



## *Left on the Verge: In the grip of a horse crisis in England and Wales*

### The Brutal Truth: Case Studies

#### The Railway Horses

On 14<sup>th</sup> June 2013, HorseWorld were called to attend two horses straying on a railway line in **Avonmouth, Bristol**. The call had come from British Transport Police who had also contacted the RSPCA and a local vet.

On arrival, it was apparent that the fence had been deliberately cut to allow the horses onto the line. One of the animals, a 13.2hh black Thoroughbred colt, had a severe wound to the stifle, (the knee joint of his hind leg) and a congenital deformity lower down on the same limb. It is thought that the owner of the horses may have deliberately released them into the path of an oncoming train to dispose of their 'poor stock'.

The black yearling was issued with a Section 18 order by the vet allowing him to be removed from the scene due to his injuries and poor health. The other horse however, was not deemed to be in poor enough health to be able to issue a removal order (by law, the animals cannot be removed without this) and so was returned to the field and the fence secured so he could not stray onto the lines again.

The yearling, now named Black Beauty, was taken back to HorseWorld's isolation unit where his injuries were tended to and a programme of routine care such as worming, vaccination and farriery etc could begin. **He was not microchipped and no owner came forward for him. By law, all horses passported since 2009 should be microchipped. It is also illegal to own a horse over six months old without a passport however most horses rescued from abandonment or fly grazing incidents have neither a passport or a microchip and no owner ever comes forward to claim them.**

This is not the first incident of its kind and the problem of stray horses on railway lines is on the increase. Approximately one horse every three days is removed from the path of oncoming trains. Some are not lucky enough to leave the tracks alive.

*For more information on this story or for images, contact [amy.williams@horseworld.org.uk](mailto:amy.williams@horseworld.org.uk) or [stephen.poole@horseworld.org.uk](mailto:stephen.poole@horseworld.org.uk)*



## The Foal Left To Drown

A tiny foal abandoned in a river in **East London** arrived at Redwings Horse Sanctuary in Norfolk at the end of April.

The foal was found by a member of the public on Friday 19th April in a stretch of the **River Lea in Essex**. They alerted the RSPCA who attended immediately along with three appliances and 14 firefighters and officers from the London Fire Brigade who carried out a delicate operation to rescue him from the river. They named him Steve, but he was shivering so much that he has since become known as 'Shaking Stephen'. The fire officers wrapped him in blankets to warm him up and he was then taken to the Galley Hill Equine Surgery in Waltham Abbey where the vets treated him for hypothermia and gave him the vital colostrum (early stage milk) that he may not have received from his mother.

The surgery tried him with a surrogate mare, but when Stephen showed no real interest, they approached Redwings Horse Sanctuary to offer Stephen a home and continue with his hand rearing. He is thriving in the care of the Sanctuary and now has a surrogate mum called Queenie to teach him how to be a horse.

**No owner was ever found, and that combined with no mare being found nearby would indicate this foal was abandoned deliberately. This is not the first time a (male) foal has been found in this stretch of river, where the walls are 12ft and made of concrete.**

An RSPCA spokesperson said: "It is appalling and heartbreaking that a young foal like this could be dumped with no thought to his care or wellbeing. This is indicative of the sort of serious neglect of horses that we are increasingly seeing. We are grateful to Redwings for taking him on and caring for him."

*For more information or images, call Nicola Markwell at Redwings on 01508 481014 or email [nmarkwell@redwings.co.uk](mailto:nmarkwell@redwings.co.uk)*



## The Airport Pony

Heath was born at Blue Cross after his pregnant mum Minnie and six other ponies were found **running wild and free to breed** in a rundown field next to **Heathrow's Terminal 4 in Hillingdon, West London**. His mum was underweight, infested with lice and worms and had badly overgrown hooves. The field was a very dangerous place for horses, littered with rusting scrap metal and poisonous ragwort.

Fortunately Heath made it through the pregnancy and was raised at the Blue Cross' Burford rehoming centre. When he was old enough, he was weaned from his mother and given good basic handling where he learned skills like being led, having his feet picked out and getting examined by a vet.

