



Annual Report 2023

Charity Name: The Starlight Trust

Registration Number: EW16594

Charity Objectives & Activities

Charity Objectives

For the benefit of the public, to relieve the suffering and distress of animals in such ways as the trust shall decide including (but not exclusively) the following ways: -

- (a) to rescue, take in and provide care, shelter and sanctuary for stray, lost, neglected, abandoned, ill-treated and unwanted pets, primarily small pet rodents, and to rehome these animals wherever possible.
- (b) To promote humane behaviour towards animals by providing appropriate care, protection, treatment and security for animals which are in need of care and attention by reason of sickness, maltreatment, poor circumstances or ill usage.
- (c) to educate the public in matters pertaining to animal welfare in general and the prevention of cruelty and suffering among animals.

Activities Undertaken

Founded in 2008, the trust operates a rescue and sanctuary for small pets and feral pigeons from founders Sarah and Dave Argrave's home. Since 2020, due to the risk that COVID-19 poses to the health of the Managing Trustees, the trust's main focus has switched to online work, advising the public and supporting other animal rescues. These activities include

- Operating HelpWildlife.co.uk which provides advice to members of the public who find wildlife casualties and publishes a directory of UK wildlife rescue organisations
- Providing bespoke advice and support to wildlife casualty finders through the HelpWildlife.co.uk helpdesk
- Funding the transport of wildlife casualties to rescue where other options have been exhausted
- Making small grants to wildlife rescues to support their work
- Providing free faecal sampling for pigeons in other rescues

In Focus – Hands on Animal Rescue

Hands on animal rescue is no longer the main focus of our work due to lack of space and the health status of the Managing Trustees. However, we continue to house non-releasable pigeons across two aviaries and have a small group of degus who will live out their days with us. We also take in the occasional pigeon which looks as though they may benefit from our particular experience and ethos, on average about one or two a month.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

80

ANIMALS CARED FOR

Altogether we cared for or supported the care of 80 animals in 2023.

These were

- **45** permanent residents admitted in previous years (3 degus and 42 pigeons)
- **23** pigeons in need of ongoing support or sanctuary who are cared for at Linjoy Wildlife Rescue with our financial support
- **1** returnee – a previously released pigeon who came back for treatment for a leg injury
- **11** new admissions (all pigeons)
 - **3** died
 - **2** moved on to Linjoy with our support
 - **1** was rehomed
 - **5** are still here



In Focus – Pigeon Poo Sampling

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

212

SAMPLES TESTED, FOR

131

BIRDS, SAVING RESCUES

£3180

Wild pigeons commonly suffer from intestinal parasites which can cause weight loss, anorexia, dehydration, intestinal bleeding and, eventually, death. Identification of parasites relies on faecal samples being observed with a microscope and is essential to ensure that the right medications are given to treat the issue successfully. Professional labs exist for this, charging an average of £15 per sample.

Since 2019, we have offered free testing to pigeon rescues, allowing them to provide targeted treatment and direct their limited funds elsewhere. In total, we have undertaken 930 tests for 639 birds, saving rescues nearly £14,000!

In 2023, we spent just £141.15 on poo checking supplies to help 131 birds and save rescues £3180 which we think represents excellent value for money.

With 49 rescues and independent rehabbers now registered with our free poo sampling service, we expect 2024 to be our busiest year yet for sampling.



HelpWildlife.co.uk: Our 2023 in Summary

Highlights

- Website visitor numbers increased 21% in 2023, up to 334,302 – our busiest year to date.
- Completed a refresh of the main site design and all its content.
- Launched our £1 for Wildlife campaign which, along with ads on the listings, raised £1820.77 for UK wildlife rescues.
- Made small grants averaging £100 each to 12 wildlife rescuers.

Challenges

- Volunteer shortages meant we had to reduce HelpDesk availability and our average response time increased to 16 minutes.
- Volunteer shortages also meant we added less than half the 120 potential new listings identified to the site.
- Our costs increased this year owing to needing upgraded hosting and increased security to protect the website. It now costs around £100 a month to run the website and HelpDesk.

Plans

- Bring in new volunteers to help resource the HelpDesk and put more time into finding and adding new rescue resources to the directory.
- Undertake a refresh of the directory subsite to bring the look of the two sites together and add some new features.

