

# The Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust

Fighting Poverty – Feeding Families

Registered Charity No: 1096814

## Summer 2023



### Rising above the challenges and looking to the future.

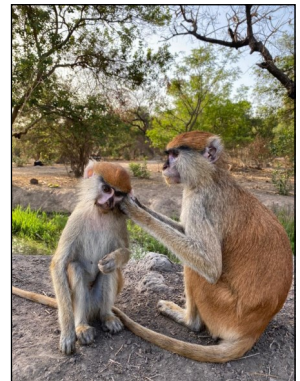
We are half way through the year and we have had everything from severe burns cases in equines, snake bites, a lot of tetanus to a dog encased in tar and in between all the animal cases, two of our volunteers, Emily and Eva also became ill and had to be hospitalised. The challenges have been coming from all directions but one by one, we have somehow overcome them thanks to our staff who stoically kept going all day (and night when needed.)

We have had a lot of volunteers, vets, nurses and students already this year and they make such a huge difference, helping the staff and becoming involved with the patients. We are very grateful to them for bringing their expertise and sharing their knowledge. It is now interesting to watch as more and more, especially with the younger vets, the tables are turning and often our staff can now teach them.

The volume and complexity of some of our cases can be very overwhelming for newly qualified vets. They are usually only with us for two weeks and have a lot to absorb in terms of culture, heat and having no one senior to turn to so they have to do the best they can with the knowledge they have and with some help from our team when they need it. It provides them with very good experience and builds confidence. It seems that everyone benefits and we all learn from each other.

We are receiving more and more school trips as well as College and University students and it is thrilling to witness the change in attitudes to animals. Thanks to The Dog Project we hope to be teaching Rabies prevention in schools. Teachers will be trained in the subject which will enable far more children to be reached. We have come a very long way thanks to you, our supporters, as well as our dedicated team, aided by the Animal Welfare Advocates and our wonderful volunteers but we still have so much more to do but the future is full of promise.

I am confident that together we shall achieve it.



The Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust

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## ***Letter from the Director, Heather Armstrong.***

The workload at Makasutu is becoming increasingly heavy as we become better known and we always strive to raise the standards as high as we can with what we have available to us. On my visits I find it increasingly difficult to have staff meetings because there is no one time when all the staff are available. There is a constant stream of walk in patients, phone calls or call outs as well as many equine, canine and feline in patients who require nursing. Sometimes I just stand in the yard and observe. I always feel the need to pinch myself and ask myself how on earth this all happened.



A donkey is brought in with severe lameness and the Gambian staff take notes and then X-ray it, a road traffic accident dog is rushed in and immediately put on a drip, another donkey arrives with a wound full of maggots and Dembo directs a group of nurses to set to and clean it. It is good to watch the senior staff directing the newer staff and discussing cases with visiting vets. It is amazing how far they have all come and to reflect on what an extraordinary team we have.

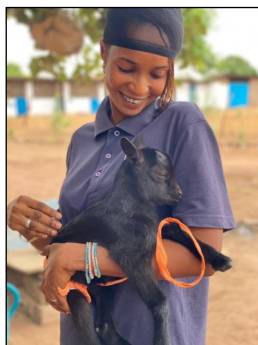
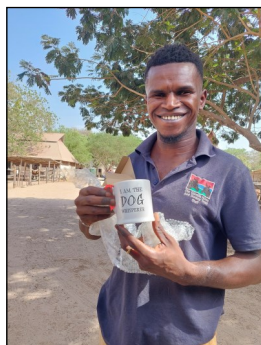
We achieve almost miraculous successes (and some heart breaking losses), but the staff never cease to amaze us with their dedication and skill. They have learned so much from the visiting experts but through observation and experience they have also learned so much themselves and they are willing to go above and beyond for their patients which is why we have such good results. When Emily was so sick, Sainabou, one of our nurses spent every day and night with her. When we have had unpredictable dogs, Moss's calm presence always brings them round and now a growing team of his students are joining him with the dog rehabilitation programme. They always defend the animals with behavioural issues in their care. Dembo leads the equine team by setting a good example and is always the first with the fork when the dreaded job of unloading the hay occurs. Late night call outs or animals in need of 24 hour supervision are always covered and sometimes it is hard to watch how weary they all are but they still continue to take care of the animals.

