RSPCA

IN

International News

THE RSPCA NEWSLETTER FOR ANIMAL WELFARE ORGANISATIONS OVERSEAS

Spring/Summer 2012

Jackie Hickman

RSPCA Inspector Jackie Hickman at Appleby Horse Fair.

Mounting concern for equine welfare

Since the RSPCA was set up in 1824 a large proportion of our work has involved equines (horses, donkeys and ponies) but we are currently seeing a steady increase in their mistreatment and abandonment.

By 16 February this year, we had received 122 complaints about abandoned equines; last year we received 120 over the whole of January and February. In 2011 we found new homes for 240 horses, which was a large increase on the 156 horses rehomed in 2010. This extra need doesn't come cheaply – there are still 500 horses being boarded on behalf of the RSPCA, with the costs of rehabilitating each animal often exceeding £5,000.

Jackie Hickman is a professional farrier and RSPCA inspector, and worked with RSPCA International to deliver training in Japan in 2009 and 2011. We talked to her about her work with equines in the UK and the challenges she faces.

"The value of horses has dropped significantly and some sell at market for less than the price of a bag of feed," reports Jackie. "Some owners often become overwhelmed by the costs involved in keeping equines and can't afford to feed and care for them, which results in their welfare standards dropping."

Types of horses and the environments in which they are kept range from thoroughbred racehorses to tethered gypsy ponies. Some are used for competitions or pleasure riding, while others are kept as pets and do little or no daily work. A major problem is the huge number of horses kept on chain tethers, often on council or common land with little to no provision made for their welfare. Although tethering in itself is not illegal, it requires careful management to ensure the welfare needs of a horse are met. There are at least 3,500 tethered horses at any one time in the UK, and the number of calls we received regarding their welfare increased by around 21 percent in 2011.

Although all RSPCA field staff respond to complaints in relation to equines, the Society also has a team of specialist equine officers. Jackie explains their role: "This team is usually the first port of call for field staff when assistance is required in any equine-related matter. This ranges from providing advice, to overseeing and assisting with the removal and care of equines subject to cruelty case investigations. Equine officers also provide support at major national horse events and fairs."

The largest of these is Appleby Horse Fair, held every June in Cumbria. Thousands of travellers attend from all over Europe, many arriving in horse-

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Phil Wilson/RSPCA

‹ Man riding a pony in the River Eden at Appleby Horse Fair.

drawn wagons, and huge crowds gather to watch. The RSPCA provides a team of more than 30 uniformed inspectors, which works alongside the police, a team of equine vets and other equine charities to monitor the fair both day and night.

A huge variety of equines can be seen at the fair – there are numerous trotting or pacing horses, driving horses, ponies of all shapes and sizes, and donkeys. Although this is predominantly a horse fair, other animals can also be a cause for concern, especially puppies brought to the event to be sold illegally.

Problems encountered at the fair include horses and carts involved in collisions; tethering injuries; accidents during transportation; injuries sustained in the river; ill-fitting tack rubs and harnesses; wounds; colic; choke; cuts; and trauma-related injuries. "Hundreds of horses are taken to the event for trading and during the week horses are driven, often at speed, along a closed-off road known as the 'flashing lane'. This is a known accident hotspot and we are usually on site immediately to deal with any casualties or welfare concerns," says Jackie.

Each day, horses are taken into the river running through Appleby town for washing and occasionally for swimming. Jackie says that this activity is closely monitored in case any horses appear at risk while in the water, as horses have drowned in the past. "Every morning

Andrew Forsyth/RSPCA Photolibrary

^ Horses pulling a cart at Appleby Horse Fair.

before the activities begin, RSPCA inspectors trained in water-rescue clear the river of any debris or articles that could be hazardous to the horses. Any person seen mistreating a horse is dealt with on the spot, with advice given or, in more serious cases, the instigation of a cruelty case investigation.

