

# The Donkey Sanctuary of Canada

## Solace, refuge and tranquility

STORY AND PHOTOS BY VALERIE DAVIDGE

On 100 acres of beautiful, rolling land, forests, fields and meadows just north of the 401 and west of #6 highway in Puslinch lies The Donkey Sanctuary of Canada. In this idyllic setting, small herds of donkeys graze in contentment, enjoying the unhurried pace of life. For many of them The Sanctuary Farm is a welcome and often lifesaving respite after years of suffering, cruelty and neglect.

In August this year, the Sanctuary celebrated 12 years of incorporation, but the idea for it began many years before with the dreams of a young girl. When Sandra Kennedy encountered working animals languishing in fields, in debilitating cold or sweltering heat, lacking food, water and shelter, she became obsessed about the animals' welfare. Her parents told her that animals did not have souls and did not suffer – a prevalent belief at the time – but Sandra was unable to reconcile her parents' beliefs with her own and, haunted by the plight of animals in distress, she dreamed that one day she would be able to help them. It wasn't until many years later, when Sandra and her husband, David Pady, purchased this farm that her childhood dream of rescuing animals came true.

She first contacted the Joywind Farm Rare Breeds Conservancy Inc. in Campbellford to learn about rare breeds in need of conservation and also began to educate herself about farming. She and David read books and spoke with other farmers and breeders of livestock in order to learn about modern farming techniques and they rented out their eastern pasture to a neighbour for his sheep.

When Dudley, their youngest poodle, accidentally killed one of the lambs while playing, Sandra was devastated. Concerned about the welfare of the sheep she spoke to a friend who told her that donkeys could be placed with sheep to act as guardians. The friend, Jy Shipperzak, the founder of the Rare Breeds Conservancy, offered to let her foster three of the Conservancy's donkeys.

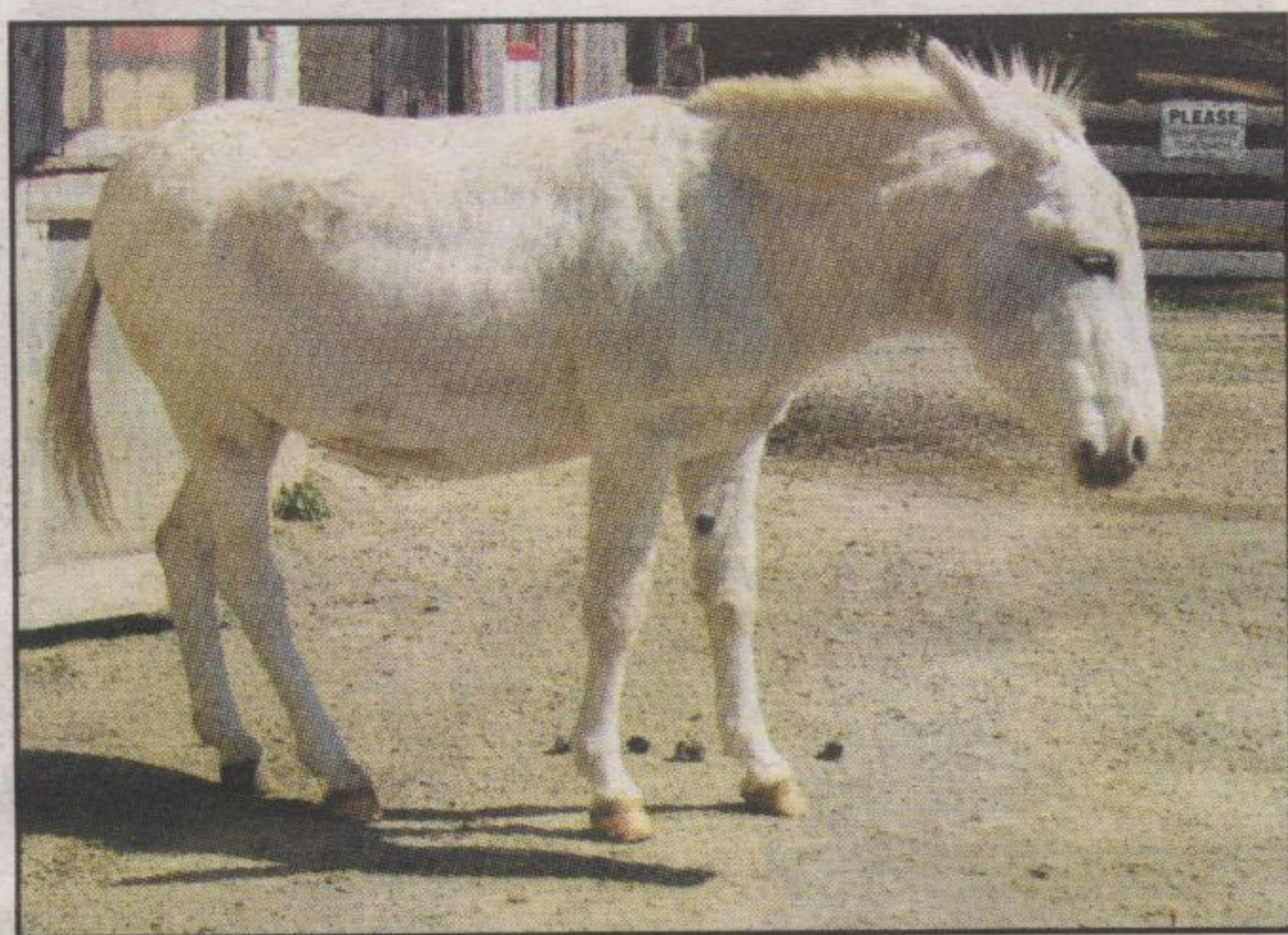
From the first day Riley, Bronwyn and Apache trotted into her life, Sandra was captivated. She could not get enough of the donkey's gentle stillness and soothing, restful presence and found herself spending more and time with them.