There are too many members of staff to name them all individually but they all have their own particular skills and together they make a formidable team.

Some have been with my family for 30 plus years, others have only recently joined us and of course there are times when we feel we have to go over certain subjects that need refreshing or when we all become frustrated with one another, but they have all become so competent, give so much to their patients, take learning so seriously with such consistent results that I cannot help but feel proud of them.

None of this would have been possible without all the training provided by our volunteer vets, nurses, farriers, dentists and other visiting experts. You all say that you don't feel you have done much but over the years I have watched the transformation thanks to your efforts and it is HUGE! I thank you sincerely.

*Heather*



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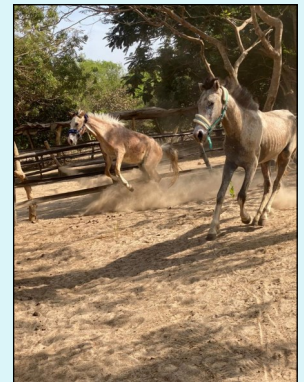
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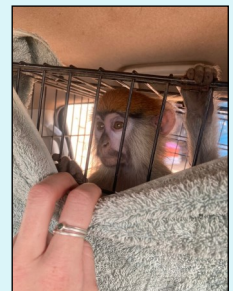
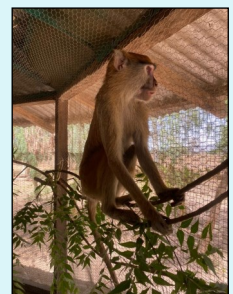
## Stable fire

On Christmas Day we received a call about a dreadful fire up country in which four horses had been badly burned. Our team leapt into action trying to sort out transport from afar to get them to us. It is a long journey lasting several hours and we feared the worst. The volunteers gave up all plans for Christmas Day and set about providing treatment. Two were far more seriously burned than the others but all were serious. We received a lot of help and advice but we really wanted to use what was available locally to demonstrate to our staff and students that we could help them with locally available plants. We fortunately have a wonderful company in The Gambia called **Care for Natural** which makes a lot of nature medicines with plants available in country. Claudette who grows the plants and makes the medicines has achieved great things with human burns patients and works closely with the medical profession. With Claudette's guidance and support and the dedicated round the clock nursing of Emily and our GHDT staff, the animals began to respond but we were devastated when the mare developed tetanus and had to be euthanised. We didn't have too much time to grieve as the other three animals desperately needed our support. Opinions on whether we were doing the right thing were divided and we received some criticism, but we are always guided by the animals and what they tell us. Despite his appalling condition, Matata took over custody of the foal, Zazu, when he had to be separated from his mother as her teats were so badly burned. They seemed to give each other comfort in their hour of need. It took several weeks of really intensive nursing and care but gradually we saw signs of hair regrowing and lifting of spirits. Last week they were all turned out together for the first time and to see the equine version of "Zoomies" and play filled us all with absolute joy and removed any doubts we may have had about whether we had done the correct thing in helping them to survive. They are all fit, well and happy and they will all be capable of working again if needs be. Would we do it again? Of course we would, it was not just the horses that benefitted, we too learned so much from it and to see their Joie de Vivre is sufficient reward for the long hours put in.



