

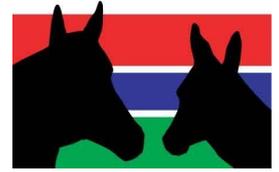


The Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust

Fighting Poverty – Feeding Families

Registered Charity No: 1096814

Spring 2020



We shall survive!



Emily training Mansajang, the blind filly with the assistance of Little Lucky

In these worrying times with many other larger charities in trouble, we would be foolish if we were not seriously worried about our future. We started 18 years ago with two rescued horses, two stables and one member of staff. If we have to, we will reduce what we do, but with your help, we will **NOT** go under if we can possibly help it. We **ARE** making a difference and there have been big changes since we began our work. It would be devastating to let all that go. Unlike many charities, we don't have large overheads, our head office is a shed in the Director's garden, most of the administrative and training work is carried out by volunteers, so we just need to find money for feed, salaries for our Gambian staff, medicines and fuel and maintenance for the vehicles. We would appeal to any veterinary surgeries who may have medication spare after the lockdown to think of us. We are very grateful to the wonderful supporters who have helped so much recently with dog feed and a couple of difficult cases we have had. We simply could not do it without you.

Until the pandemic and lock down, we were incredibly busy. Now we are just busy! A message from Emily gives you an idea of just one day in February.

"Really busy doing treatments, 2 fractures, severed tendons, call out to a dog being stoned, some visitors arrived, then the disabled children from Hart House. They had just gone when 90 children turned up on an unannounced school visit, but the staff rose to the occasion."

It is wonderful that schools love to visit and that the staff take every opportunity to teach the importance of animal welfare.

Since November we have treated 1066 animals, attended 148 call outs, treating many different species both large and small. We provide training for on average 30 University and College students per week during term time. We work in schools, and we welcome and encourage school visits. Our rehabilitated donkeys provide riding and driving for disabled children. We need your support now, more than ever.

Our visiting vets and volunteers get a great deal of experience in a short time, so why not begin planning a visit now? We welcome visitors because we feel that people should be able to see how we use the money donated. There is a special atmosphere at Makasutu in particular, where all the different species of animals seem to get on with each other. We look forward to being able to welcome you back in the future so we shall keep thinking positive thoughts!



She arrived terrified of dogs, but left crying because she wanted to take her new friend home with her.

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Letter from the Director, Heather Armstrong.

Greetings to you,

We are living in strange and troubled times, but we hope our newsletter will lift your spirits a little.

We would like to begin by extending condolences to anyone who has lost a loved one during this pandemic. We also send our commiserations to so many who are living through the loss of their jobs or businesses. The worry is unimaginable. We are a small charity and many of our supporters become our friends too. It saddens us to see their pain - we understand because we are in a similar position.

We seem to be hit from every side with drops in donations, an inability to hold fundraising events, a huge and painful drop in the exchange rate means we get less for our local currency and expenses are increasing in The Gambia. We face tough times, but we are not alone.

We are holding a series of virtual shows on our Facebook page in an attempt to raise money but we would welcome suggestions on novel fundraising ideas. Perhaps you can use this time to sort out your house and sell things for us, sponsor one of our animals, take out a standing order or remember us in your will. We need your help more than ever before if we are going to survive this storm.

Best Wishes and please stay safe.

Heather



WESTMINSTER ABBEY

On Christmas Eve our wonderful donkey Ambassadors here in UK, Smokey and Blue, gave us the thrill of a lifetime. For the very first time in its long history, donkeys were allowed inside Westminster Abbey to attend the Christmas Eve crib service and they did it for our little charity! How wonderful is that? They were driven all the way down from Scotland by their owner, Vicki Edmondson, who is a vet. The day was quite magical, the staff at the Abbey were so incredibly kind and welcoming and the expressions on the faces of the children as the donkeys walked in was a sight to behold! It really made Christmas very special for the several hundred people who attended the service and at the same time raised much needed funds for the charity. If donkeys could be saints Smokey and Blue would be first in line for a sainthood as they were impeccably behaved. We would like to give our very sincere and heartfelt thanks to them and their owner Viki Edmondson and her husband Peter. We would also like to thank everyone at Westminster Abbey for allowing the donkeys in to such an historic building and for giving us all such a lovely welcome, especially The Reverend Jennifer Petersen for the beautiful service which made Christmas feel very special.



