



# Newsletter

August 2021

As usual, I will start the newsletter with an apology for the big gap between communications. The last time we were in touch was March this year when we sent round our 2020 Annual Report. In that we shared how Covid-19 meant we'd had to pause intake of rodents due to Dave being classed as Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV). The experience had, however, been valuable in forcing us to look at other ways we could help animals if we could not physically rescue them. More on that later.

During 2021 our rodent intake has remained paused as the pandemic continues so there have been no new rodent friends, with the exception on one little catted wild mouse friend who stopped by very briefly for some antibiotics before being released. It's been very strange, after so many years of a house full of rodents, to be reduced to just our permanent residents and we've both really missed making lots of new rodent friends.

For most of the year our pigeon work continued as normal but more on that later too.

## New Friends

We don't have space here to tell you about all the guests who have come to stay so far this year but here are a few who particularly touched our hearts.



Billy was a particular favourite, not just because he gave us a great before and after shot. The left picture is him on arrival – hunched up with decidedly grey ceres. The right is a week later, and he's standing tall and his

ceres are bright white. Billy was being fed regularly by a very lovely family who noticed him showing signs of canker. They were really keen that he go back to his flock once he was well and travelled back to collect him once he was well.

I have to admit, woodpigeon guests worry me. They have very different personalities to feral pigeons so they're quite difficult to handle and ones who cannot be released generally have to be euthanased for their own welfare. Archibald here gave me plenty of sleepless nights when a cat attack left him struggling to stand. Thankfully, after an almost two month stay, he made a full recovery and has now been released.





Josiah

Very sadly, not all of our guests get their happy ending. Two particularly heart-breaking losses were those of Josiah and Pablo. Both were stray domestic pigeons who had become injured. Josiah had a



Pablo

badly broken leg and Pablo had a ruptured crop. Despite great effort by ourselves and lovely vet Elisa, neither made a good recovery and we had to make the very difficult decision to end their suffering.

## Success Stories

On a happier note, our release site volunteers continue to monitor their flocks for returning guests. The pigeons we release wear one or two coloured rings stamped with our phone number. This is so that, if they get into difficulty again, they can hopefully find their way back to us. But we also keep a database of the pigeon's colouring and rings so we can identify them and monitor their progress.



Albert tangled in netting

Albert was admitted in April 2019 as a baby. His parents nested under anti-bird netting and Albert was tangled up in it and had become injured. He was released that June and here he is at his release site more than two years later.



Albert earlier this year



Lucille on admission

Lucille was admitted in November 2018. Suffering with PMV and intestinal parasites she was very poorly indeed. She was released in February 2019 and here she is more than two and a half years later, looking extremely well.



Lucille earlier this year

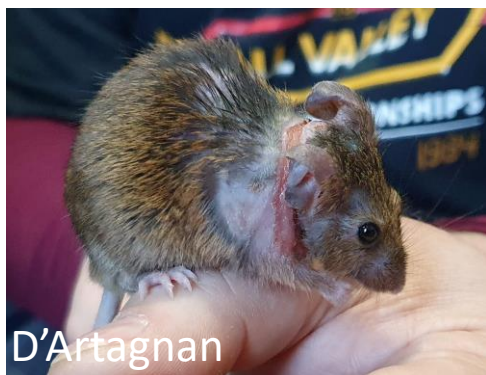
## Au Revoir

We've mentioned many times before our struggle with space for our permanent resident pigeons. We operate from a little suburban terraced house so we don't have much space. The aviary in our garden was intended to accommodate around 20 birds and this year we got to the point where there were more than 30 in there. We have often appealed for volunteers to have aviaries in their gardens which did result in two off-site aviaries, but really we could fill a dozen with all the pigeons needing help. So this year we've come to an arrangement with Linjoy Wildlife Sanctuary in Derbyshire, funding a new aviary on their land in which we could house some of our pigeons. Lindsay and her volunteers will very kindly take care of them and we will continue to cover their food and vet costs. The other benefit was we were able to send some birds who were less disabled. At Linjoy they will be given the option to free-fly, meaning they'll be housed in an aviary with a hatch through which they can fly out and then return as

they wish. So they'll get the best of both worlds – safety and food if they want it, but also a bit of freedom if they prefer. Ten birds made this move this year: - Coral, Felix and Jennifer (all of whom have one eye), Connie and Tabatha (slightly impaired flight), Panda and Phillip (domestic breeds), Leandra (one leg), and Tyson and Roxie (hand reared by members of the public and left a bit tame). Linjoy have also kindly given a permanent home to our brain damaged woodpigeon Santiago.

