



Newsletter Spring 2014

Well, here it is. Late as usual but hopefully it being jam packed will make up for its tardiness!

Our last newsletter, sent just before Christmas, was a positive tale of success stories and plans for the future. Little did we know that we were on the cusp of the most difficult period of our six year existence.



On Christmas Eve we found Gemini the chinchilla collapsed in her cage. We rushed her to the emergency vets but she died shortly afterwards with no obvious cause of her passing.

We returned home and did the late night feed and check only to find that Porsche the hamster had passed away in her bed.



As if that wasn't an awful enough start to Christmas, the next morning we found Electra, Gemini's sister and cage mate, looking unwell and with a prolapsed rectum. So we were off to the emergency vets again on Christmas Day. Electra had several procedures to try to repair the prolapse but it kept recurring and eventually we were forced to make the decision to let her go. Tests failed to find the cause of this outbreak of illness so the vet recommended a prophylactic course of antibiotics for many of our animals. So the two week break from work we had treated ourselves to over Christmas was purely spent going back and forth to the vets, worrying, disinfecting, nursing and medicating.

The illness then spread to our own pets and we lost our three guinea pigs and one of our rabbits despite extensive veterinary tests and treatments. Following a post-mortem examination, we now know that a bacteria called actinomyces was the culprit in at least some of the deaths and it's likely it

was the cause in others. The vets are somewhat baffled as this bacteria is present in the soil so commonly found in hays and grasses but is not usually pathogenic. Why it caused such a major problem for us we just don't know.

But it has meant that 2014 so far has been all about coping with this illness. We closed our doors to new admissions and rehoming until February, only then feeling that we were safe to start moving animals around again. The toll on us emotionally, psychologically and financially was massive. I cannot even begin to describe the torment and heartbreak caused by having so many animals in your care die so quickly. Perhaps the only thing that kept us going was the huge amount of support we received from supporters on our facebook page with messages of support and donations of newspapers, towels, items from our wishlist and desperately needed funds pouring in. I don't think we could have survived without your help, so thank you.

Pigeons, pigeons, pigeons

Since we have been closed to new rodent admissions for most of the year, 2014 so far has been pretty pigeon-centric. In late March we ourselves found a young pigeon fallen from his nest in Croydon while driving home from work. We took him home and later heard a friend of ours, Lou, had found a similar aged pigeon herself who she had called Queenie. So after treatment for a throat infection, Queenie came here to keep Matthew company. Young love quickly blossomed and the two have now been transferred to East Sussex WRAS for their release.



Just a few days after Matthew arrived we had a call from a lady who had found a badly injured woodpigeon in the road. The day of the week inspired the slightly unimaginative name of 'Sunday' and she arrived, battered and concussed, hardly able to stand. Over the next couple of days, with the help of medication and syringe feeding, she perked up and we started

to clean her wounds. She had a large wound on her neck which was covered in a large scab and I was concerned about what was lurking underneath. When the scab lifted my worst fears were confirmed – her crop had ruptured. Without surgery she would not be able to eat or drink. So we dashed her to the vets where they did a fantastic job of repairing her. After that she went from strength to strength and was feeding herself again within a few days. Sunday has now gone to stay with our friends Paul and Caroline in their aviary so that she can regrow her lost feathers and be released in their garden where several of their previously rescued pigeons still visit.



We also took advantage of the lower rodent numbers to start work on getting the aviary ready for Galega and Beatrix pigeons to move in. You might recall we introduced them in our last newsletter and said that the old aviary would need a bit of work before they could move in. Ha! Understatement of the year, sadly. When we started emptying it out (we had been using it to store cages), we found, to our horror, that the aviary was falling apart and the roof was leaking. Patching it up was not going to do!



So we launched an appeal to buy a new aviary for Galega and Beatrix and any future pigeons to live in. We need to raise £510.99 to buy this beautiful new aviary and we need to raise it fast so that our pigeons can be outside enjoying the sunshine.



If you can help, please visit <http://www.starlighttrust.org.uk/aviary.php> for the latest appeal totals and details of ways you can donate. Thank you x

Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork

I also took advantage of the period we were closed to catch up on paperwork – yuck! But, we've been operating for six years now and for all that time I've managed to put off getting the trust its own bank account and getting us registered with the HMRC. We can't register with the Charity Commission as our income is less than £5000 per year but registering with the HMRC gives us many of the same benefits such as being able to claim gift aid. The new bank account is up and running which means we can now accept donations via cheque, BACS and Standing Order and we can avoid paypal fees! There are more details on the website at www.starlighttrust.org.uk/donate.php.