"Horse owners are generally accepting of our presence, however some can become very confrontational and abusive, especially when their animals are seized because of cruelty. Fortunately the police are supportive of our activities," Jackie concludes.

Jackie has also been involved in a new initiative called the Equine Link Project. The first two-day event was a tremendous success, with the RSPCA and local police teaming up to tackle problems associated with numerous welfare and straying issues within an area of the West Midlands.

Their first step involved liaising with the horse-owning community and assessing the situation. Although the majority of the horses involved spend their lives tethered on chains, there have been cases of some escaping onto busy roads. In addition, it is a legal requirement within the UK for each equine to have a valid passport before it can be moved or sold. This now includes the requirement to be microchipped – a procedure that can only be performed by a veterinary surgeon.

"It was apparent during the initial assessment that almost none of the horses checked had a microchip or passport and it was also clear that some owners did not understand the concept of routine worming," says Jackie. At the first event, horse owners were invited to bring their horses along on either day for a welfare check by an equine vet, worming, microchipping, passport application and financial assistance for castration, if required. A minimum fee was requested to cover costs, then a donation was optional.

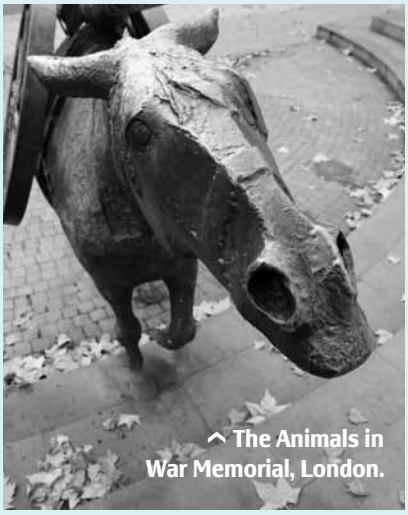
Several charities that are members of the National Equine Welfare Council participated. The RSPCA provided three inspectors and the microchips, and despite the cold and wet weather a staggering 103 horses attended.

The next stage is to organise educational events providing equine welfare advice within the communities. It is hoped this will be rolled out across England and Wales as a proactive scheme to address welfare concerns before they become a problem. This is in line with the Society's aim of preventing cruelty before it happens.

There is more information on equine care on our website: **www.rspca.org.uk/allaboutanimals/horses**

Message
from the editor

This issue of *International News* (IN) focuses on equine issues. We look at specialist activities that the RSPCA undertakes (page 1) and a high-profile prosecution regarding cruelty towards equines (page 7). The Horse Protection Society from Lithuania talks to us this month about its work in News from you (page 5) and we've received some great feedback from you on the Spring/Summer 2011 issue of IN, especially about managing stray dog populations (page 4). News from the UK (page 6) takes a step back in time to look at the role of horses in the First World War – an extended version of this story can be found in the winter 2011 issue of *Animal Life* magazine. Equine issues are topical at the moment with the release of the film *War Horse*, which highlights the strong human-animal bond and our responsibilities towards animals.



Andrew Forsyth/RSPCA Photolibrary

^ The Animals in War Memorial, London.

Updates

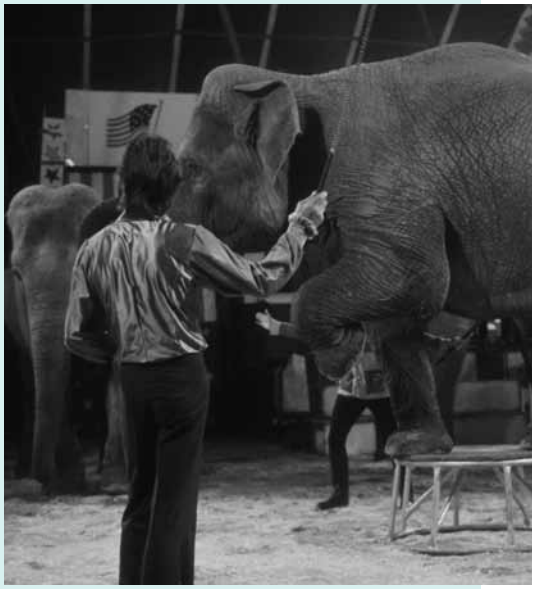
Following on from our article on circuses in IN Autumn/Winter 2010 there have been exciting developments in the UK and internationally. On 1 March 2012, the government in England announced that it will be bringing forward a law to ban travelling circuses from using performing wild animals, stating: "There is no place in today's society for wild animals being used for our entertainment in travelling circuses and wild animals deserve our respect."