Once he reached the age of four, the 11.1hh native pony started his training to become a riding pony. Thanks to his upbringing at Blue Cross, this was quite an easy process as Heath had been prepared for his life ahead and had the confidence to face new challenges with ease.

*For information on this story, please contact the Blue Cross by emailing [press@bluecross.org.uk](mailto:press@bluecross.org.uk) or telephoning 0300 777 1950.*



## The Industrial Estate Horse

It was 'touch and go' for a dark bay mare found emaciated and collapsed on a Newcastle industrial estate but she has now recovered after being taken to a specialist equine veterinary surgery.

The pony was spotted by a member of the public on **Newburn Haugh Industrial Estate, Riversdale Court, Newburn, Tyne and Wear** in February 2013. They called the RSPCA.

RSPCA Inspector Claire Hunt said: "This pony was in a terrible state. She was extremely thin and had no energy at all. I think she must have been dumped the previous day and gone down overnight as there were lots of marks on the grass where she was trying to get back to her feet. It certainly didn't bode well for her."

As the pony couldn't stand Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service were called. They used their specialist lifting equipment to get her into a horsebox.

"We are extremely grateful to them, as always. They were extremely helpful and professional and we couldn't have rescued her without them," said Inspector Hunt.



The pony – called 'Daisy' by those caring for her - was transported to the vets where she was put on a drip overnight.

The pony was wearing a navy rug and **was microchipped but no owner details had been registered so there was no way of tracing them.**

RSPCA Inspector Hunt said: "It was touch and go for Daisy. I would be lying if I said it didn't make me very angry. All she needed was the most basic of things, food and water."

*For more on this story please contact Sophie Wilkinson at the RSPCA by emailing [sophie.wilkinson@rspca.org.uk](mailto:sophie.wilkinson@rspca.org.uk) or telephoning 0300 123 0244.*

## The Roaming 100

In **Gravesend, Kent** lies a close to eight-mile-long field littered with abandoned and neglected horses, numbers are constantly increasing. World Horse Welfare Field Officer for Essex, Kent and East Sussex, Alana Chapman, often finds herself immersed in the goings-on there.

She says: “There is a walking route alongside the area called Saxon Shore Way so I tend to get calls from passers-by regarding concerns for the horses and I visit there quite frequently. It is difficult because you have to walk for miles across large stretches of land to find the horses of concern as there are 100+ all running feral.”

Alana has dealt with numerous horses from the area that needed immediate care from the charity, World Horse Welfare, including having to drag horses out of deep marshland and working with vets to put individual equines to sleep at the scene due to severe suffering.

Alana describes the horrific ordeal for one mare and her dead foal: “After walking for three miles across the vast grassland I came across this coloured mare, she was laying down. The closer I got to her the more strongly I could smell this vile smell, like a rotting stench. The poor mare looked as if she had prolapsed, but what had really happened was she had given birth to a dead foal, the foal and afterbirth were hanging out of her, just left there.

“It was a very hot day and she must have been so incredibly uncomfortable with no one to care for her. I then had to walk three miles to get the vet and again attempt to find her amongst all the other horses. Once the vet had checked her, we found that she had a broken pelvis, so we had to put her to sleep to end her suffering. This is another unnecessary example of horses being left to indiscriminately breed with one another.”

“The problem is that **none of these equines are microchipped or passported,**” continues Alana. “So there is no way to link these horses to their owners, therefore no action can be taken against owners. Fly grazing has massively increased in my area, partly due to the economic crisis but mainly due to the fact that people can get away with doing it.

“Owners can simply dump their animals on good land, with good grazing, for free and if they cannot be held accountable for their actions then why would they not put them on there? The reality is that eventually these horses will die, it is inevitable that the equines will deteriorate without proper care. Charities cannot cope with mass numbers like these that are currently all over the UK right now, in the same position. We need help to put a stop to this. ”

*For more on this story, please contact Amy Fordham at World Horse Welfare by emailing [AmyFordham@worldhorsewelfare.org](mailto:AmyFordham@worldhorsewelfare.org) or by telephone to 01953 497248*



## The Foal Dumped On Wasteland

In June 2012 this young colt foal was found dumped on wasteland in **County Durham**. There was no sign of his mother and no clue as to how he got there. Subsequently named Patrick, he was thought to be less than 24 hours old and was still wet from his birth.