OVER

£1800

RAISED FOR RESCUES

706

LIVE DIRECTORY LISTINGS

334,302

SITE VISITORS

1244

ANIMALS HELPED VIA OUR
HELPSK

In Focus: HelpWildlife Advice Articles & HelpDesk

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

178,539

HITS ON OUR ADVICE
ARTICLES

938

HELPDESK TICKETS
RECEIVED, ABOUT

1244

ANIMALS

More than 178,000 people read the 61 advice articles on the site this year, up about 35,000 on 2022. As in 2022, our most read articles were those about baby feral pigeons, birds with broken wings, and foxes with mange.

Our HelpDesk aims to help those who cannot find the information they need in the advice library, or rescue help in the directory. Volunteer shortages this year have meant we have had to trim down our offering here somewhat, reducing availability on Sundays and having to close the HelpDesk on other ad hoc days when cover wasn't available. As a result, ticket numbers are down 35% on 2022 and our average response time doubled from around 8 minutes last year, to 16 minutes in 2023.

We've also not been able to put as much resource into follow up work on HelpDesk tickets which includes identifying and drafting stories for our social media pages. We believe these are important in spreading knowledge and awareness of the plight of our wildlife and the work of UK wildlife rescues, so we are keen to resume this area of work.

In 2024, we will look at options for increasing HelpDesk coverage, though suitably knowledgeable and available volunteers are likely to be hard to come by. We will continue to review the suite of available articles and add new ones where there appears to be gaps and demand.

In Focus: HelpWildlife Directory

In 2023 we added 52 new listings to the directory. Unfortunately, we also removed 81 as the year saw a record number of rescues close. Common issues were lack of funds and the health of the rescue founders. The number of live directory listings is therefore slightly lower than in 2022 (706 compared to 732).

There is currently a backlog of 63 potential new listings to be added and a key priority for 2024 will be recruiting at least one new volunteer to help with getting these added to the site.

There were nearly 150,000 searches of the directory in 2023, up around 10,000 on 2022. Feedback on directory listings was down though – from around 1300 to 940. We need to look at why this might be and take steps to increase visitor feedback which plays an important role in helping us keep the directory up to date.

2023 was our first full year with ads on the site. This was a step we had some reservations about taking but decided to trial one small, discreet advert on each directory listing. This raised more than £550 over the course of the year which we have been able to use to support rescues in the form of small donations.

In 2024 we will undertake a refresh of the directory sub-site, bringing its design more in line with that of the main site and adding some new features.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

706

LIVE DIRECTORY LISTINGS

149,620

DIRECTORY SEARCHES

£550

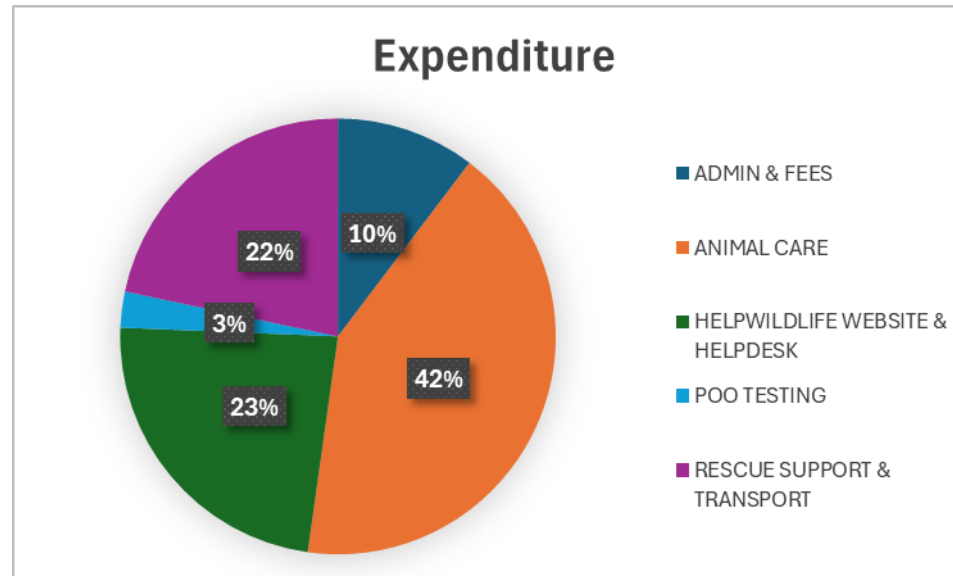
RAISED FOR RESCUES

In Focus – Finances

Although donations on the animal rescue side of our work are down again, income on the HelpWildlife side was boosted by ads on the directory and our £1 for Wildlife campaign.

