

## CHAPTER 22

### **The work of the Donkey Rescue Centre in Corfu, Greece.**

Judy Quinn [Corfu Donkey Rescue]

Corfu needs to keep its shelter for donkeys.

When a donkey is injured, sick or too old to work, the owner would;

1. Simply take the donkey somewhere and abandon it.
2. Sell to the dealers for a few euros.
3. Trade with the dealers for a replacement.

I receive calls mainly from foreigners (non Greeks) about donkeys wandering on roads or loose in villages. I have received calls from the police and fire brigade about loose donkeys or donkeys involved in a road traffic accident, asking me to deal with the problem. In recent months since my work has become more widely known, Greeks tell me about donkeys abandoned on their land or donkeys that belong to them and they want me to take them for retirement, they do not want to abandon them nor do they want them to go to the dealers.

The dealers collect all the donkeys that cannot be resold. They then wait for a call from the mainland dealers who ask if they have enough donkeys to make it worth their while to come to Corfu and collect them. These donkeys are then shipped to Bari, Italy and the slaughterhouses.

My lawyer has recently found out that there is a government department whose job it is to deal with the problem of abandoned and stray donkeys. This department is supposed to collect they donkey, hold it SOMEWHERE for one week during which time it is advertised and the owner should come forward to claim it. If it is not claimed, the donkey is auctioned off. It seems that this service is not widely known as I have been unable to find anyone who knows about it. Certainly these days there is no demand for donkeys, especially the abandoned ones which are most certainly old, injured or sick. Therefore if this service was in place, only the dealers would purchase the animals for a few euros to sell to the mainland dealers and on to Italy.

So the work I do is necessary, not only because this government department does not do the work designated but more importantly, if it did, the donkey's fate would be sealed.

As I took in more donkeys I realized that many of the leg deformities, and there were many, were due to incorrect, or lack of, foot care. Also many problems could have been avoided by good veterinary advice. So I tried to start 'Outreach Clinics' to help the donkeys 'in the field'. To trim their feet, to do their teeth, to give medical treatment and advice so the donkeys work longer and better for their owners. This also delays the donkeys coming to the shelter.

To run the shelter and the outreach clinics is very costly. It also requires staff. With only myself and a few volunteers (all of us unpaid), we have kept this going for two and a half years. We have asked for nothing from the state, even though we are doing the job of the state. Now we face bigger challenges. We have to move from our premises.

We are happy to do the work the state should be doing, but in return we need state help to set it all up.

We require a piece of land to build a new shelter and hospital on.

We need a license to run this.

We would like a regular monthly income from the state for every donkey we take in 'off the street'.

The expenses involved in running the shelter are enormous. The food bill alone for 45 donkeys is over 600 euros a week. Then we have medicines and vet bills. Rent, water, electricity, telephones, building, repairs, sundry purchases etc etc. (nobody is paid a wage). With the trickle of money that comes in, we literally live from day to day, I estimate that closure will come in less than a year if serious financial help is not given. I personally have kept the shelter going with my money. It is running out.

The shelter has now become known nationally in Greece having been in the local papers and national TV. This will draw in more work for us and more donkeys to help, however, our greatest fear is that financially we will not be able to bear this burden and will have to turn donkeys away.

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**UPDATE: 31 January 2007**

The situation since we last talked has changed dramatically. A couple of weeks ago, a donkey from the shelter was tested positive for Equine Infectious Anaemia. He was one of 27 tested prior to export to fantastic donkey shelters in Austria, Germany, Holland and UK. This is a notifiable disease and the ministry in Athens are drawing up a 'plan of attack' - taking their time. The only information I have is that we will be quarantined for a year!!!! All donkeys and horses testing positive will be destroyed. We await instructions but this is really bad news especially as the donkeys cant go to their new homes, some may be put down and the extra financial strain of keeping all these donkeys.....My vet has suggested I set up another shelter outside the quarantine area so I can take new rescued donkeys there. I dont think he has any idea of the financial strain we are under. Not to mention that I can hardly look after 45 donkeys on my own, let alone another shelter! But he means well, bless him.

I shall definitely be asking the state for financial help just to feed them, as soon as the news breaks out.

So things go from bad to worse to bad again. But I keep looking at my donkeys all content and peaceful and know it is all worth it.

I am getting a lot of information about the history of the Corfu donkeys, first hand info. It makes for interesting reading, though often not for the faint hearted. I will, if ever I get time to write it, let you have it.

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