The government has committed to introducing a ban in the next three years. We will be watching circuses closely until the ban is in place, and insist that the circuses have a retirement plan for the animals that guarantees their welfare.

We were also delighted to hear that the Greek government has banned the use of all animals in circuses following a campaign backed by more than 50 local animal protection groups across Greece. The new animal protection law also addresses a number of important issues concerning stray animals, including the creation of an online microchip database. Greece is the first country in Europe to ban all animals from circuses and similar performances. Austria currently has a ban on wild-animal acts, and several European countries including Portugal, Denmark and Croatia have measures to ban or phase out wild animals in circuses. Many thanks to Cretan Animal Welfare Group (CAWG) for all its updates.

Association scheme

Most associates should now be aware that we are winding down the association scheme and not renewing expiring memberships. We will still be producing IN, however, and are available to provide advice and support where we can to any overseas organisation. Our website is a great resource and features lots of useful publications: **www.rspca.org.uk/in-action/international/reports** and a page for animal welfare organisations: **www.rspca.org.uk/in-action/international/whoweworkwith/localorganisations**.



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^ Greece has become the first country in Europe to ban all animals from circuses.

If your association has expired but you would like to continue to receive *Animal Action* and/or *Animal Life* magazines, you will need to set up a subscription. You can do this at: **www.rspca.org.uk/getinvolved/theclub** or **www.rspca.org.uk/in-action/aboutus/stayinformed/animallife.**

IN can be accessed via the animal welfare organisations page of our website (see above) or you can ask to be put on our mailing list to receive a hard copy. Just email: international@rspca.org.uk

We are really interested in the work that other organisations are doing internationally and will share ideas and comments through the website and IN with the wider animal welfare community.

Please send any feedback to: kkilving@rspca.org.uk. We would love to hear your reactions to any of the stories in this edition of IN or your own experiences of any of the issues featured.

News from you Letters

Yesterday I was looking at the RSPCA website and by chance found *International News*. Congratulations on your article about stray dog animal control (spring/summer 2011). It was so informative, interesting and relevant. I am part of a street animal charity group in Kalkan, Turkey (KAPSA) and we are working very hard to operate a TNR (trap, neuter, return) programme and often get asked why we don't want a dogs' home.

It's for all the reasons you have written about, so we will share the article with our members and critics too. We are a multi-cultural group of volunteers and set up as an official organisation in April 2008 to improve the wellbeing of street animals in Kalkan. We are funded completely by donations and are always busy fundraising.

We operate TNR and all our animals live on the streets. We have a winter programme to feed the cats and dogs once the tourists have left and many businesses are closed. We try and treat the sick and respond to cruelty. We also visit local schools and teach children about the understanding and treatment of animals using a slideshow and booklets.

We have managed to achieve a lot but there is an enormous amount of work still to be done. We are trying to widen out our neutering programme to local villages and are slowly seeing an increase in local people coming to us for help.

We have also started to register dogs, both street and owned, and we try hard to promote responsible ownership.

Kind regards
Sandra Osborne

KAPSA
Kalkan Association for the Protection of Street Animals – Kalkan sokak hayvanlarini koruma dernegi

KAPSA

Children showing interest in a KAPSA campaign.

I received the spring/summer 2011 *International News* issue featuring the article 'Is a shelter a solution?'