Her first opportunity to rescue a donkey came unexpectedly. A neighbouring farmer had bought a donkey to guard his herd of goats. When the little donkey proved an ineffective guardian, he was confined to a stall, where he remained lonely and despondent.

When Sandra learned about the donkey, she arranged to purchase him and thus Sebastian became the first donkey rescued by what was soon to become The Donkey Sanctuary of Canada. Shortly after, she learned about twelve donkeys slated for an equine auction that would be sold to a slaughterhouse if no buyer appeared, so she took them in as well. By now, sixteen donkeys were grazing in the field.

Sandra says that she never considered the possibility of her farm becoming a sanctuary for donkeys until friends mentioned there were several donkey sanctuaries in England and she started researching and writing letters requesting information. Dr. Elizabeth Svendsen, founder of the Donkey Sanctuary of Great Britain – the world's largest sanctuary for donkeys – encouraged her to create a sanctuary of her own and provided her with helpful advice on developing an organization and fundraising.

To date 102 equines have been admitted and given a lifelong home under the protection of The Donkey Sanctuary of Canada with thousands of human visitors arriving each year to spend time with the animals and learn about their unique personalities and gentle, winning ways. Recent admissions include Sergeant Argent, a Standard gelding with grotesquely overgrown hooves; Terra, a Standard molly mule; Hershey, a small Standard who appears to have some medical issues regarding his gelding before arrival at the Sanctuary, and Luna, a Miniature Jennet. All are settling in with their new companions although Hershey and Luna need some basic training by Sanctuary staff.



The Sanctuary does not buy, sell or breed donkeys, mules or hinnies.

Sanctuary staff, humane society inspectors and caring individuals work diligently to remove animals from harsh, unjust or life-threatening conditions. Foals are born at the farm only when their mothers are already pregnant upon admission.