Our spending was up on last year but less than our income. It's hard to know how many animals our work actually helps but even if just 10% of the visits to HelpWildlife result in an animal receiving help, it would be over 30,000 so we think our activities offer excellent value for money.

With income being over £5000, and likely to be again due to our efforts to raise money for wildlife rescues, we are now eligible to register with the Charity Commission. So we'll give some thought as to whether this is the right move for us. We are, of course, registered already with HMRC.



KEY FIGURES

INCOME

£5,564

EXPENDITURE

£5,290

END OF YEAR BALANCE

£5,316

Plans for 2024

Hands on Rescue

It's likely things will stay much the same here. We have found our groove with our online work, and we can help many more animals by focusing our time and energy there. We will continue to take in very small numbers of pigeons as and when space allows as well, of course, as continuing to offer the best possible care to our permanent residents. going forward.

Poo Sampling

We have big plans to extend our offering here. We'd like to start training other rescuers to sample and supporting them financially to buy their own microscopes. I'm hoping we can make a start on this in 2024. I'd also still like to enhance the testing we can do here to include yeasts, canker and bacteria but I think sharing our experience with other rescuers is the priority.

Rescue Support

We're very pleased with the £1800 we raised for rescues in 2023 but rescuing wildlife is really expensive so we want to increase this considerably. I'm not sure how yet, but we'll monitor the success of our campaigns and try to adjust them as needed to increase their productivity. We likely need to be more proactive in appealing for donations, but it can be hard to find the time to create engaging posts and appeals.

HelpWildlife Directory

Maintaining the directory is taking up a lot of time. It's important work but it does keep us from other projects. In 2024 we'll be undertaking a refresh of the site, bringing the appearance more in line with the main site (which was refreshed in 2023) and adding a few new elements. We need to encourage more rescues to claim and maintain their listings, and more visitors to leave feedback, to take some of the pressure off our volunteers. We will also need more volunteer help to enable us to add more new listings to the site to help replace those which have sadly had to close.

Plans for 2024

HelpWildlife Advice Articles & HelpDesk

We undertook several reviews of our advice articles in 2023, both of their content, and to revise the feedback element to direct visitors to the HelpDesk if they were struggling to find their help and information they needed. At this stage, no further work is planned on the advice articles beyond the standard annual review and adding any new articles which appear to be needed. A key priority before Spring will be to create a second HelpDesk form so we can have one version for us in busy periods which helps encourage visitors to help themselves with the information on the site, and one version for quieter times which is more accessible. With the loss of volunteers in this area, we need to strike a balance between being realistic about what we can do and being available to those who genuinely need our help.

Finances

2023 has been a better year financially and we'll need to think about whether registered charity status is the right move for us now. We've not been able to make much use of the Amazon Wishlist to encourage donations of goods due to ongoing technical issues with wish lists and third-party sellers. So, we'd like to look into alternative services which would enable supporters to send gifts of items to care for our animals and support our poo testing work. We finally launched a new sponsorship scheme for the permanent residents in late 2023 so we need to do more in 2024 to publicise this.

Other Projects

In our 2023 report we shared that we had an idea to bring together our work in advocating for pigeons, including helping place lost domestic pigeons and the pigeon poo sampling, into one place. Work did start on this in 2023 but we then got distracted by other things. This **will** happen in 2024 – I am determined. It has a name and a web address, so it finally feels like more than just an idea.

In Summary

With 2023 being our fourth year focusing on online work, we feel like we hit our groove. We were able to revamp two of our websites, raise money for wildlife rescues, undertake lots of poo tests, start work on a new project, and welcome a record number of visitors to [HelpWildlife.co.uk](https://www.HelpWildlife.co.uk).

We're looking forward to growing our poo testing work and launching our new pigeon project in 2024, as well as raising more funds to support wildlife rescues.

Our sincere thanks go to the volunteers who have worked with us to deliver these aims this year, fostering animals, maintaining the [HelpWildlife](https://www.HelpWildlife.co.uk) directory, and helping us give advice via the HelpDesk.

Our thanks, too, to all of those who have supported our work with donations – we literally could not have achieved any of what we have covered in this report without you.

Sarah & Dave Argrave
The Starlight Trust