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RESCUE EXPLAINED.....

The neglect changes you.
The abuse hardens you.
The suffering breaks you.
The ignorance angers you.
The indifference disturbs you.
The injustice destroys you.

On a daily basis...your faith will be tested.
Your heart will be wounded....
Your soul will be altered.

On a weekly basis...you'll question yourself.
You'll question your strength.
You'll question the world.

On a monthly basis...you'll fall down.
You'll get up.
You'll go on...

On a yearly basis...you'll look back...
You'll see faces...
You couldn't save them.
You'll learn to mourn.
To grieve.
To sob.
You'll learn to trust a little less.
To do a little more.
To fight a little harder.
You'll learn to try.
To hope.
To pray.
You'll learn to fail.
To succeed.
To accept.

You'll learn when to hold on.
When to give up.
When to let go.
You'll learn who you are.
What you stand for.
Why that matters.

Then... at times... you'll forget why you matter.
You'll question what you're doing.
You'll wonder if it's worth it.

But...here's the good news... When you forget...
When you question...
When you wonder...
All you have to do...
Is take a look around...
And you'll see them.

You'll see their faces.
You'll see their smiles.
You'll feel their love.

In their eyes, you'll see their journeys...
You'll remember their beginnings...
You'll know how far they've come...
You'll remember when they didn't know you...
When they didn't trust you...
When they'd given up.

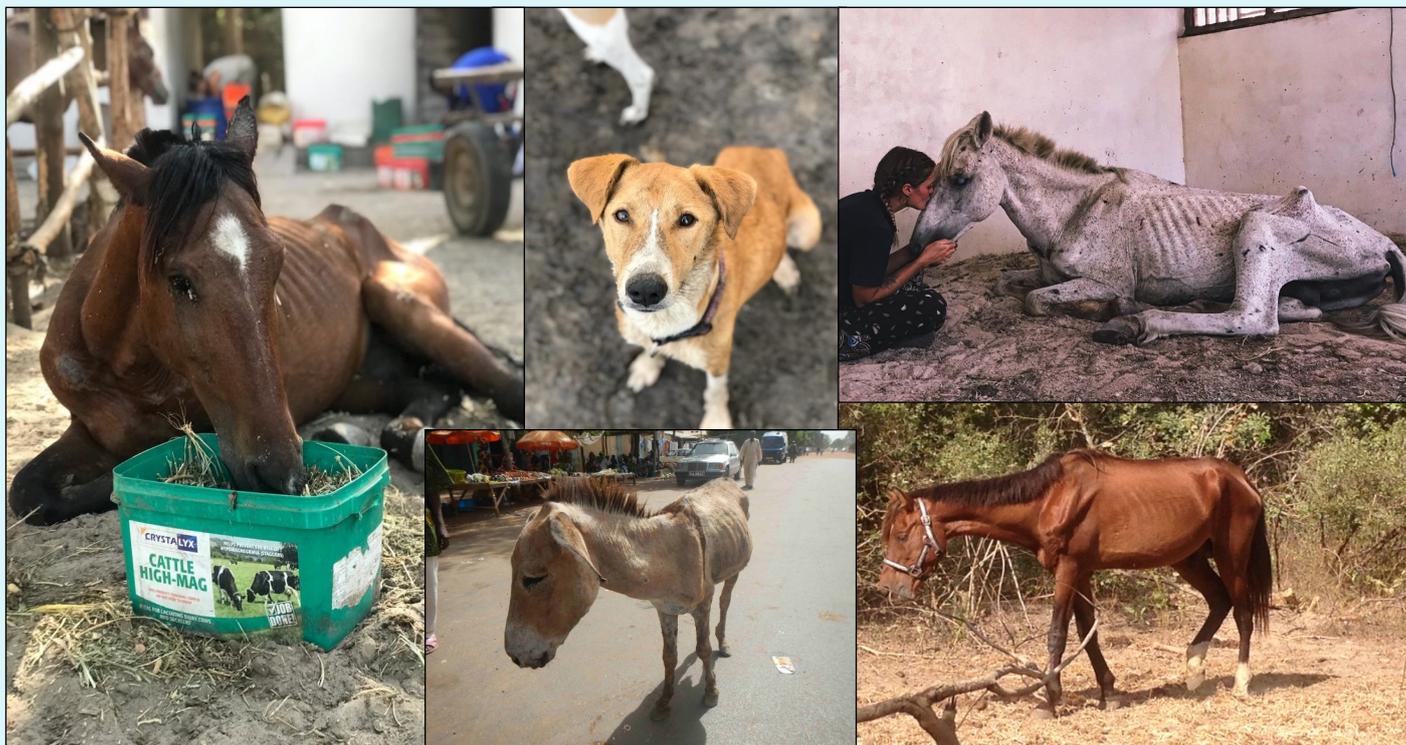
You'll remember how you healed them...
How you loved them...

