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Well, everybody, here we go again. Yet another year has passed by, and yet again, I can honestly say it has proved to be another incredible year at Hollytrees. Stressful, tiring, and traumatic at times, but so rewarding and life-affirming at others. We feel it all here at Hollytrees. I sometimes can't believe the things we see happen to animals and, occasionally, people. Nonetheless, I hope this newsletter finds you all happy, healthy, and looking forward to the holidays.

As ever, COVID and its related complications continued to rear their ugly heads this year. The sheer volume of animals bred and sold during the lockdown is mind-blowing. Many of them were rounded up or bred in Europe before being imported or smuggled into the country. You can understand why they do it though, I mean have you seen how much these pups are being sold for? Mega amounts of money. And I mean MEGA amounts. And of course people who were stuck at home during the lockdown bought these animals. To keep loneliness at bay and/or their families happy. I completely understand deciding to bring a new companion into your life. The problem became, as we all saw it would, when everyone started going back to work, and kids back to school, and these poor animals were being left at home all day. Suddenly realising that they didn't in fact have the time necessary to devote to their new animal friends. So they ring the local rescues, either small voluntary ones, or the larger national ones, and are greeted with the same message: "We are full to bursting." So where are they to turn? Thankfully most people don't just dump these poor animals on the street, and will hold on for a space to become available. But it does happen. They do get dumped. Putting undue stress and danger on these poor animals, they didn't ask to be bred into this situation. And the constantly rising numbers of animals looking to be rehomed, combined with fewer and fewer spaces being available,

puts so much pressure on the animal rescue sector and those that work in it. I worry for the future and how we'll all work through it, because at the end of the day, we have to find a way through it. The animals deserve that.

Of course, COVID isn't the only thing adding pressure to pet owners. The veterinary practices, especially the group-owned practices, raising their prices at higher and higher rates over the years are a big factor. Adding to that, the current cost of living crisis, which is forcing prices up across the board, means pet owners are finding themselves stuck between a rock and a hard place, with nowhere to turn. Hopefully, an authority will step in and control the constant vet price increases. But until then, the rising costs are another reason so many pet owners are looking to rehome their animals. Sadly, finding that rescue spaces are few and far between. And of course, the rising costs hit all the rescue centres just as hard. Food, energy, and veterinary costs are through the roof, causing some centres to close. Thankfully, the immense generosity of our donors means we should be able to provide a safe haven for animals for a long time to come.

These frustrations also bleed over to the boarding side of Hollytrees. With all the extra pets, be they cats, dogs, rabbits, guinea pigs, birds, or what have you, there doesn't seem to be enough capacity for boarding throughout the country. For us, this isn't even restricted to just peak times; it is year-round. I personally know two boarding kennels and three boarding catteries that shut down during the COVID lockdowns; their owners eventually decided to just shut up shop and retire. Needless to say, our phone hasn't stopped ringing with people desperately looking for boarding whilst they take a well-earned break. But where can they take their beloved pets? I admit it puts a great deal of pressure on us and the remaining boarding kennels and catteries. We firmly believe that we need to look after our regular clients first and foremost. Nevertheless, it feels bad not being able to help people out. As you may know, the boarding side of Hollytrees is my and my family's only source of income. Enabling us to keep our work with the rescue side all voluntary. But with added pressure on both sides, we have to make sure we keep a good balance between them so we can help as many animals in need as we can. Come what may, I hope we can get through all this and return to some level of normality.

After all that, I have to take a moment to thank the hard-working Hollytrees Animal Rescue Trust staff. Their sustained effort is the only reason we can help as many animals as we do. They continue to rise above and beyond, and this place simply couldn't run without

them. Also, I can't forget our wonderful team of volunteers, some of whom visit us three times a week or more to lend a helping hand. You know who you are, and we appreciate what you do for us, not to mention for all of the creatures in our care. COVID unfortunately brought along a whole host of new regulations and health and safety measures for us to abide by to keep running the licensed boarding kennels and rescue centre. When you consider the close proximity in which we work, and the fact that most of our boarding clients are going abroad, it makes sense. But sadly, that means we've had to severely limit our volunteer numbers to keep everyone safe and everything above board. It's understandable from the point of view of keeping everyone safe and healthy; especially for work experience, the schools have to prioritise keeping the students safe. But I do miss the days before the dreaded COVID. We used to have students from lots of places. University work placements. Colleges covering anything from animal welfare, management, agriculture, and pre-veterinary medicine. Not to mention all the pupils from secondary schools for work experience. They were all brilliant. And it felt great to give them an insight and step up into an industry they were interested in joining. But, like I say, we had to restrict all that. Fingers crossed, things will get better next year, and we can start taking on more volunteers and work placements.

Anyway, enough of my worries and concerns, let's talk about some animals.

I'm sure you've heard me say before that we aim to help everything and anything that comes our way. And I'm so proud of what the team here manages to accomplish, giving every creature that winds up here the very best of care. The intake numbers are always increasing, but I'm confident that we will rise to the occasion and help everything we can.

