Sambel Kunda and the GHDT.

Sambel Kunda is small. Its thatched compounds surround the village's wells and school with no real sense of pattern or control. It's a centric-freedom mirrored by the Dust Devils that drift across the surrounding farmlands as cattle stroll calmly from tree to tree. It is clear from the moment we arrive in Sambel that there is great enthusiasm for the work this charity does under Heather's guidance, and it is also clear to see how it is continuously aiding this community to move forward.

At the GHDT centre, each day is spent meticulously caring for each animal: mucking out, washing wounds, building new paddocks for the stallions to bound around in or heading out to local markets to offer those evidently desperately needed drugs to struggling animals, most underfed by similarly struggling owners. On the road we stopped regularly to make new head collars for donkeys pulling carts as their owners threw their sticks far into the bush on seeing the GHDT vehicle. There was a quiet concern for these animals that I have not witnessed elsewhere. They are not just a means of transport or a sport, they are not a pet, or the centre of a love affair, they are a resource far beyond that; they are a necessary provision to a healthy family in the bush and indeed, when the animals were healthy, there was a glow happily matched by their smiling owners. During the midday sun in Sambel, animals and people gathered together beneath the tall trees that cover the school, sheltering together against 50 degree heat.

I do not have enough knowledge or understanding to see Heather's extraordinary charity in the bigger picture; that of West Africa, of Africa as a whole and as part of the developing world. I cannot convey properly the humour and respect I witnessed and that I was welcome to whilst I was there. But I do know that what I saw was real and true and now, and I can understand why I smile as I write about it now, in my tiny north London flat. I can take comfort from the things I saw in Sambel, as I know others have done and will continue to do and I can hardly imagine the hope and calm it brings to the people of The Gambian bush that it aids every day. For although I am one million miles away, across that Saharan ocean, I feel that it has affected me too.

Please remember us, we need your help more than ever.

The bigger we become and the more we do for both animals and their owners, the more money we need to keep it all going. We have less money coming in due to the recession and yet our expenses are going up. Our vehicles need replacing and constantly require maintenance to keep them going. Your help in any of the following ways would be much appreciated. **Buy a raffle ticket and win some wonderful prizes including 2 tickets to fly to The Gambia and see our work. Please contact us at the address at the foot of page for tickets, they are ONLY £1 each.**

Please..... remember us in your will, consider taking out a standing order to enable us to plan ahead, hold a fundraising event for us, consider giving talks about our work at schools and old folks homes, hold a sponsored ride for us, organise a dog walk, hold a cake sale for us, sell plants, run a marathon...There are so many ways to raise money and for us, literally every single penny helps us. We deeply appreciate all the donations of tack and equipment, but what we need most is money to pay our bills and to cover the cost of the shipment of all your donations.

Please consider raising money for us this summer!

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