How they loved you, too.
And as you look back...
You'll want to move forward...
For them... and because of them.

In your darkest hours, you'll look around...
To find the differences made...the hope given...and the lives saved...
Because you existed.
In those moments, when you look into their eyes...every doubt will be erased.
Every question will be answered.
Every worry will subside.
Because in that instant...in each of your hearts...
You both share the very same thought:
"Every bit of pain was worth it...for this moment here with you."
And honestly...no matter what else happens...
Those moments hold all the strength you need...
To keep going.

Rescue is pain.
Rescue is joy.
Rescue is worth it...because they are worth it.
And that's the honest truth.

~ Ashley Owen Hill



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GHDT successes.

Many animals benefit from our help. Since January our hospital has averaged 45 donkeys, 14 horses , 4 camels, 8 sheep/goats, 10 cats an 28 dogs, per month, - that is a lot of feed!

Here are just some of their stories:

Steve

Came to us in a very sorry state. He had suffered from a fistulous wither from poor harnessing. His owner was advised to “fire” it by putting hot irons on it. Steve quite naturally struggled and was burnt in several different parts of his body and during the struggle fractured his elbow. He arrived with us mentally and physically traumatised. Splinting his leg was challenging and required utmost care and skill as the leg was so badly burned. We are very pleased to say that Steve made a fantastic recovery and is now a happy and healthy donkey.



Yellow

Came to us in very emaciated condition, we thought we would give him the benefit of the doubt and see if he would recover, but whatever we tried seemed to make no difference. In December a shipment arrived with a donation of EquidGel and Alfalfa nuts and we thought we would try him on these. With TLC and good food and making sure he was not chased off his feed, Yellow thrived and though he is not the best example of good conformation, he has stolen all our heart and we are delighted with his progress.

Buba

Came to us with tetanus, he was an extremely sick little donkey and suffered awful muscle spasms. It was fortuitous that Andrew and Luise Harrison who were vets sponsored by the BEVA trust, were with us at the time. With excellent veterinary care and good nursing by the staff, he has made a full recovery and is doing remarkably well.



Rocket

Had apparently become “vicious” and had bitten 8 people. He was loved by his family and he loved them in return, but he was taunted and teased by people in the neighbourhood and something inside him snapped. When he came to us we put him in a kennel where he hid at the back and snarled at everyone as he was so afraid. We let him know we would not invade his space and little by little he began to come forward and watch the people and dogs in our yard and would even eat out of our hand. Sainabou, one of our nurses, took time to gain his trust and gradually she was able to handle him and walk him. He has been accepted by the other dogs and is now part of the Makasutu pack, living happily together. He loves people and attention and is enjoying his life once more.



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The power of good intensive care nursing.

One day we received a message from a charity called PAW that some dogs had been poisoned on a beach and had severe neurological problems. They had been taken to two local veterinary surgeries. They had all eaten a dead turtle and it was thought that they had botulism poisoning. There were six of them and the vets did not have the necessary staff to give them the round the clock intensive care nursing that we knew they would require if they were to survive. Botulism is used in germ warfare and paralyses the whole body and patients eventually die of asphyxiation as their lungs fill up with fluid and they can no longer breathe .