## Back to the wild.

Many of you will know of Daynano, the tiny baby Red Patas monkey who came to us with a broken leg. He was nurtured by Emily. Baby monkeys are always attached to their mothers in their early days and in order to bring him up as well as we could, he was initially always attached to Emily. We work closely with The Department of Wildlife and whilst discussing Daynano's future they mentioned that they had two females that they were going for release so arrangements were made for them to come to us to form a small group with Daynano. As soon as they arrived, human contact with Daynano was reduced and he and the two ladies formed a well bonded little group. As I write this, Emily and Eva are with them in the bush up country introducing them to their new life. It is hoped that they will join a wild troop but they may form their own little group. We wish them long and happy lives.



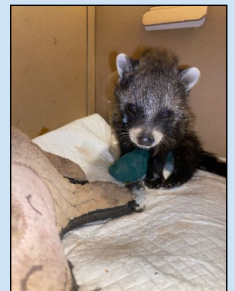
## THE DOG PROJECT

In February we were able to hold the pilot project of the Dog Project and it was extremely successful. There are two parts of the dog project, one is the cool, shady dog paddocks and houses we have built for the dogs that are being rehabilitated. They even have a dog training paddock and agility equipment to use adjoining the area. This facility has been built in memory of Miles Dawson, a great dog lover, who tragically died last year. The other part of the project is being managed by dog behaviourist Ali Scott and involves teaching children in schools how to avoid Rabies through better understanding of dog behaviour. She has developed a series of lessons and the object is to train the teachers. Mention has even been made of including it on the National Curriculum so that every child of school going age has access to the information to help keep themselves safe. We hope to have dog training and fun classes and develop a display team that can visit schools and help children overcome their fear of dogs through better understanding their body language. We are desperately trying to raise the funds to continue with this project so if this project resonates with you, please consider donating and please mark your donation with "Dog Project"



## WILDLIFE

We recently had a young Civet cat brought in with a broken leg. It was a nasty break and amputation was considered but he had youth on his side and cats are notorious for healing well so we gave him a chance and he is making excellent progress.



## JEAN SAINSBURY'S ANIMAL WELFARE AWARD

We have received much support over the years from the Jean Sainsbury Animal Welfare Trust for which we are very grateful. Imagine our delight when we were chosen to be recipients of their 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Awards. Many of you will know that we have had endless problems with our old vehicles, and had sometimes even had to resort to taking taxis to attend to sick animals. I sometimes feel that someone is looking after us because at almost the same time that the award was made, we were notified of a new vehicle that had come into The Gambia that was for sale and the award meant that most unusually, we were in a position to buy it. We have called the vehicle "Jeannie" in acknowledgement of the wonderful lady, Jean Sainsbury whose legacy has helped so many animals across the world. Our sincere thanks go to the Trustees who nominated us.



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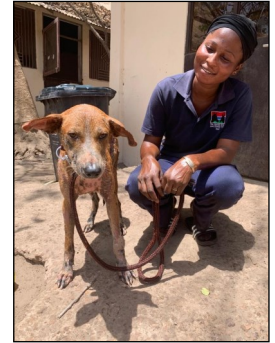
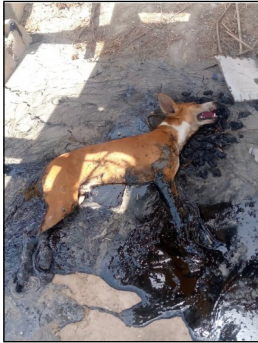
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## TAR MACADAM

Recently we received a call from a lady called Claudia Hoffman who runs a small charity single handed, rescuing and rehoming dogs. We try to help each other as much as possible. We help by neutering her strays and she in turn helps us with sharing donations that she receives from her sponsors in Germany. Claudia had been called to a dog that had been completely encased in tarmac which had hardened around him. She found a friend who helped her to cut the dog out of the now solidified puddle, and bought him to us. No one knows how long he had been lying there in 43 degree heat trapped by the tarmac. He was immediately put on a drip and 6 people set about cleaning him up. It was a long and laborious process and took 6 people almost 24 hours to clean him. He went back to Claudia and has a wonderful home now and he will want for nothing for the rest of his life.



