

Tower Hill Stables Animal Sanctuary

Newsletter 2023



Tower Hill Stables Animal Sanctuary is based in Essex and provides care and a home for life to around 500 rescued animals. Founded in 1993 by Fiona Oakes it now spans 4 locations and is home to over 100 horses, around 100 pigs, 90 sheep, 52 cows, plus goats, turkeys, chickens, ducks, two 2 swans and a naughty bear called Percy! 😊

How time flies! Seems like we are still waiting for Summer to arrive yet here we are all of a sudden at the end of another year with a new one waiting patiently just around the corner.

It's been another challenging year during which we have continued to feel the ongoing impact of the cost-of-living crisis following the lockdown years which has resulted – and continues to do so – in an overall reduction of support. This coupled with the fabulous *increase* in feed prices has put the Sanctuary under considerable pressure.

We have managed to stay afloat this year – as in 2022 - thanks to our reserves and of course the fabulous support from our followers and members. This year we launched a number of new initiatives to help raise funds which you can read about in the following pages.

The year started sadly with the loss of Mr Pluto the Great Dane who reached the grand age of 12. Pluto had lived with us for several years, moving in shortly after we acquired the new farm site. He was a lovely soul and is sorely missed – Great Danes like many large breed dogs don't live very long compared to say a smaller dog. 7 to 10 years is the average for them, so reaching 12 was a very good age. It's the same with horse as small ponies can reach into their 40's whereas a Shire will be doing very well to reach 20 years.

In February, one of our supporters, Hollie, organised a fund raiser to make some improvements to the main pig field where the majority of our rescued pigs live.





We wanted to build some more houses to give the pigs more places to choose from when they needed shelter. The funds were raised and we managed to build a HUGE extension to one of the existing houses as well as improve access to the field itself as next year we plan to make further improvements that will need a lot of machinery.



Now we have a 12-foot gate installed, so that will make the access feasible for the diggers – this won't happen until the Summer, but we are of course always trying to plan ahead.

On the subject of Piggies – one of the sanctuary icons – Florence - went to sleep in February also which was very sad as she was so loved by all the volunteers and everyone who met her.

Florence had lived most of her life at the Sanctuary having been taken in as a youngster. She had been purchased as a house pet but the family said she couldn't stay and so she was taken in by the Essex Wildlife Hospital and from there she was rehomed with us at Tower Hill Stables where she lived for many years.

Florence is very much missed.

Pricilla Pig had been looking for a home and found sanctuary at the Stables. She had previously been a house pig, but had then moved to a shed, but was now desperate to find a new home. She has her own area at the sanctuary as she is too used to being on her own. We have tried to integrate her with the stables pig gang, but she really wasn't having it and got too upset to the point that we had to give in – fighting is very common when introducing pigs and given her age and the fact she was so used to being alone, we decided not to continue – she is near the other pigs and she can see the sheep and horses and gets a lot of visits from the Geese and the hens!



Also, in April we said goodbye to one of our eldest residents. Dream the Arab pony. She was 30 years old and was one of the first horses we ever rescued back in 1993 (*Image, Fiona with her back in '93*)



Dream was the last of the animals that originally moved in with us when we acquired Tower Hill Stables in 1996.

Even at 30 years old she still looked like a foal to us. She will always be remembered.

In May we made the strategic decision to withdraw from 2 of the yards that we rent. In case you are not aware of the history, the Sanctuary started at the Asheldham location and after we had no further room there, we started to rent other local yards – over the next few years we were renting FOUR more yards and

then in 2018 we acquired the new Farm site up at Bradwell.

The animals at the yards concerned were integrated at the Bradwell site and one of the other satellite yards. On the right you can see Katy & Hercules who are now fully combined with the main herd in Bradwell.

In May we also had to deal with our 4 yearly TB testing for all the cows we look after – some 52! For those who are not aware, ALL cows in the UK are subject to TB testing on a periodic basis. Depending on whereabouts you are in the UK your Cows may need to be tested every 4 years or at much shorter frequencies – it all depends on how much TB is in the local environment. Thankfully we are in a 4-year test zone so we don't have to do this every year – thank goodness.



It is however a MAMMOTH task as of course cows on farms are used to being ordered about and respond to the cattle handler and are used to being confined in a crush or other equipment and so it's not a major issue for them to accommodate – However, our sanctuary cows are a totally different matter as they are NOT used to being handled, (we let them live as naturally as possible) they have their own minds and will not be ordered about – AND most are absolutely massive.