The terrified foal was rescued by the RSPCA and British Horse Society (BHS), who assumed responsibility for his care. He was extremely dehydrated and needed intensive care as well as expensive antibodies to help him fight off infection. There is no doubt that had he not been found when he was, Patrick would have died a solitary and lonely death



Patrick's team of carers fed him every 2 hours day and night through the first few months of his life. Attempts to find him a foster mother failed when a number of potential candidates rejected him.

Twelve months on, after many sleepless nights and a great deal of hard work, Patrick is a happy and healthy yearling. He is one of the lucky ones.

BHS Head of Welfare Lee Hackett said, "**Patrick is one of many colt foals who are being abandoned or, even worse, killed. The market for colts, particularly those without valuable bloodlines, has fallen away with the recession and sadly a small minority of breeders see dumping or killing their excess stock as the easy answer to the problem of what to do with them. Charities are left to pick up the pieces from irresponsible breeders.**"

*For more information on this story, or for images, contact Alison Coleman at the British Horse Society on [alison.coleman@bhs.org.uk](mailto:alison.coleman@bhs.org.uk) or 02476 840463.*

## ...And The Ponies In A Garden

Two miniature Shetland ponies Monster Munch and French Frie were rescued from a small back garden in **West Sussex** strewn with rubbish and scrap metal. They were belly-high in mud and in an awful condition - underweight with matted coats and infested with lice. They were taken to the Blue Cross rehoming centre in Burford where the team gave them the veterinary care and attention they needed and restored them to health.



Munch and Frie were very timid when they arrived at the charity and it was clear that they hadn't been handled much. Over time they became more confident as they got used to being around people and the rehoming team were able to give them the training they needed to prepare them for a future in a loving home.

Next staff at the centre needed to find Munch and Frie the right home where they could continue to blossom. They have now been rehomed through the Blue Cross rehoming scheme.

*For information on this story, please contact the Blue Cross by emailing [press@bluecross.org.uk](mailto:press@bluecross.org.uk) or telephoning 0300 777 1950.*

## The Blackpool Horses

A man and woman from **Blackpool** were banned from keeping horses for 10 years after admitting four allegations under the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

The couple appeared before the town's magistrates' court for sentencing in February 2013.

They pleaded guilty to causing unnecessary suffering to six horses by failing to investigate and address the causes of their poor body condition and weight loss; failing to meet the needs of eight horses by failing to protect them from pain, suffering, injury or disease by failing to provide internal parasite treatment; failing to meet the needs of eight horses by failing to protect them from pain, suffering, injury or disease by failing to ensure they received adequate and appropriate hoof care and failing to meet the needs of eight horses by failing to provide a suitable environment.

RSPCA Inspector Mandi Taylor said: "This was a very frustrating case for all involved. These horses were moved from several previous locations before eventually turning up at Skippool Road, which was equally unsuitable due to hazards like ragwort and the lack of grazing. We tried really hard to work with the owners but they continued to ignore our advice until eventually the condition of the horses deteriorated and they were removed. They had chance after chance but didn't take them."

The horses were taken into possession by police on veterinary advice and placed in the care of the RSPCA and World Horse Welfare in August 2012.

The couple were deprived of the three horses not already signed over to the charities and ordered to pay £1,000 costs each.

"The 'before' and 'after' pictures of the horses show what a difference being wormed and fed enough of the right things makes. That's all they needed," said Inspector Taylor.

Three of the horses are in RSPCA care, and a fourth had to be put to sleep. One of them is already up for rehoming. Storm was cared for at RSPCA Felledge equine centre.

The other four horses were cared for by World Horse Welfare.