## VET PARTNERS

We were thrilled to be chosen as Vet Partners Charity of the Year for 2023. Vet Partners is a very large veterinary company and owns a great many practices in UK and Europe.

**vetPartners**

It is wonderful to have their support. Some of their vets have already been out to visit us and we hope many more will come in the future. Their practices hold fundraising events for us and Vet Partners match whatever is raised which is very generous of them. It is a wonderful coincidence that Zahra, who came too us from Afghanistan, is also working and studying with them and is loving it. We would like to thank them sincerely on two counts, one for their generous support of our work and two for taking such good care of Zahra who we consider a part of our GHDT family.

## SCAMS

We have been receiving more and more messages from people who have made friends with Gambians on social media enquiring whether we can provide them with a donkey. These kind hearted people want to do their best to help someone they believe is in need. The story given to online "friends" is designed to pull at the heart strings and often has reference to being orphans and needing to educate siblings and they just need a donkey and cart to earn a living. Very often the prices of the donkey and cart are very inflated. We investigated the first few cases and found that they did not want a donkey, had no need for a donkey and only used it as a means of getting money from their "friend" We find it reprehensible that some young Gambians are taking advantage of good kind people to obtain money fraudulently. They are also giving the country a bad name and when people in genuine need of financial help for medical expenses try to get help they are unable to as people now fear it is a scam.

**Please be warned about giving money for donkeys and carts for so called orphans in The Gambia.**

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## BEVA

The British Equine Veterinary Association Trust kindly sent out three vets to help us in February. We were delighted to welcome Markus Wilkie, from Germany back along with Milly and Beckie from the Donkey Sanctuary. It was so good to have three very experienced equine vets to turn to and learn from and we would like to thank them very much for their help. The following is a note that two BEVA funded vets sent following their visit.

*"First of all, we would like to say thank you to all at The Gambia Horse & Donkey Trust as well as the BEVA Trust for kindly supporting the volunteering outreach project. We were absolutely blown away by the dedication of the staff and volunteers of the charity & fell in love with the country and all of the animals within it!*

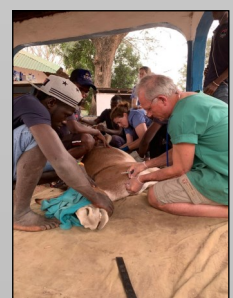
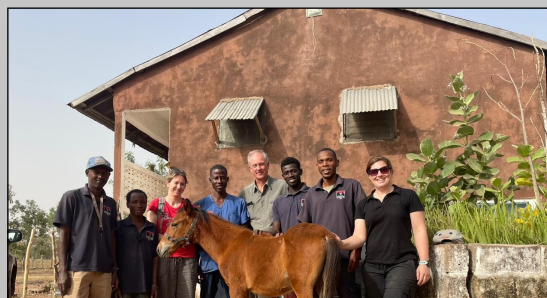
*During our visit, we attended 4 outreach clinics where local people could bring their animal along to be treated. It was fantastic to see so many coming along purely for health checks- they were clearly well cared for and educated that a healthy donkey = a donkey that is able to work more efficiently! Sadly there were many wounds from poorly fitting tack/harnesses and ropes being used as bits or as a way to control the animal by wrapping it around the pastern. It was extremely rewarding to be able to give well-fitted head collars to all animals that needed them. Education was a key part of these clinics- explaining to owners the importance of constant access to water, regular food as well as rest days for their animal in order to retain as much strength as possible. Temperatures peaked to 38 degrees during our visit & that is classed as winter in The Gambia so summertime for us would be almost unbearable!*

*There was always lots to do back at the main hospital. We saw a huge variety of cases from tetanus, to horrific fractures (that would normally be considered catastrophic back at home) to blood borne diseases, particularly trypanosomiasis. The diagnostic aids available to us were understandably limited- we were able to perform a manual PCV, TP & blood smears. All of the staff at the hospital were very keen to learn, always asking questions and keen to learn new skills. We felt as though we learnt a lot from them too- especially how best to handle some of the feisty/stubborn donkeys!*