The vet will not administer the TB test unless the cow in question is safely secured in a crush – which is all very well assuming you have a cow who is willing to cooperate and of course a big enough crush!

We do have a crush, but its only designed for a typical farm cow and the majority of our boys & girls will not fit in it – Plus of course there are the Highlands to consider as they can't get in a normal crush as their horns will not allow them to do so.

So, what to do?

We had to enlist the help of a specialist – and there aren't many about – but a chap from North Lincs has all the necessary equipment and offers a mobile service. His team arrived to set up bringing with them their extra-large crush and their Highland crush and they spent the day setting up. Meanwhile we had to “persuade” the Highlands to come in from their field (which wasn't easy) and into their barn where at one end their crush was being erected, whilst all the other cows had to be separated from the horses and positioned so that they could be marshalled through their barn and into the extra-large crush – trust me, it was a logistical nightmare.

AND you don't have to do this just once – oh no – First each animal must go through the crush and be injected in the neck with 2 types of TB – Avian TB and also Bovine TB. Then the thickness of the skin is measured with a calliper at the injection site and a note made thereof.

3 days later the whole process needs to be repeated so that the thickness of the skin at both injection sites can be measured. Any significant reaction causes a bump and hence a bigger reading and this, depending on whether it's the avian bump or the bovine one, indicates whether the cow is deemed to be a “reactor”.

This is the last thing one wants to hear as where reactors are found, they are retested and if still positive are culled – and there is nothing we can do about it 😞

Thankfully we had no reactors – although you can imagine the incredible stress this all causes.

One additional massive chunk of stress on the day was that Woody Woodstock proved to be too big for even the extra-large crush, and unfortunately, he got himself stuck in it and then disaster struck as he fell down and was unable to get up 😞 The sides of this crush were smooth welded metal sheets so could not be dismantled and he was totally wedged.

The vet didn't think we would get him up and was thinking about letting him go, but we managed to get some straps round him and thanks to the incredible driving skills of our friend



Joey and his forklift we slowly, slowly managed to ease him out – much to the astonishment of the testing team.

Once out he had a drink and some grub, but still stayed down. We were very worried he still wouldn't make it, but 5 minutes later he was up & had wandered off 😊

Commercial cattle equipment is just not geared for sanctuary animals – especially the bullocks – who, if left to live, can grow to an enormous size

Woody (left) is at 25% of his target and [really needs your help to save his home](#)

It was important that we completed the TB testing ahead of letting the gang out into the fields at the farm site where they have around 40 acres of grazing, as once out in the fields it would be nigh on impossible to get them all back into the yard for testing purposes as some are very stubborn – Benny in particular will only go where Benny wants to go and as a very large Hereford - who are we to argue?

Letting the gang out was a joy to behold and the Video is still pinned to the top of our wall on our [Facebook page](#) with some fabulous arial photography courtesy of one of our drone equipped volunteers – Jel.

As I mentioned at the outset of this newsletter, our financial situation continued to deteriorate through 2023 and one of the initiatives we put in place to try and combat this was an idea presented by the Cows.

They knew that Fiona had completed the notorious Marathon des Sables some 3 times - that's 250 km across the Sahara carrying all your supplies on your back in up to 50 degrees centigrade, so they thought they could organise something along these lines themselves and call it the Marathon des Cows.

The position was that we were going backwards each month by around £6,000 - i.e., feed costs were exceeding donations each month by this much. So, the cows figured that if each of them could raise £100 a month in sponsorship, that would bring in an extra £5,200 a month which would go a long way towards closing this funding gap.