World Horse Welfare's field officer John Cunningham said: "We hoped the condition of these horses would pick up when they arrived at Skippool Road but they continued to deteriorate and Ms Willey was not caring for them. There was no grass left for them to eat and they were becoming even more underweight. **There was an on-going failure to provide proper care and it reached the point where removal of the horses was the only viable avenue available to us.**"

*For more on this story please contact Sophie Wilkinson at the RSPCA by emailing [sophie.wilkinson@rspca.org.uk](mailto:sophie.wilkinson@rspca.org.uk) or telephoning 0300 123 0244.*



## The Pony With Burns

The RSPCA are appealing for information after a pony was found dumped with horrendous injuries in **Winterbourne near Bristol**.

Watson, as he was later named by HorseWorld, was found on 8 June in a field on Old Gloucester Road. He had horrific wounds on much of his body, which appeared to be some kind of burns.

RSPCA Inspector Chris James attended and immediately called a vet and the police, who seized Watson. Inspector James also contacted HorseWorld who collected the coloured colt and took him for treatment.

As well as the burns to his skin, Watson was suffering from an ulcerated mouth, he had lice and had no hair on half of his body. He was thought to be just 18 months old. Despite intensive veterinary care, Watson had to be put to sleep three days later as he had extensive kidney damage. It is not known if his injuries were caused by ingesting a toxic substance or if a corrosive fluid was poured onto his skin.

RSPCA Chief Inspector John Atkinson visited Watson at HorseWorld shortly after he was found. He said:



“I thought I’d seen everything until I saw the state this poor horse was in. It was absolutely shocking to see his injuries and how much he’d suffered.

**“He wasn’t microchipped** and we have exhausted all efforts to find his owner so now we are making an appeal to anyone who might have information about what happened to this pony.

**“This also highlights the problems we have in trying to trace the owners of dumped or cruelly treated animals. By law all horses must be microchipped and have passports, but there are many irresponsible owners out there who just don’t bother. These are the same owners who leave animals like Watson without treatment. We need more enforcement of microchipping and passporting to bring such owners to account.”**

Jerry Watkins, HorseWorld’s National Welfare Director said: “My heart went out to this poor little fellow who endured a short and miserable life. The only consolation was that we were able to relieve his suffering somewhat at the end.”

*For more information on this story or for images, contact [amy.williams@horseworld.org.uk](mailto:amy.williams@horseworld.org.uk) or [stephen.poole@horseworld.org.uk](mailto:stephen.poole@horseworld.org.uk)*

## The Pony On The Streets...

A pony found wandering the roads in **Diss, Norfolk** has been offered a secure home at Redwings Horse Sanctuary.

The tiny pony, who is thought to be between three and four months old, was found roaming the streets of Diss in Norfolk by a local family at the end of May 2013. They moved her to safety by placing her in their back garden until the authorities could arrive to collect her, and even gave her a parasol to use as a shelter. They named the pony 'Lottie'. She was severely underweight, weighing just 49kgs, and was suffering from diarrhoea and dehydration.

Lottie was taken to the Redwings Reception Centre in Norfolk to receive immediate treatment from the charity's team of vets. She has now been signed over to Redwings by the RSPCA. **It is suspected that she was deliberately abandoned. She had no microchip and no owner ever came forward to claim her.**

RSPCA Animal Welfare Officer Craig Plumley said: "This little pony was probably abandoned because her irresponsible owners did not want to pay for vet treatment to get her better. It is cruel and heartless and we would still like to hear from anyone who knows where she came from and who owned her. Anyone with any information should call us on 0300 1234 999."

Redwings Senior Field Officer Julie Harding said: "Poor little Lottie had a body condition score of just 0.5 when she was found, who knows how long she had been left to her own devices? It is unbelievable to think that someone could heartlessly abandon such a young pony like this. We are just so glad she was found when she was – huge thanks go to the family who took her in and protected her, it's no exaggeration to say that you may well have saved her life."