*We made a 3-day trip 'up country' to the Sambel site, which is a much more rural area & often described as the 'true Gambia'. On our way we stopped off to visit a sick horse and a donkey with terrible fistulas over its withers that unfortunately the owners had been applying engine oil to in order to heal the wounds. Evidently in the blazing sun this had caused even further damage, however we were able to take this donkey back to the hospital with us for treatment and educate the owner on the importance of not applying engine oil to any wound on any animal. After a busy start to our trip we were very excited to find out we were going on a boat trip down the River Gambia & were lucky enough to see hippopotamus (twice!) as well as chimpanzees.*

*It wasn't just horses & donkeys that we treated during our stay at GHDT- we also treated dogs, cats, goats, sheep & cows which as purely equine vets made us scratch our heads at times! The charity does amazing work for all animals within the country and you can tell how much all of the residents mean to the staff and local people.*

*We feel extremely lucky to have been given this opportunity by GHDT & BEVA Trust- it really was a once in a lifetime experience that we will never forget.'*



We are exceptionally lucky to have such lovely supporters. Quite apart from your generous donations of time, money and equipment, your kind words of support when we are going through tough times mean so much to us. If we had to name you all we could fill the whole newsletter and still forget a few, so please know how much we appreciate it. We simply could not do what we do without you.

We would like to give special thanks to The Aqualia Foundation, The British Equine Veterinary Association Trust, The Jean Sainsbury Animal Welfare Trust, Vet Partners, Vets with Horsepower, IMV Imaging, IMS, Aniwell for their donations of Filtabac and The Gambia Experience for kindly donating two return flight tickets for us to raffle. Thanks just not seem enough, none of you will ever really know just how much we appreciate all the help given.

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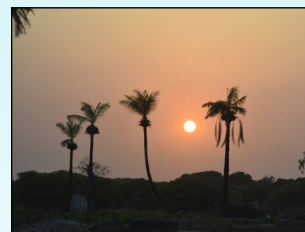
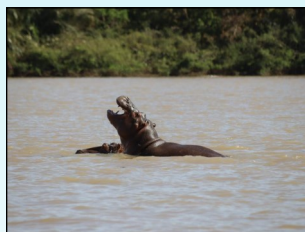
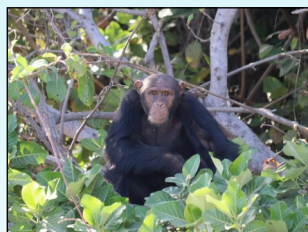
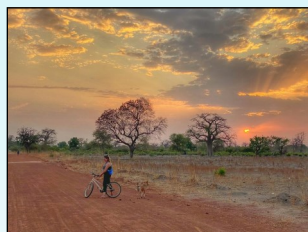
## Education, education, education.

A large part of our work is education. We hold workshops for farmers, we teach when we hold mobile clinics, we have agricultural and livestock students come and gain practical experience with us, we have students from overseas come and learn with us and we are having an increasing number of school visits with up to 100 pupils at a time. The visits need to be fun and we are great believers in the quotation "Tell me and I will forget, show me and I may remember, involve me and I will understand." The children are learning and changing their attitudes so fast now, it is really gratifying to see and we love seeing them interacting with the animals in our care. The camels are particularly good ambassadors. They came to us as timid untouchable creatures but they are now quite sociable and seem to enjoy visitors. Slowly but surely attitudes are changing thanks to the respectful way our staff go about getting their messages across. One child arrived with a fear of dogs and left with a pup snuggled in her arms which she wanted to take home with her! The power of education should never be underestimated.