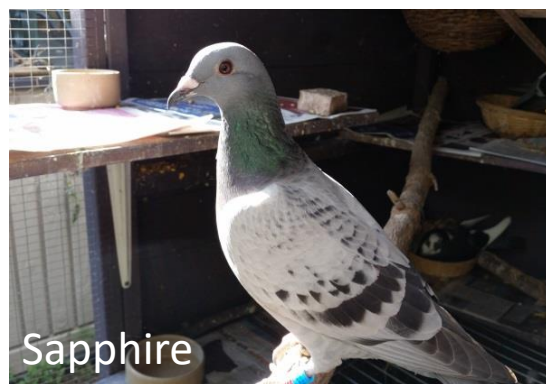
## Farewells

Sadly we've had to say goodbye to three very much loved permanent residents this year.



D'Artagnan came to us along with his brothers in January 2019. They were part of a litter dumped on a shelf in a pet shop and believed to be part wild. He overcame 'Itchy Mouse Syndrome', which caused him to scratch his neck and shoulders raw, at the beginning of the year but then, in May, he developed a sore leg. When this didn't respond to treatment the vet suspected cancer and we sadly had to let D'Art go in July. He was a brilliant little character and we miss him greatly.

Gorgeous ex-racing pigeon, Sapphire, came to us in 2016 when she was found hanging round a stable yard. For the last couple of years she lived in our off-site aviary, Trafalgar Oblong, where she was very happily paired with Galega. She passed suddenly and unexpectedly in her nest in July and will be very much missed having been one of our friendlier pigeons. Husband, Galega, has come back to HQ in the hope that he will find love with one of our single ladies.



And in June we said goodbye to Henry, one of our most challenging guests to date. He came to us in November 2018 after he was spotted living rough in a garden, caught in a trap and taken to our vets. As he had domestic rat colouring he was assumed to be an escaped pet, but his behaviour was that of a wild rat. To this day we're not sure if he was a strangely marked wild rat or a domestic rat gone wild after being born outside but we never felt

confident that releasing him was the right thing. So he stayed here with us but remained wild almost until the end. In the last couple of months he went, well, a bit senile really. Although not tame he grew a lot more accepting of us. We hoped he would slip away in his bed so we wouldn't have to put him through the stress of a final vet visit but he was too stubborn. Thankfully, vet Elisa ensured he had a peaceful passing for us.



This has been an unprecedentedly busy year for our wildlife advice website. Numbers of visitors to the site are up around 50% on last year and this jump is reflected in the number of advice tickets received to our helpdesk as well. Wildlife rescue has been under enormous strain in general with the numbers of animals needing help far outweighing the spaces available, only made worse by a reduction in volunteers due to the pandemic. Covid has also severely impacted fundraising with many events cancelled and a lot of people too worried about their finances to donate. It really has been a difficult year.

We are constantly reviewing and refreshing everything about the site and the helpdesk, responding to patterns and questions and trying to make the site as beneficial as possible. Amongst other changes this year, devoted volunteer Penny is working through adding a 'donate' link to each rescue listing in the hope that site visitors will offer money as well as ask for help.

There's so much more I want to do with the site, everything from improving the appearance and navigation to adding new articles and to really increasing the role we play in supporting and bringing together wildlife rescues. If you'd like to get involved, please visit [helpwildlife.co.uk/get-involved](https://helpwildlife.co.uk/get-involved).

## Rescue support

Part of our 'extra' work through HelpWildlife has been supporting other rescues. Appeals for donations to cover the costs of running the site and helpdesk resulted in more funds than we needed so we have been able to redistribute some of these funds to support particularly small informal rescues without the ability to do much fundraising.

We've continued to support other rescues through free faecal sampling too though we did have to pause this over the Summer as the demands of the helpdesk over the busy season just didn't leave enough time. Even so, we've completed 127 checks for other rescues, saving them around £2000 in lab costs. This is another area I'd like to develop, increasing the issues we can check for and becoming qualified to also offer treatment advice.