The HMRC application is in but it takes a while to get a decision. Hopefully we will have some exciting news for you there soon ☺



I've also used the time to publicise our new small pets website a little, contacting the majority of the rescues listed on the site to introduce www.smallpetsmatter.co.uk and check their details are correct. We've had a really encouraging response with many complimenting the site and offering to write articles for it. Since its launch at the end of last year over a thousand people have visited. Don't forget, the site also has its own facebook page which we would love you to 'like' and share as this is a vital tool in getting our message across. You can find it at www.facebook.com/smallpetsmatter

Success Stories

So after the difficult start to the year, we really needed some good news. This came in the form of fantastic new homes for some of our longest stay residents.

Cabo and Lleno the degus who had been waiting for a new home since August 2012, found an amazing new home with Fiona. Lleno had a



health scare which delayed things a little but a tooth trim sorted him out and, since going to his new home, he has gained loads of weight and they are both having a lovely time.



Petit Pois, one of the group of dwarf hamsters we took in in November 2012, found an amazing new home with Mandy. We wanted a home for PP which had a big cage and where she would get lots of attention as she is quite a busy girl. She now lives in a massive four foot tank! Lucky girl!

Residents



Not all our November 2012 hamsters were as lucky though. Plum and Brandy remain here and, given that they have been here 18 months and they are now around 21 months old, we made the decision that



they ought to now remain here as permanent residents. As far as they are concerned, this is their home, and I think the disruption of moving on at this late stage would be unfair to them. This means the girls are now available for sponsorship for £2 a month.



Our resident degu, Betty and Semi, are doing well. Semi had to have another dental in January as his teeth were overgrown again but he is now putting weight back on nicely. He



remains by far our most expensive animal to date with a vet bill of around £700. So sponsors for him, at £5 a month, are very much appreciated!



Galega and Beatrix the pigeons will officially become residents and be available for sponsorship once we have been able to raise the funds for their new aviary. If we cannot raise the money we



will be forced, for their sakes, to try to find them a place in another rescue. We really don't want to do this as we are very attached to them and permanent homes for pigeons are not easy to find but we have to put their welfare first and they need more space and access to sunshine and fresh air desperately.

If you would like to sponsor one of our resident animals you can find out more at www.starlighttrust.org.uk/sponsor.php.

Animals needing homes



Suzie gerbil has been with us since November. She is friendly but a little shy so she would prefer an adult carer.

Vega is the remaining cage mate of Electra and Gemini so has been living alone since Christmas. She has been tested and is healthy. We have tried to move her in with our own chinchilla, Hans, and the resident degus but she's not keen. She is looking for a home with another female or neutered male chinchilla. Vega loves interacting with people though, like most chinchillas, is not keen on cuddles.



Pearl came to us with a skin condition which left her balding and bedraggled. She's now all better and looking beautiful. She needs a little work on her handling so would prefer an adult carer.



Stanley and Jackson were two babies from the massive group of 26 born here last February. They were rehomed but their new owner's circumstances changed so they were



recently returned to us. They are very handsome, cheeky boys with nice natures though they're a bit wriggly when picked up so would do best with a confident, adult carer.

We've just taken in an emergency batch of baby rats. They were an accidental litter when their owner bought what was supposed to be two males as company for his existing boy and ended up with two girls instead. He was overwhelmed with babies so we stepped in. They will be ready for homes at the end of May.



We have quite a big waiting list at the moment including another pair of degus and many rats so do please get in touch if you have room in your life for some new rodent friends.

Wildlife

This is a busy time of year for our wildlife work. With many species breeding, spring is when people tend to find apparently orphaned and abandoned babies and wonder what they should do. Whilst it is true that, in the majority of cases it's best to leave alone, the blanket 'don't touch' advice issued by groups like the RSPCA is very dangerous and leads to many genuine casualties not getting the help they need. This was the main reason why we developed www.helpwildlife.co.uk back in 2005. Each spring and summer the site receives up to 80,000 visits, with around 3000 people a month visiting the page giving advice on what to do if you find a baby bird. We produced a poster several years ago for sharing on social media and displaying in vets and pet shops to help people find the right advice. You can find it at www.helpwildlife.co.uk/poster.pdf and we'd really appreciate your help in spreading its important message.

Well, thank you for reading our rather long newsletter, we do hope you have found it interesting. We hope to catch you on [facebook](https://www.facebook.com/) or [twitter](https://twitter.com/), otherwise we will aim to write to you again late summer or early autumn.

Kindest regards

Sarah & Dave
The Starlight Trust