As you know if you've ever been to the centre or read these newsletters before, birds are our bread and butter when it comes to the wildlife rescue side of Hollytrees. Pigeons especially. It's unbelievable how many get brought to us. And this year has been no exception. Whilst it sometimes feels like we're the only rescue within a hundred miles that takes in and looks after pigeons and other birds, it does mean we have got it down to a fine art. I've talked many times before about our hand-rearing and rehabilitation practices. The hand-fed live mealworms or the syringes full of Ready-Brek or specialised rearing milk, depending on the species. The process works. But this year, the main issue surrounding birds has been the dreaded Bird Flu. We've had to implement strict protocols when accepting in and handling birds. We see so many that if

one with bird flu slips through into the main rehabilitation room, it would spread through them all like wildfire. Not to mention all the chickens and domesticated birds we have in our care. We were advised to halt all acceptance of birds, but how can you turn away animals in need? We just want to help. So we put practices in place to quarantine and spot symptoms, provide isolation facilities, and thankfully we made it through the year without an outbreak.

One animal I like to work with are bats. We get a few every year. Most are just exhausted and need rest, some may be really old. But we try everything we can. Warmth is absolutely paramount, and I always have a supply of healthy, live mealworms which we feed to lots of mammals and birds here. They are easy to administer and give everything such a massive boost. Bats are not the friendliest, or the easiest, of creatures to deal with. Even just handling you should wear the proper protective equipment, their bites can be especially dangerous. But we just have to remember they don't understand what's happening, we can't tell them we're only trying to help. And the feeling you get when they can be returned to the wild is like no other. We always turn to Amicus Vets when we're in need of advice with the more unusual animals and cases. Everyone there is 200% and I trust them completely with all animals, both domestic and wildlife.

I feel like I bring this up every year, but can anyone tell me why deer do so well in this country? I have and always will help where I can, but honestly it's getting silly how many calls we get about deer. Whether they're getting stuck in fences, trapped in buildings, hit by vehicles when they dart out of hedgerows. We hear it all. It feels to me like the breed that causes the most trouble is the little Muntjac. Other organisations have the policy that since they are not native to this country, they have to be euthanized on site; I've seen this in writing. All I can say is, we all have rules to abide by, but taking a creature's life simply because it is undesirable or non-native, does not enter the equation for us. After all, it's not their fault they are in this country. They were purposefully introduced in the early 20th century from China, and without natural predators their numbers increased rapidly. But you know our policy. And I've mentioned before that I believe in reincarnation, so I might just come back as a deer! No comments from you readers please.

One success story in particular this year was a young Muntjac that was fished out of a canal late one night in June and brought to our door at 10pm, cold and shivering, but still feisty. A teenage girl was out canoeing on the canal with a group and spotted it thrashing around, desperately trying to get out. Bravely,

she paddled up to it and managed to scoop it up, keep it steady, and return to the bank, all without falling out of the canoe herself! I was amazed as she told me the story. We got her in a warm pen, under a heat lamp, and gave her a good feed. Although animals can't talk, we could tell she was grateful for her young saviour. We kept her at the centre for a few weeks to make sure she was healthy and can happily say that she was released onto some private land where she is now thriving.



The young muntjac deer on her first morning at the centre. Keeping warm in one of our heated and escape proof pens.

We've had a record number of calls about foxes this year. Most are calls about sightings of foxes with the dreaded mange. Such an awful condition for them. I always give the same advice, if you are able to set up a regular feeding station for them, we can administer medication to them via the food. If that doesn't work we can trap them and work with them at the centre, but we do prefer to leave the animals in the area they are used to if possible. Sometimes we get calls about foxes so far afield that we are unable to get out there to help in a timely manner. In such cases we always highly recommend the National Fox Welfare service, who do such a fantastic job. I've been out to deal with a few cases of foxes getting trapped in what is known as Heras panels. These are the mesh fences you find around building sites and the like. The wire mesh has an inch or two gap and is pliable enough that if an animal hits it at speed, like if running in fear, it gets its head jammed in and are well and truly stuck. I've been out to foxes, cats, even an owl, they all manage to get themselves trapped in it. Thankfully if we can keep them calm, they are simple to extract. The majority are absolutely fine and can be released immediately, only a few isolated cases aren't so lucky. I've complained about them to the powers that will listen, but am awaiting a real response.

I have to say I feel we are going to see a major problem with cats in the near future. Every cat rescue I know of, including ourselves, is full to the brim with cats and has waiting lists many months long. And in our case I can

honestly say we get at minimum a dozen calls per day regarding cats in need of rescue and rehoming. With the dire circumstances and with winter upon us I do fear for any cats that are dumped on the streets. And with the way cats become feral and breed, the problem will only exacerbate. We will need cat wardens. Honestly I feel they may be needed now. The dog wardens do a fantastic job, certainly in and around the Midlands, even with services being cut to the bone. But they too find it difficult to find places to house abused and stray dogs, having to go further afield. We always help where we can, but like I say we're all fit to burst. But mark my words cats will need major help and I feel councils will have no choice but to get involved. There is only a certain amount the smaller voluntary groups and even the larger national charities can do. To make my point, I'm writing this newsletter in the breakroom and the phone has rung 8 times since I've sat down. 5 of those were people who needed to rehome a total of 8 cats! And it's only going to get worse.