Our staff at Makasutu rose to the challenge and undertook to try and nurse them. Sadly one died at the vets and one, Atlantic, died shortly after arrival with us, but the staff, led and directed by Emily, immediately set about draining the fluid that had built up in their lungs. They continued to do this every 15 minutes or so until the fluid stopped building up. The staff were divided up into teams who worked around the clock so dogs were never without a nursing team to help them. Danielle Barnes, who is a physiotherapist in UK, designed a rehabilitation programme for them and the dogs received physiotherapy at intervals day and night. They had everything we could give them including a homemade hydrotherapy pool.

Slowly but surely there were little signs of recovery and, after three weeks, three of the four dogs with us were able to return to their homes on the beach where they are doing well. The fourth dog, Simba, took much longer to recover and during his rehabilitation, he formed a very strong bond with Emily who just kept willing him on. Although he is fully mobile now, it is clear that he will have ongoing special care needs. His owner, who was very fond of him and visited regularly, fully appreciated his needs and selflessly and very generously signed Simba into the ownership of GHDT as he felt we were better able to meet his ongoing health needs. The teams we understandably shattered by the time the dog were fully recovered, but they learned so much about intensive care nursing and they should be justifiably proud of their achievements. A huge thank you to each and every member of the team.



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Miracles happen when you refuse to give up.

Little Mo was seen hobbling across the road by our team as they rushed to an emergency. He had a very nasty fractured leg which he had apparently sustained at least two weeks before, when he had been hit by a car. His owner did not know who to contact for help. Emily felt he deserved a chance to live. He had survived so long in excruciating pain and living on what rubbish he could. He was pooping out plastic for days after his arrival. The pictures will tell the story. He is now without a splint and we are working on strengthening his tendons. He has been an excellent patient and we feel that if we asked him, he would confirm that it has been worth the 12 weeks of restriction to be healed.



Little Mo on arrival at Makasutu

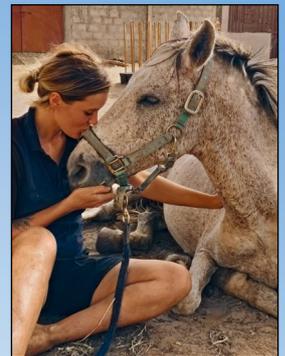


Little Mo now



Emily

In December we welcomed Emily as our long term volunteer. Emily is a qualified veterinary nurse with a passion for animals. She is totally dedicated and has an incredible capacity for hard work. She is also delightfully eccentric and now has the entire staff singing to distressed animals, but it works! In the short time she has been with us she has transformed the place and has inspired the staff. We now have “enrichment” as part of our daily routine where the animals are pampered, played with, trained or exercised. We have an enrichment paddock for the youngsters, the



fitter horses are taken to the river most evenings for fun and a bit of muscle building exercise and the dogs now expect their daily outing to the river and run beside the horses like a pack of happy hounds. The animals are happy and fulfilled. With the recent Corvid-19 problems, the charity fully understood that she may prefer to return to UK to be with her family and offered her the option of returning. Her response was that she could not possibly leave the staff and animals at such a time. She chose instead to instil safety measures to try and keep everyone safe. A member of staff of this calibre is worth a small fortune, but she chooses to be a volunteer and she is making such a huge difference to the lives of both humans and animals. **Thank you Emily!**



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Closed borders but open hearts. (A letter from some unexpected but very welcome guests)

Five months ago we started an adventure of a life time. From the far north of the Netherlands my fiancé Alex, our lovely dog Maysie and I, set off in our truck named Toto on a road trip via the west coast of Africa all the way down to Cape Town. Little did we know (I mean who did?) that during our trip we would be faced with a pandemic and that closed borders would force us to pause our overland travel for a while. We decided to make the most of our time here and are very grateful to have met Emily and her dedicated, wonderful team at the Horse and Donkey Trust who welcomed us stranded overlanders with open arms. For the time being we are camping out in the GHDT back yard. We have a wake-up view on the horses and donkeys, gladly share our breakfast with them and we are very excited to assist the team as volunteers in the awesome work they are doing.