I have been struggling since 1983 in southern Italy to reduce the enormous number of strays through spay/neuter projects, identification and registration of dogs and cats, education and training, and lobbying of the authorities. I strongly believe that a shelter cannot be the solution, because there are too many dogs and cats born every day. Only preventive measurements can eventually show a difference. If you read the results of a census we did recently in a little village in the mountains in the Caserta area, you can imagine the situation if all these dogs (not identified!) had been caught and taken to shelters. Italians normally do not search for their missing dogs, they get another one...

Very best wishes from still warm and sunny southern Italy.
Dorothea Friz, DVM
www.legaproanimale.org

You can read the results of Legaproanimale's census on the RSPCA website: www.rspca.org.uk/in-action/international/whoweworkwith/localorganisations

legaproanimale

Lega Pro Animale running a spay/neuter project.

PROFILE

Egle Gerulaityte from the Horse Protection Society of Lithuania talks to us about the Society's work.

The Horse Protection Society of Lithuania (ZGA) is a non-profit organisation that promotes equine welfare and educates about equine care, humane handling and behaviour. We also provide direct help for horses in need and a shelter for homeless horses. All our work is done by volunteers.

"We began operating in 2007 when current board members, myself, Justina Vaitiekute and Gintare Dainelyte, were notified of a tragic situation in a rural region of eastern Lithuania. A local racehorse breeder had left around 30 horses in the woods during winter with no food or water. By the time we arrived, eight horses had already died of starvation while others could barely walk – some were already unable to stand.

The horses were emaciated, dehydrated and swarming with both external and internal parasites. We rescued three of the worst-looking horses, two of which survived and are now healthy and happy in new homes.

We find that only too often such cruelty cases are left unresolved and animals will continue to suffer unless something is done about it. We decided to formally establish the Horse Protection Society and have been dealing with equine cruelty cases ever since.

› The first horses rescued by the Horse Protection Society of Lithuania.

Horse Protection Society of Lithuania

Horse Protection Society of Lithuania

› Ruta Matukonyte of the Horse Protection Society of Lithuania working with shelter horse Bardo.

Our main aims and goals include:

- providing easily accessible, professional information on care, veterinary developments, humane training methods and welfare
- advising on horse care and welfare, referring people to specialists as appropriate (e.g. nutritionist, vet)
- promoting kindness and compassion towards equines through education
- lobbying for legislative change to better define concepts of animal abuse and cruelty, and for the imposition of stricter penalties, including animal confiscation in more severe cases
- horse and pony rescue and rehoming.

In the last five years, we have rescued and rehomed more than 20 horses and indirectly helped to rescue and rehome another 23. We have issued more than 70 press and TV releases regarding equine welfare and cruelty cases, organised more than 14 seminars and workshops on equine care, veterinary issues, behaviour and physiotherapy, and several charity events including music concerts and arts auctions involving members of the public who would not otherwise be interested in equine welfare. We have also established agreements to cooperate with other national and international animal protection organisations, as well as with government bodies such as the National Food and Veterinary Institute and the Equestrian Federation of Lithuania.

Looking towards the future

Our future aims and ambitions include larger, nationwide educational projects targeting young people, improvements to our shelter, professional volunteer training, and more seminars, workshops and courses on equine care for horse owners and breeders. We are also working towards improving media communications, corporate sponsorship and fundraising.

We believe that prevention, understanding, empathy and kindness are key to animal protection and welfare and we are constantly giving 200 percent as we work towards these goals.

News from the UK

War horses

On 11 November 2011 RSPCA staff gathered at the Animals in War Memorial in London to remember those animals that helped the troops during the wars and conflicts of the twentieth century. It is estimated that eight million horses died during the First World War, 1914–1918, of which around 250,000 worked for the British Army on the Western Front in Europe. About one million horses were in service at any one time for British and Commonwealth forces around the world.