We've also supported a rescuer friend with the rescue and rehoming of a large group of neglected rodents in Solihull. Amelia, whose usual focus is wildlife, took in 35 rats and 2 gerbils many of whom were unwell or injured from months of not receiving proper care. The response to our appeal for funds to help with their food and vet costs was astonishing and rehoming has since gone pretty well. There are, however, still a few rats and the two gerbils looking for their forever home. You can meet them at [starlighttrust.org.uk/animals/category/adoptable-animals/](https://starlighttrust.org.uk/animals/category/adoptable-animals/)



Anna, one of the Solihull rats

## Looking Forward

As we've touched on in this newsletter, the pandemic has made our rescue work difficult and we're also struggling with space. Moving a group of pigeons to Linjoy means that our aviaries now contain the numbers of pigeons they were intended to hold but that means there's no room for more. Adding to those factors our ongoing health issues and we've now made the decision to focus more on our online work. Although the hands-on rescue has more obvious results, we believe the online work we do is very valuable.



A baby pigeon our helpdesk was contacted about

HelpWildlife.co.uk helps thousands of people find information and help with wildlife every week and there's so much more we'd like to do there. I've also got big plans for some new pigeon advocacy work that I'm not ready to share just yet but I have just registered a new domain for it so it's getting closer to become a reality!

And, as already mentioned, I'd like to be able to do more with the free faecal sampling we offer as well. You can find more details about how and why we are refocusing our work at [starlighttrust.org.uk/refocusing](http://starlighttrust.org.uk/refocusing). Although I say there that we're closed to new intake, realistically a few animals will still sneak in as and when we have time and space, but this will no longer be our main focus.

## Your Support

I'm conscious that most of you became supporters of Starlight Trust because of our work with pet rodents. You've stuck with us when pigeons started creeping in and when they then took over and became the majority of our guests. Now we're changing again to focus more on our online work which is definitely more wildlife and pigeon than rodent focused. We're sending this newsletter out to all our regular donors as well as everyone on our mailing list so you know exactly what work you're supporting. If you choose to cancel your regular donations, we absolutely understand. If you're looking for an alternative rodent-focused organisation to support then we would recommend checking out [gerbilandrodentrescue.co.uk](http://gerbilandrodentrescue.co.uk). Based in Selhurst, their ethos is much like our own.

If you stick with us, then your support is still very much appreciated. We currently have more than 50 permanent residents as well as the 10 birds at Linjoy who we will continue to support financially. I've refreshed our wishlist so it now reflects the things we need on an ongoing basis to make their lives happy, healthy and enriched - <https://amzn.eu/cX3OE3v>

Volunteers to help with our new plans are also much appreciated. We always need help with the websites (both technical and not very technical roles available), I would really like someone to revamp and run our sponsor animal scheme, we have a lot of cages and rodent paraphernalia here which could be sold to raise funds so someone to store that and organise its sale would be a huge help, and we really want to expand our educational work which means we need help with graphic design and social media management. If you're passionate about animals, especially wildlife, and you're self-motivated and keen to help, please [get in touch!](#)

# Thank you

Finally, we just wanted to take a moment to say some thank yous especially to all the volunteers who have worked so hard for us this year.

To Penny, who has been putting in time pretty much every day since 2016 to keep the helpwildlife directory up to date. She has stuck with it through so many different systems and processes and through my endless faffing (which often seems to break something!).

To Louise who helps provide advice on helpwildlife tickets as well as hands-on help with fostering and transport. She even recently drove a big car load of pigeons up to Linjoy to save them needing to be couriered!

To Beri who has recently hit a year of helping with the admin side of the helpdesk, checking in with finders to make sure they've found the help they need. Before that Beri also used to foster for us and also often adopts our most 'characterful' hamsters.

To release aviary volunteers Paul and Rosy for their invaluable role in helping to prepare pigeons to return to the wild.

To Alison and Natalie who take care of some of our permanent resident pigeons in their garden aviaries.

To Lana-May who fosters hamsters for us and currently cares for Nyx the rather special little hamster.

And thank you to everyone who has donated, liked, shared, emailed, dropped off some newspapers, sent us a message of support, or helped in any other way. Throughout our 13 year history our focus has been on the less glamorous species, the overlooked, the misunderstood, even the hated – knowing that there are so many people out there who share our passionate belief that every life matters is just amazing. We truly could not do what we do without you!

Sarah & Dave  
Starlight Trust