We continue to aid the emergency services when they need it. I'm so pleased that we are able to help the brave people working on the front line. The latest callout was different, to say the least. A police officer called our out of hours emergency number. She asked if we could help with a hamster in its own cage which was ½ full of water! Obviously we said yes, no problem. I was intrigued to learn what had happened to the poor thing. Well, it turned out a fire had broken out, potentially arson, in a home with a lady and eight year old daughter. The fire service put the fire out quickly, God bless them, and the family were fine but whisked away to hospital for safe measure. The hamster, getting drenched in the process, was left behind in the chaos. The police officer, unsure what was best to do for the poor thing, knew just who to call. Referring to us as her only hope! Thankfully the hamster was fine. We transferred her to a new enclosure and placed her under a nice heat lamp to dry and recover from the ordeal. She was collected a few days later by a very, very happy owner, who thought she was lost in the fire. I tell you there wasn't a dry eye in the place! Certainly a story for when I finally get around to writing my book. Social services are another department who are always appreciative of our help. We get calls from all over the Midlands. Generally looking for help with tenants, usually vulnerable, who need their pets looking after when they find themselves in dire straits. As mentioned earlier rescue spaces are at an absolute premium right now, but we will always step in and help when we can. The owners are always so grateful, to which we reply we just want the animals to be safe. If we could help them all, we would.



If it's not the phone ringing here at Hollytrees, it's people pinging us over the Internet. Whether it's via email, or Facebook, or the like, it's another great lifeline for animals needing help. I admit I'm absolutely useless at it, but eldest daughter Wendy, and the good people who run the Facebook group 'The Only Way is Wythall and Hollywood' are fantastic at alerting us to anything that needs help. And indeed pointing people in our direction. Plus you find groups like the 'Witches Walk' and others that fundraise for us. Not only does it help the animals in need, but it brings the community together around it. So often we see the now jokingly famous saying, "I know who will help you... Ray Dediccoat at Hollytrees!" It hadn't dawned on me, but someone pointed it out the other day, this is my 36th year at the helm of Hollytrees. Believe me I didn't, and couldn't, do it by myself. I've always had a fantastic team and support group around me. We've grown to such a level now, mainly through word of mouth, that we're helping animals from all over the country. As proud as I am of the service we provide, I've had to do my best to keep it at a manageable level. It would be easy to let it grow out of control, but it's better for all involved to keep it manageable.

Well I should really start wrapping this up so we can get it printed and out to you good people. But before that I have to thank each and everyone one of you. Our goal and hope here at Hollytrees is always to be able to help as many animals that come our way, whatever they may be. And as you've heard me say many times, we couldn't do it without the generous support we receive from folks like you.

It's a lovely feeling that we can help animals in need. But it's a better feeling seeing you good people help us, to help them. It's reaffirming in a world where we're all plagued by bad news everyday. I get told off for mentioning names, because there are honestly so many of you that I inevitably forget someone, so I won't do it again. All I know is we get lovely help in all sorts of ways. Thousands of newspapers, the number one thing we get through here at the centre. All sorts of bedding. Food and treats of every type imaginable, which really helps keep the dogs and cats diets varied and interesting. Stacks of dog and cat treats which are invaluable when trying to rehabilitate and socialise nervous and abused animals. Anything you can imagine. It all gets gently placed in our famous green wheelie bin, found just outside the entrance to the centre. It's almost a full time job just to keep it empty! I feel I should mention that I don't usually ask for things in particular, but I will say we can always use your old greetings cards. We recycle them for notes and labels for all the animals in our care. So if you find you have stacks of them piling up at the end of the festive

season, you know where you can drop them off! I'm constantly overwhelmed with the generosity we see. I genuinely thank you all from the bottom of my heart. And I know if the animals in our care could talk, they would be thanking you as well.

Whenever I come to thank all of the wonderful people who keep this place running, I am sadly reminded of all those who have departed to the famous rescue centre in the sky. Believe me we have lost a fair few friends this year. I'd like to take a moment to remember them, and the work they did, and take it as read that you may not be here with us anymore, but you will never be forgotten. Cheers.

On a final, personal note, I am still very much enjoying being a granddad to little Amelia. Nothing brings me joy like seeing her stomping around the place, preparing for when she's in charge. She started school in September, but she's still eager to help out with the animals when she gets home. I see the future of Hollytrees in her. Eldest daughter Wendy is still slowly taking over the administrative work, enabling me to remain more hands-on with the animals. Laura is still helping vulnerable people in Nottingham. And Emma is still doing the family proud working as a paramedic. And of course, I can't forget my long-suffering partner in crime, Ann, who has stuck by me through thick and thin, helping grow this place into what it is today.

Happy Holidays from me, my family, and the team here at Hollytrees. Here's to a healthy and prosperous new year! Xxx

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Donations are gratefully received at the above address.



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