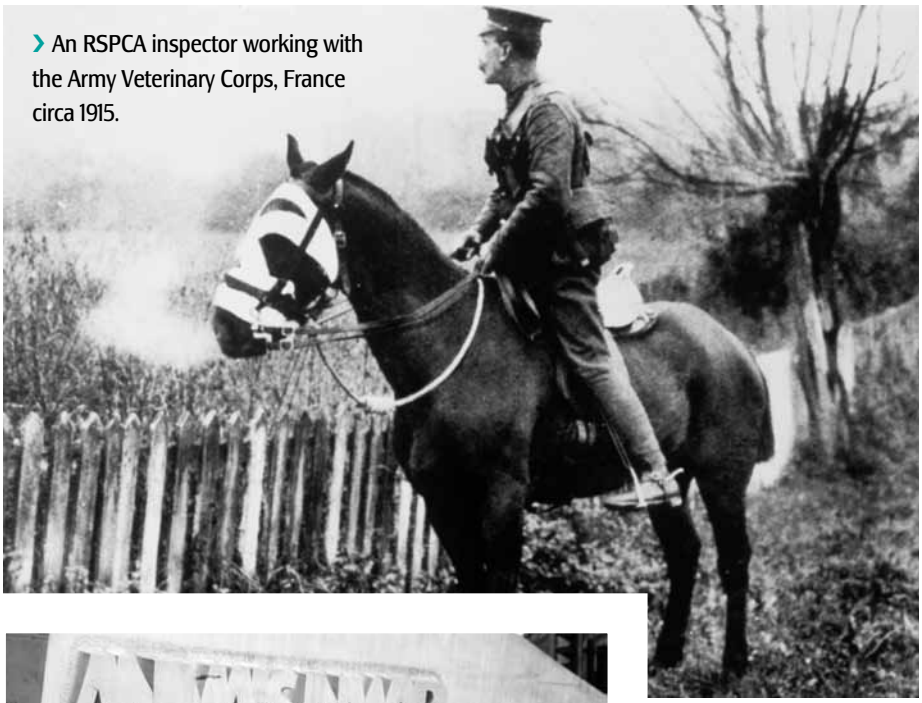
At the outbreak of war in 1914, armies on all sides depended almost entirely upon horse power to move materials to and from the front lines. Most of the horses were used to transport ammunition wagons and died in their thousands alongside the soldiers, from bullets, artillery fire, gas, fatigue and disease. By 1915 almost 5,000 horses a day were being killed or declared unfit for action.

In 1914, over one-third of the staff of the RSPCA enlisted in the British Army, a number of them in the Army Veterinary Corps (AVC), and by 1915 this proportion had grown to one-half. The Fund for Sick and Wounded Horses, created in 1914, raised the equivalent of £10 million today to help alleviate the suffering of sick and wounded horses. Worldwide, 2.5 million animals were treated by the AVC, with 80 percent being returned to duty.

The huge number of horse casualties, the quality of those men trained to look after them, and the need to return as many animals to active service as quickly as possible, provided many opportunities for advancements in veterinary care and medicines. The RSPCA played a large role in this and veterinary practice in the decade following the war greatly improved as a result of the intensity of wartime experience.

At the end of the war, the British Army had to decide what to do with the thousands of horses it owned but no longer needed. The sale of unwanted horses to French and Belgian farmers for slaughter caused public outcry and the RSPCA threatened to withdraw its support for the military. Eventually, the government took measures to check that horses were being sold abroad for labour. Sadly, only 60,000 horses actually made it back to Britain.

The success of the stage play *War Horse* and the Steven Spielberg film of the same name, which came out in January 2012, both based on the book by Michael Morpurgo, has helped to stimulate renewed interest in our relationship with animals. In revisiting the horror of the First World War, we have an opportunity to reflect on our personal responsibilities towards our fellow creatures.



› An RSPCA inspector working with the Army Veterinary Corps, France circa 1915.

RSPCA Photolibrary

Andrew Forsyth/RSPCA Photolibrary

‹ The Animals in War Memorial, Hyde Park, London.