The Charter of the Sanctuary is to recognize that the donkeys have an intrinsic value of their own and should be given the opportunity to live out their lives in harmony, expressing their natural inclinations, free from want or need and surrounded by their own kind in a pleasant natural environment. All the animals are assured that they will live out their lives with love, respect, and dignity. They are granted peace, freedom and protection; the best possible care and medical attention, the right of life regardless of age or condition and a dignified, peaceful death, induced only in the event of extreme suffering or the loss of quality of life.

In addition to its mandate to give sanctuary to the animals, the Sanctuary is committed to make available to all members of the community an education program, which underlines human responsibility for all other species and promotes improved standards of animal welfare. It provides a hands-on 'living classroom' for students, youth groups, social service groups and camps. By mingling and interacting with the donkeys, visitors experience unique emotional and psychological benefits and then, by spending time in the marshes, ponds, forests and fields of the Farm, academic subjects come to life in the real and natural world.

The Sanctuary also uses the sensitive, interactive nature of the donkeys in programs designed to develop the life skills and growth of adults and youth with unique needs. Groups attend once a week for 8 weeks in the fall and spring and participants have the opportunity to interact with the donkeys in a variety of ways, according to their individual ability. The response and feedback from this program is impressive.

During the last few years, Sandra and the Board of Directors of the Sanctuary have developed and put into effect a Foster Farm Program. Rehabilitated donkeys are placed in pairs on permanent loan at suitable

homes. The donkeys selected for foster farms are those that would benefit from the individual love and attention that can be provided in a private home. Currently there are 14 Foster Farms in southern Ontario.

In order to carry out its programs including Open House days and the annual Donkey Day held in June each year, the Sanctuary relies on the help of volunteers for both physical and financial assistance. On Saturday mornings, between 9 and 12, volunteers over 16 years of age are welcomed to help with the care and grooming of the donkeys and on Open Days volunteers greet visitors and assist in the LongEars Boutique.

There are various ways to help the Sanctuary financially. Perhaps the most popular is the 'Adopt a Donkey Plan'. Rather than making a general donation, many supporters help with the annual costs of care of a particular animal. For a minimum fee of \$50 per year for each donkey that is adopted for oneself or as a gift to another person, participants receive a letter of thanks, a certificate of adoption, a biography of the donkey, a magnetized photograph of the donkey and a yearly report.

As a not-for-profit, licensed charity, the Sanctuary relies on private contributions for all of its income and all funds raised are used for the primary care of the animals. Every donation is considered and gratefully received. There are various levels of membership and means of recognition for each.

There are only 3 more opportunities to visit the Sanctuary this year – from 9.00a.m to 4.00p.m on Wednesday October 6th and Sundays October 3rd and 10th although other times can be arranged by appointment. Pack a picnic and have it by the pond. Explore the nature trails and enjoy the flowers in the perennial

gardens. Meet some of the friendly sheep in the barnyard and shop at the LongEars Boutique. Best of all, lean over a paddock fence and pat a velvet nose, stroke a wiry coat, peer into big brown eyes and discover a donkey's love!

You can get more information on The Donkey Sanctuary of Canada at [www.donkey-sanctuary.ca](http://www.donkey-sanctuary.ca) or by calling 519-836-1697.



### Facts about Donkeys

- **Ass** – Technically, this is the term to be used to refer to the genus *equus asi*.
- **Donkey** – A term first used in England to refer to an ass. Most authorities think the name comes from the dun (gray-brown) colour and the suffix 'key' meaning 'a little dun animal', a dun-key.
- **Burro** – The Spanish word for donkey
- **Jennet** – The term used for a female donkey
- **Jack** – The term used for the donkey stallion
- **Gelding** – The term used for a gelded donkey stallion
- **Mule and Hinny** These terms are used to describe hybrid animals, each has a donkey parent and a horse parent. In 99.9% of the cases, mules and hinnies are sterile. When a male donkey is bred with a female horse, the offspring is called a mule. When a male horse is bred with a female donkey, the offspring is called a hinny.
- **Molly** – The term used for a female mule
- **John** – The term used for a male mule
- **Foal** – The term used for a baby donkey or baby mule.