For more information on Lottie or images, call Nicola Markwell at Redwings on 01508 481014 or email [nmarkwell@redwings.co.uk](mailto:nmarkwell@redwings.co.uk)

### **...And The Mare On The Housing Estate**

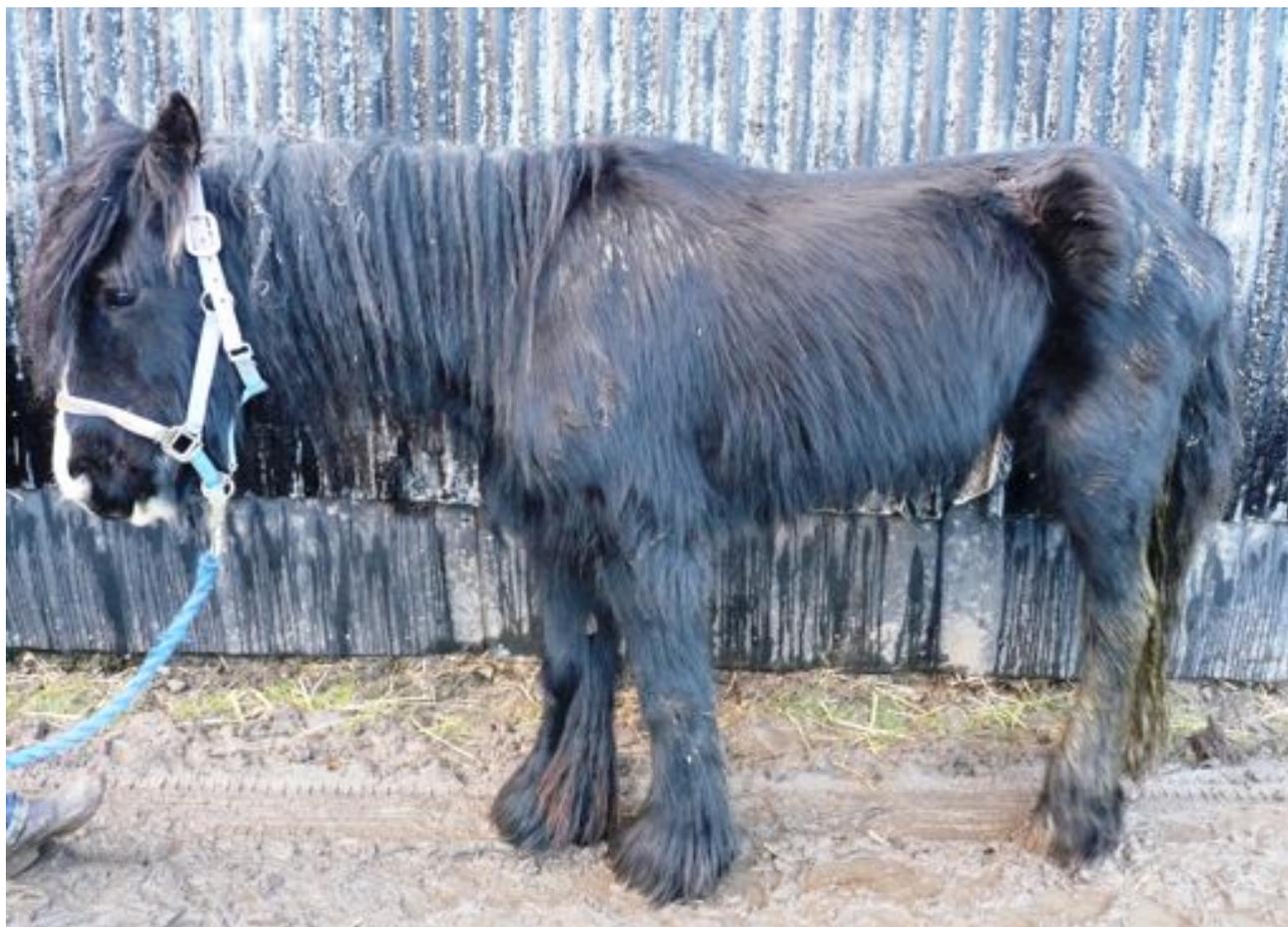
In March 2013, an emaciated black mare was found wandering around a housing estate in **Gilesgate, Durham**. Reported to the RSPCA and British Horse Society (BHS), she was taken into the care of the BHS in a very sorry state.