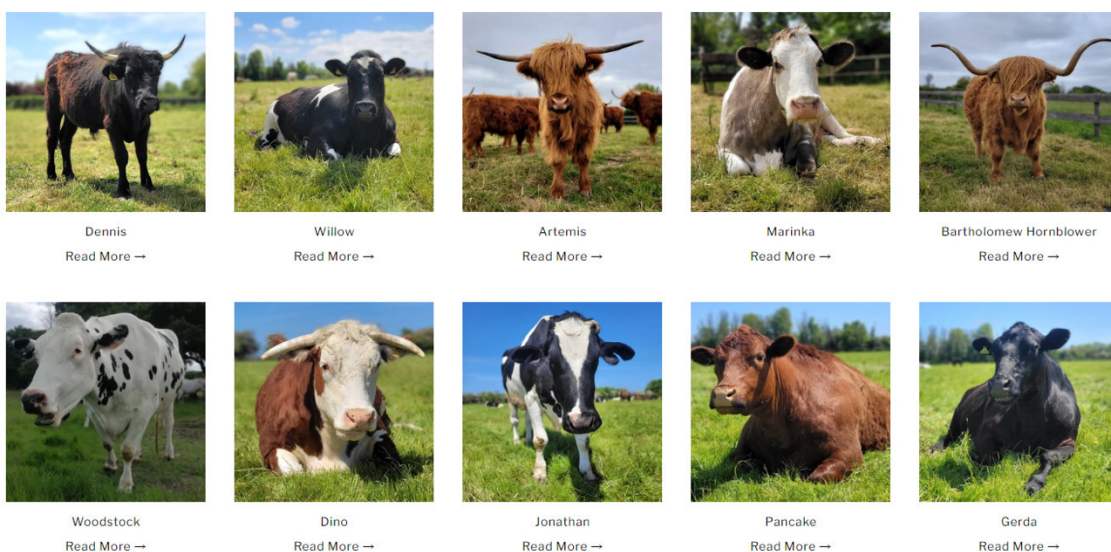
We sat down to discuss the details and soon realised that none of them were very keen to run a marathon each day, nor did they fancy carrying all their supplies on their backs and as for actually travelling to Morocco, well that was right out the window. However, they thought that their own marathon efforts could be more along the lines of say doing a lot of grazing

and extra snoozing and walking about in the fields a LOT - and so as seeing this was more or less *pretty much close* to the marathon des sables agenda, we went with it.

And so, the [website](#) was duly updated and each *Cowpetitor* had their own page set up together with a score in percentage terms which showed how much had been pledged by supporters towards their £100 target.

Below is a screen shot of what you can see of the website – this just shows 10 of the 52 and when you click on the picture online, you can read about each cow and how they were rescued

The scheme is still live today and so far 320 individual Cowpetitor sponsorships have been taken out raising an extra £2,300 per month with 9 of the 52 Cows in the scheme having



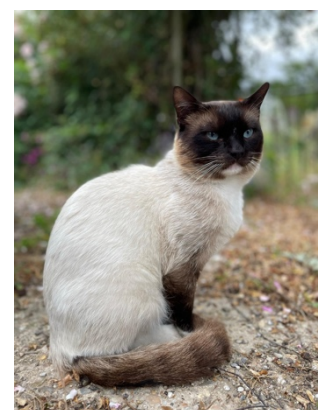
reached their target of £100 (or more) per month) The other 43 are still out on the course looking for sponsors to help them – from just £1 a month – to move close to reaching their targets.

Here is the link for the website page where you can see every cow and how they are doing 😊
[Marathon Des Cows — Tower Hill Stables Animal Sanctuary](#)

The scheme has helped close the funding gap by around 38% so we still need to find a lot more regular monthly support if we are to keep the animals in their forever home.

Atomic Kitten made an appearance at the Bradwell site in the Summer – we have no idea where he came from, he was very thin and very wild.

However, he decided that he liked patrolling the site and so he moved in. It took around 5 months for him to allow human contact and he has put on weight and looks much healthier

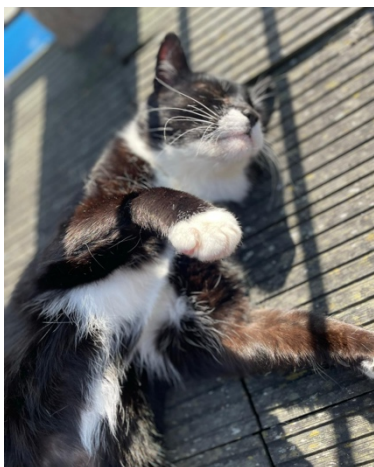


In July we had the Sheep Shearer in – always a big job with over 70 sheep in the main herd. The others live at other sites, and we shear those ourselves, but tackling 70 is too many and a professional is called for. We have used the same team for 3 years now and they are great with the animals – clearly the sheep are not keen, but it is important to shear the fleece to help them manage the warm weather but also and probably more importantly to reduce the risk of parasites in the wool – maggots can cause significant damage and even death if not spotted and removed, but with closely shaved sheep in the warmer months, the risk is greatly reduced.

As readers will probably already know, Fiona, our founder is a multiple Guinness World Record holding athlete with no less than 4 world records in endurance sport to her name. You may also be aware that Fiona is not on social media herself, her admin bear Percy looks after the Facebook and Instagram pages, however Fiona is on another platform called [Patreon](#).

On this platform Fiona publishes videos pretty much every day – often 4 or 5 a day – all about her work with the animals at the main farm site, details of what she eats and how her mum prepares the food and of course training updates and tips plus her general thoughts on what may be happening in the world at any time.