The Amersham challenge: prosecuting equine cruelty

In 2008, the RSPCA encountered its worst-ever case of equine cruelty. The dead bodies and body parts of more than 30 equines were found scattered across Spindles Farm in Amersham, along with more than 100 surviving equines that were being kept in appalling conditions.

The owner of the farm, James Gray, was charged along with four members of his family with causing unnecessary suffering to 40 equines and failing to meet the welfare needs of another 114. The first trial was held in January 2009. It was one of the longest cases ever prosecuted by the RSPCA with 50 days of evidence and submissions.

Although two vets called by the defendants claimed that the equines had suddenly fallen ill due to a strongyle worm infestation, James Gray and his son were both convicted of cruelty. The remaining family members were convicted of failing to meet the welfare needs of the horses. James Gray was sentenced to 24 weeks' imprisonment and ordered to pay £400,000 in costs. He was disqualified from keeping horses for life. The other family members received lighter sentences and were disqualified from keeping horses for 10 years.

The defendants all appealed against their convictions and sentences, and the case was reheard early in 2010. After 34 days of evidence the majority of the earlier court decisions were upheld.

James Gray absconded from court before sentence could be passed. As a result, the judge ordered the horse trader to serve the maximum sentence of six months' imprisonment and issued a warrant for his arrest. He was later caught and has served his sentence.

Judge Christopher Tyrer said: "The court has listened to a horrendous case of animal cruelty – it is the worst case experienced by the RSPCA, on a scale that beggars belief. The business to which you were all party was concerned only with profit. Animal welfare did not figure at all and you have shown no remorse."

The judges in both hearings praised the professionalism, honesty and integrity of all the witnesses the RSPCA called to give evidence, including our own inspectors, vets and members of the public. By any standards, it was a huge case to take on in terms of human and financial resources. Phil Wilson, RSPCA senior

Andrew Forsyth/RSPCA Photolibrary

▲ RSPCA senior prosecution case manager Phil Wilson with some of the Amersham case files.

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The Amersham challenge: prosecuting equine cruelty

prosecution case manager said: "We have outstanding costs orders against the family that will cover our legal fees and there's a good chance we'll get them. This case has taken up a huge amount of our commitment, time and effort already, but we will not give up."

Rehoming the Amersham equines

Amazingly, all the rescued horses have now been rehomed but returning them to health and finding new homes was no easy matter. Fortunately, other organisations were willing to take many of the animals, while RSPCA's Felledge Equine Centre and Millbrook Animal Centre were able to provide expert care for some of the horses. In addition to nursing the horses back to health, dedicated RSPCA staff spent two-and-a-half years assessing and handling the animals.

"Each horse brought here is allocated a groom who develops a bond with him or her and begins the slow process of rebuilding their trust," said Felledge groom Rachael Duffy. "We get to know each other really well through that one-to-one contact, and the horses' personalities begin to come out as they get stronger. Sometimes we'll need to prepare them for being ridden, depending on their age, capability and what they've been through, so rehabilitation can take a while. The more skills they have, the more choices they will have when it comes to finding a new home."

Rehoming has to be carefully handled. "Potential adopters come in to be assessed first," said RSPCA Felledge supervisor Julie Walker. "We watch them ride and test their knowledge of stable management, then we do a home visit to check out their fields and fencing. If they are suitable, we'll introduce them to a horse and, using our own intimate knowledge of the animal, we can gauge whether they are going to get on well. Horses are sensitive animals and after all we've been through together, we want to be sure they're going to a home that is perfect for them."

All the horses from James Gray's farm are now settled into new homes following an intensive rehoming campaign. More than 1,500 people applied to adopt one of the 37 Amersham horses and ponies in RSPCA care and the appeal was so successful that new homes were also found for a further 80 rescued horses and ponies.

▲ Case horses being rehabilitated at RSPCA Felledge Equine Centre.

Andrew Forsyth/RSPCA Photolibrary

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