Her thick winter coat did little to mask how thin she was. Her hind legs were covered in faeces as a result of her dreadful diarrhoea and she was diagnosed with a particularly nasty clostridial infection and severe red worm infestation.

**Unusually, the mare had been microchipped and passported to comply with the legislation and was found to be called Peggy. However, her first owner, who obtained the passport, had sold her on and the new owner had failed to update the passport records. Consequently it was not possible to prosecute anybody for the appalling condition that Peggy was found in.**

BHS Development Officer Wendy Suddes said “The mare was in a really pitiful state. We came very close to making the difficult decision to put her to sleep as her chances of recovery were so slim. Thankfully she has responded well to treatment and four months on she isn’t quite out of the woods but is very much improved. It is particularly frustrating that we weren’t able to trace her owner so that action could be taken against them.”

*For more information on this story, or for images, contact Alison Coleman at the British Horse Society on [alison.coleman@bhs.org.uk](mailto:alison.coleman@bhs.org.uk) or 02476 840463.*



## Finally... The Horses Left To Rot

Sarah Coverdale from **Thrussington, Leicestershire** was convicted of causing and failing to prevent unnecessary suffering to animals on June 20th of this year.



The equines on her land were diseased and the fields had poor grass and were littered with excrement. Not only that, but on a previous occasion nine dead horses had already been left to rot on her land.

World Horse Welfare and Trading Standards had attempted to hold her accountable for her premises and the suffering of equines before. Her first time in court had got her a two year suspended sentence and a £500 fine, but World Horse Welfare were not satisfied with that result and sought to find the evidence that would ban her from ever being allowed to keep horses again.

World Horse Welfare Chief Field Officer, David Boyd was asked to assist in operations at the scene by Trading Standards in February 2012 and to take two of the most severe horses into its care. What David found on that day was disturbing.

"It was minus two and this poor horse was lying still, barely breathing on the floor; he was one of the horses that we said we would take into our care. I will never forget the look in his eyes, just looking at me, desperate, and asking for someone, anyone, to save him from suffering any longer. He had to be put to sleep on scene. The second horse that we were due to rescue on a separate visit was taken away by vets for immediate attention, but was also destined for the same fate; he was put to sleep before the night was up.

"Rotting carcasses were found on Miss Coverdale's land, where animals had eaten out the insides of the bodies and bones littered around the place that had been compressed into the ground as they'd been left there for so long. I couldn't understand how someone could relinquish all responsibility to this horror when it was right in front of their face and on their very own land."

Originally and throughout the case against her, Miss Coverdale denied claims of causing suffering to any animal upon her land saying that a 'Mr Smith', supposedly a traveller, came every day to feed the horses. She said that she had no responsibility for the horses because she had entered a verbal contract with Mr Smith, despite having no phone number or address for him and not knowing his first name. Prosecutor Richard Thatcher said this in court: "The horses were suffering and this could have been stopped by calling a vet. There's no Mr Smith, is there? If there is, he's committing criminal offences on your property and you let him carry on."

District Judge, Tim Daber rejected Coverdale's claims: "I reject Miss Coverdale's account of this Mr Smith and find her to be the owner of the horses."

This time, Miss Coverdale was found guilty of six animal cruelty offences and banned from keeping horses for life. Coverdale, who already has a lifetime ban preventing her from keeping sheep, was given two months to dispose of 34 horses on her land.

Sadly, World Horse Welfare never got to take in those two horses because they had to be put to sleep, due to the severe neglect they had suffered – under the watchful eye of a woman that simply looked at the dying equines, shrugged her shoulders and repeatedly said: 'They're not mine'.

*For more on this story, please contact Amy Fordham at World Horse Welfare by emailing [AmyFordham@worldhorsewelfare.org](mailto:AmyFordham@worldhorsewelfare.org) or by telephone to 01953 497248*