To see these videos (well over 600) you will need to subscribe to [Patreon](#) to become a “Patron” but we have kept the minimum to just £1 with all the funds raised helping to run the sanctuary. So far there are around 170 patrons :)



In October one of our rescued cats Mr Biscuit – known by all who visit the Asheldham site - became quite unwell and had to go to the vet.

It turned out that he needed several teeth out and several tests as his glands were up. It's been a long road for him and he is not completely back to normal, but he is now eating more and his neck glands appear to have receded which is fantastic news

– he is however quite a bit older than we had thought – always difficult to tell with a rescue. The vet guessed about 15. Huge thanks to all who helped with his vet fees appeal at the time.

This year we were able to give a home to several racehorses who would otherwise been sent to slaughter taking our numbers of these beautiful animals to 12.

Racehorses are much ‘finer’ horses than the bulk of our rescued horses and need a greater degree of special care – Fiona talks about this a lot in her Patreon videos. We also took in a number of Cockerels and a Turkey called Delilah



One Cockerel of particular note arrived in the late Summer with Delilah the Turkey and had come all the way from Newcastle as no home could be found locally – nor anywhere between!

His name is Victor and he is a very beautiful bird as you can see – he does however only operate in 2 different modes. Mode 1 is “Sleep mode”, where – unless – disturbed – he is very peaceful – however mode II is “Stealth Ninja Attack & Destroy” mode – *which is not without some degree of complication.*

In this mode of operation, Victor will act all friendly on approach, but when one is a few yards past him & walking away he tends to launch himself at the back of your legs. He generally only goes for people he’s not on first name terms with – so is kind of a guard

Cockerel lol. He gets on great with the other birds and I’ve not seen him attach another Cockerel. He says he will calm down soon.

Moving towards the end of the year, Fiona decided to try something new to help raise much needed support for the gang. Last Christmas Eve she ran 52 miles, but this year inspired by Vernon Kay’s 100 miles in 4 days which he ran to raise funds for Children in Need, Fiona decided to run 20 miles a day – every day – from the 1st of December to Christmas day – some 500 miles – a mile for each rescued animal in our care



Vernon has a slightly larger reach than we do and managed to raise £5.8 million for Children, we set our target at 0.1% of that for the Animals at £5.8K

The good news is that a supporting organisation offered to DOUBLE what was raised to a max of £10K AND we did just that – raising £10,765 as I type, which will be £20,675 with the matching 😊 You can still support it [here](#).

This is great news, but as I mentioned earlier with the monthly shortfalls as they are – some £50k + a year, it does put in into perspective. However, we will keep going as long as we are able 😊

How Can I Help?

On our website www.towerhillstables.org you will see in the menu a “How to Help” link which has links to all the various ways you can help us with the feed costs.

Our average weekly feed cost is £4,600 add to this the satellite yard rents, farrier costs, vets fees, farm maintenance, bedding straw, muck heap removal, disposal costs and projects/improvements etc its easy to see how our monthly costs top £30,000 which works out at **just £2 per day per rescue**

One of the best ways to help is to become a monthly supporter which you can do from just £1 either by PayPal or direct to our account by Standing Order. On the [donate page](#) of the website you will find donorboxes set up for a variety of different currencies allowing you to donate in local currency if you live outside the UK

We have a [Tee Mill store](#) where you can buy sanctuary tee shirts and other items also we have the [Easyfundraising scheme](#) whereby once you sign up, and then buy anything online from one of the retailers in the scheme (there are thousands!) then you generate a small commission for the animals – doesn't cost you anything.

43 of the Cows still need to reach their targets which you can review at [this link here](#) and also the 12 racehorses would love to hear from anyone willing to help them on a monthly basis – their stories are currently being published on our FB page and in the IG & FB stories

People genuinely don't think that £1 a month would make a difference – yet if 25% of our Facebook followers did just £1 a month, the sanctuary would close its funding gap instantly and the animals future would be secure

Have a Happy New Year all!

Love from Fiona, Percy, Meg & Martin
& the Tower Hill Volunteers



Pic – Fiona celebrates her 500 miles in December

Bank Details for Standing Order or Ad Hoc Transfers

Account Name – Tower Hill Stables

Sort Code 09-01-26

Account Number – 58622475

PayPal e mail – Fiona@towerhillstables.org

[Our Tee Mill Store](#)

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[Buy Fiona's Book](#)

[Marathon Des Cows Page](#)

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