For me, growing up with horses and loving them since I could barely walk, being on the compound and working with the animals is a dream come true. I currently focus, after the everyday jobs, on working and training with Xavi, Mansa and Scout. We are teaching Xavi how to long reign, lunge and prepare him so that he can be a riding horse. It will be amazing when the kids and the team can go riding with him. He is very gentle, beautiful and he loves to work.

Scout is a wonderful young horse who loves to test you out. We are currently teaching him that it is better to walk next to you rather than throwing his front or his back legs up in the air in excited play. When Scout is more used to this we will start breaking him in too so he can join with Xavi on rides to the river.

Mansa is this beautiful, white mare that was born blind. Without the GHDT she wouldn't have stood a chance here in The Gambia and I can't believe how gentle she is. We are building up trust and teaching her to respond to voice commands so that in the future she can work with disabled kids as a therapy horse.

Alex in the mean time has been working hard to build a goat pen, a chicken coop (including chicken Spa - how luxurious) and a sling to hoist equines with a broken leg up to provide them the needed support. The goats were happy to move from the indoor stable to their new play area.

After a nice and intense day we love to sit back with a cold drink, gather and play football with the team, go for a horse ride or take the 20+ dogs on a walk to the river.

Being here and working with the animals is extremely rewarding but at times also very confronting.

The patients that come in receive the best medical care and the most love that they can get, but it is heart breaking to see the state in which some of the donkeys and horses come in. It is important to realise how much work still needs to be done in changing hearts and minds here in The Gambia on how to treat equines.

They really form the pillar on which a big part of the society is built in particular agriculture and transport. Next to saving the horses and donkeys in need, the educational work of GHDT is therefore invaluable to help in the realisation that by caring better for animals you can take better care of yourself and your family. For us it is an honour to play a small role in this. We could not have wished for a better place in West Africa to be stuck then right here with the great, open hearted team of the GHDT.

Love, Renske



BEVA TRUST

We are so very lucky to have the support of The British Equine Veterinary Association Trust who have sent out two groups of vets since our last newsletter and both have been wonderful. In December two vets and a nurse, Paul Martynski, Joana Bourbon and Jessica May visited. They helped in so many ways and Paul managed to get our X-Ray machine and ultrasound machines repaired, pure genius!



In February Andrew and Luise Harrison, a husband and wife vet team joined us. They worked incredibly hard and we had the added bonus that Andrew loved cooking, so we ate really well! Many of the visiting vets say that they gained more than they gave, but the legacy they leave in terms of education and training is priceless. We are very grateful to both the BEVA Trust and the vets who volunteer their services, it is having a lasting impact on animal health and welfare in The Gambia.

SPONSORSHIP

After the equine flu epidemic last year we were left with a number of animals that have been abandoned by their owners who thought they would die. Many of the rehabilitated and unclaimed animals go out as project donkeys to help other farmers but inevitably we have been left with a few permanent residents. These may not be able to work normally but they earn their keep as therapy donkeys for disabled children or for children from surrounding towns and villages who come to spend their spare time playing donkey ball or exercising them and building bonds so that the animal welfare message is passed on to future generations. We have a similar problem with dogs, many strays are brought to us and where we can we will rehome them, two are even going to Holland! However there are a small nucleus that it would not be possible to rehome either on medical or temperament grounds. If you would like to sponsor a horse, donkey or dog, and know that you are making a difference to the life of a particular animal, please have a look at our website. We have two methods of sponsorship, if you want to be the sole sponsor of an animal it is £40 per month or for £3 per month, you can share the sponsorship with others.

THANK YOU.....

Thank you. We have too many people to thank individually, but to each and every person who contributes to us either with money, time or donated goods, we give you our sincere and heartfelt thanks. We are incredibly grateful to the following companies who have given us so much help, IMV Imaging who provided us with our X-ray and give us so much support from a distance, we could not fault the service they provide, Kruise who have been very generous with supplies of veterinary equipment, Equidigel, for donations of their incredible feed product that helps to rehydrate and nourish some of our sickest patients, Durham Rosettes who provide the rosettes for our show each year and Gambia Experience for supporting us in so many different ways, the BEVA Trust for their incredible support. Last but not least Peter and Viki Edmondson, Smokey and Blue and the staff of Westminster Abbey for making Christmas so very special.



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