

Sanctuary a saviour for donkeys

Tolerant creatures saved from slaughter and given proper care at former retirement residence

By Vanessa Tignanelli

The Donkey Sanctuary of Canada plays a major role in the protection of donkeys, adopting those who have been seized by the SPCA or donated by owners who can no longer care for them.

The 100-acre property near Puslinch, Ont., near Guelph, quickly evolved from a retirement home to a sanctuary in 1991, when founder Sandra Pady saved nine donkeys from a slaughterhouse and fell in love with their stoic nature.

The sanctuary's mission is to save and rehabilitate donkeys that have suffered abuse. Over 400 volunteers, staff and veterinarians provide proper care for 81 donkeys, nine mules and hinnies (one parent is a horse and one a donkey), and three goats.

According to Executive Director Lesley Bayne, once the staff decides to bring a donkey to the sanctuary, it will be protected for the rest of its days either on the property or at a trusted foster farm.

Today, donkeys are bought for the purpose of guarding or calming other farm animals, most commonly cattle or sheep. Often they will not bond with the animals they are meant to protect, or become too expensive for their owners, leading them to become forgotten or mistreated.

"They are often called the forgotten member of the equine family. Horses are majestic, Zebras are exotic, and then there's the donkey. People don't realize how amazing they really are," said Bayne.

The mistreatment of donkeys happens on a regular basis, normally because of a lack of education. Many people do not realize that donkeys require very different care from their horse relatives. "You start off treating them like horses, but now I know that's not fair," said Mark Jamieson, a volunteer who works in the special needs barn.

The sanctuary's staff and volunteers are eager to educate visitors on donkey characteristics and what can lead to mistreatment: Abuse can range from neglecting to trim a donkey's hooves,



Photo by Vanessa Tignanelli

Education Assistant Carleigh Cathcart says she loves her work at the Donkey Sanctuary of Canada in Puslinch, Ont. She and MJ (Miss Jenny) have formed a special bond. The sanctuary is dedicated to educating people on the unique caretaking of these animals, often the forgotten members of the equine family.

overfeeding, or using the wrong kind of food; An overfed donkey will store fat in its neck, causing the ligaments to snap and its crest to fall over; Donkeys do not have the oil that exists in horse hair, so rain soaks into their fur and can cause hypothermia if they are left outside. All of these things can be excruciating for the animal.

Stemming from their wild North African ancestors, donkeys are self-protective and hide all signs of weakness, so as not to become a victim in the

desert. "This means that a donkey could be suffering from terrible pain but will never show signs that it is hurting," said Bayne.

Damages may be irreversible. It costs \$1,500 to care for a donkey, and more for those in the special needs barn. The sanctuary relies on private donations and the Sponsor a Donkey program.

Only two other donkey sanctuaries exist in Canada (Chase, B.C. and Roseneath, Ont.), and the importance for the organization's work remains widely un-

known. As a way of promoting proper education and the care of donkeys, the Donkey Sanctuary of Canada opens its doors to the public every Sunday between March and October.

Visitors can enjoy the property's four kilometres of trails, read each donkey's story in the gallery, or learn more about the unique qualities of donkeys at the learning centre. With a strong education team and well-trained volunteers, it is hard not to become infatuated with donkeys after a visit.

"Usually, if we can get someone here, they are in love for life," admitted Bayne.

Though they are forever destined to be at the bottom of the hierarchy, donkeys continue to be the quietly strong and well-natured animals that they are.

If you see a donkey that looks like it is being neglected, you can contact the Donkey Sanctuary of Canada at 1-519-836-1697 or the SPCA at 1-800-665-1868.