## How to help

We are frequently asked how people can help us. There are of course all the normal ways such as donating money or equipment or your services which are a huge help to us. There is another possibly more pleasurable way. Most of the problems we see are caused by poverty, so why not consider helping to improve the local economy by visiting Gambia and having a lovely holiday, coming to visit us and see for yourself the work that we do. It is a lovely country and you will learn so much and get a better understanding the problems that the people here encounter.



**In order to reduce costs, we are sending the majority of our newsletters by email. We are still happy to send hard copies if you prefer. We do not have email addresses for everyone so if you want us to continue to send our newsletter please ensure that we have an email for you.**

If you would like to make a donation to the Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust you can do so in a variety of ways: - ONLINE - Via <https://www.justgiving.com/ghdt> or the

'Online Donations' tab on our website - [www.gambiahorseanddonkey.org.uk](http://www.gambiahorseanddonkey.org.uk)

VIA FACEBOOK - Simply click on the 'SHOP NOW' button on our page and follow the instructions

VIA POST - Simply send an old fashioned cheque to our postal address

PAYPAL [ghdt@gambiahorseanddonkey.org.uk](mailto:ghdt@gambiahorseanddonkey.org.uk)



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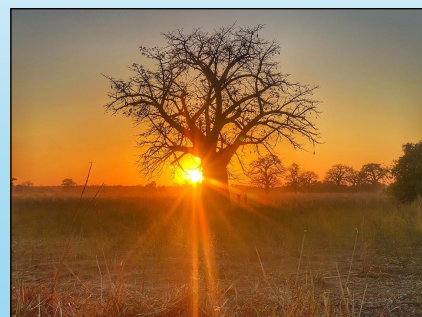
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## ADVENTURE AWAITS....

Do you yearn for a change? Would you like to do something that really makes a difference? We are looking for a vet or nurse with a sense of adventure who would like to join our team for at least a year. You must be well organised, have compassion and empathy and the ability to teach and share your knowledge. Airfares, board and accommodation and generous volunteer allowance will be provided for the right candidate.

We are also looking for an administrator/education officer who would be able to train a Gambian counterpart in the day to day administration procedures as well as help to organise educational workshops, visits and training. Airfares, board and accommodation and generous volunteer allowance will be provided.

Please apply with CV to [ghdtooffice@gmail.com](mailto:ghdtooffice@gmail.com)



## PROJECT DONKEY

For many years we have run the Donkey Project where we will provide a donkey and sometimes a cart or plough to a family that is unable to afford one. Very often this provides them with the means of taking the first step on the ladder out of abject poverty. The recipient of the donkey must come for training in donkey management, provide shelter for the donkey and sign or thumbprint a contract promising never to abuse it. The donkey is visited on a monthly basis and one warning is given if we have any concerns. If on the subsequent visit the matters of concern have not been addressed, the donkey is withdrawn. Two hundred donkeys have gone out now and many of them return to us years later to retire with us. I recall going to visit a man who proudly showed me his new house with a corrugated roof, he told me that his donkey, "Heidi" had enabled him to afford the house. His old house with a thatched roof had now been allocated to Heidi!



## WISH LIST

We are trying to upgrade our laboratory and need a lot of equipment for it. We have many students coming for training and our staff are becoming more able and in need of laboratory information for their patients.

If anyone is upgrading their equipment and has any of the following to spare, we would love to give it a good home. Microscopes, Centrifuge, McMasters slides, Diffquik stains, refractometers, set up for culture sensitivity testing,

Other items on our wish list are as follows.:

Replacement cassettes for X ray, large dog crates, dog bowls, cat litter trays, pony sized headcollars, 4.5" bits, vetwrap bandages, conforming bandages, soffban bandage ,dressings, weigh tapes, stethoscopes, dog muzzles, toys and enrichment for equines and dogs/cats' agility equipment, salt licks, dog collars for small/medium dogs, dog food, vetwrap bandages and of course lots of fundraising please.



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