

A visit to the Holy Land

by Erika Winpenny

What a joy to leave the arctic conditions of the 'Beast from the East' behind and emerge into the warm temperatures of Tel Aviv on a sunny March afternoon! I was extremely excited to return to Israel and I couldn't wait to see Lucy, whom I've known and supported for almost 15 years now and had visited in Israel several times before, where I witnessed first-hand the hard work she puts into helping these defenceless animals.

It had been a few years though, and it was about time I saw the new sanctuary and met its inhabitants (37 donkeys and 4 horses, and three doggies). The sanctuary surpassed my expectations – the field is so much larger than I had expected, the animals have plenty of space to roam around and when I was there, there was still a lot of greenery for them to chomp on. It felt really peaceful and the donkeys looked – as I've come to expect from Lucy – very well cared for. The stables are also large and have several separate areas for more vulnerable donkeys.

What I found particularly poignant was the vast difference between donkeys like little Sam, born at the sanctuary to gentle, blind Jane (who was already pregnant when Lucy rescued her), and the donkeys that had been rescued from abuse. The former would follow me like puppies, wanting cuddles and strokes, totally trusting (and utterly mischievous!), whilst with the others you could often see how they were still wary of people, some still flinching if I made a sudden movement, as if they were expecting to be beaten. With Lucy's loving care, however, they are making such progress. There was little Zachariah, for example, the donkey who was found near Israel's border to Syria with his eyes gouged out and who wouldn't let anyone near him at first. When I visited, he let Lucy stroke him and cuddle him, something that was unthinkable just a few months. The others, too, are learning that there are also kind humans, and many follow Lucy around the field like she's the Pied Piper!

The other thing that struck me was the sheer amount of work Lucy has to do on a daily basis. The setup is very low-tech – no tractors or other fancy things to help with the work, just good old-fashioned hard manual labour – shovels, wheelbarrows, pitchforks. The stables have to be cleaned out every day – and let me tell you, those donkeys are veritable poop-machines!



It is a lot of work, most of which falls on Lucy: filling the wheelbarrow, wheeling it a long way out into the fields to empty it, then back, start again... and when it's all finally clean (hours later), she lugs around heavy bags of sawdust to make it all nice and lovely for the donkeys in time for their return to the stables for dinner. Before that, all the troughs in the main area – but also in all the little separate stables where the more vulnerable donkeys live – have to be filled up with hay and oat supplements (and, of course, the odd carrot treat!)... the work is never ending and even though I tried to help out as much as possible, we rarely finished before nightfall. And somewhere in between all that, Lucy also has to find time to administer medication to poorly donkeys, protect them with fly repellent etc. Occasionally, some wonderful local volunteers will help Lucy out in their free time, but the lion share of the work falls on Lucy and I couldn't help thinking how wonderful it would be to receive enough regular donations so that the Foundation could finally consider paying Lucy at least a small salary or employ someone to help Lucy out full-time. The large amount of work at the stables and the lack of funds mean that Lucy can't do her outreach work to help working donkeys in Arab towns and the Palestinian West Bank anywhere near as often as she would like to, and those animals are in such desperate need of help and support.



Blind little Zachariah who'd had his eyes gouged out and was abandoned near the Syrian border



During my time there we also went into the West Bank to do some outreach work. Just as I remembered from previous visits, those poor animals aren't as lucky as the ones in Lucy's sanctuary. They are made to work so hard, regardless of their health. One poor under-nourished horse was completely dripping in sweat after having been made to carry his owner a really long distance, another donkey had to pull a large cart despite being heavily pregnant – and then there is the worry of what will happen to her baby when it's born, as too often the foals are considered a nuisance as they distract their mothers from their work, so they are separated way too early. The animals at the outreach clinic were all suffering from fly attacks on their legs, which is common at this time of year but is a terrible nuisance that causes extreme discomfort if left untreated, so the vet and Lucy made sure that the sores on their little legs were treated with an iodine wash and antiseptic ointment – but of course, ideally it needs continued treatment. It's such a stark contrast watching Lucy gently stroking the animals, getting them fresh grass and carrots, and talking to them quietly, letting them experience a bit of tenderness, compared to the harsh way many of them are treated by their owners.

Below: This far too thin horse had been ridden for a very long distance and then was refused water as the owner believed it was better not to let a horse drink for half an hour after riding him. Needless to say Lucy snuck some to the horse when the owner wasn't watching...



Sore legs due to fly attacks, after treatment with iodine and antiseptic at outreach clinic



Applying treatment to another working donkey at the outreach clinic in the West Bank

Below: Pregnant donkey made to pull a cart at outreach clinic in a Palestinian village



A bit of tender loving care, some fresh grass and a nose protector, kindly donated by Lucy's supporters



The Palestinian West Bank in Spring



Apart from the regular work around the sanctuary, there are always other things that need doing too – while I was there, Lucy was very worried about part of the fence around the field which had started to lean back quite badly. Donkeys can be veritable Houdinis and escape from all sorts of places (in fact, three of the donks managed to escape shortly after I left Israel – thankfully they were all found and brought back safely, but it confirmed Lucy's fears). Ideally Lucy would like to stabilise the current fence and add a 2 metre high basic chain-link fence to provide more security, but to cover the 227 metres of fence around the entire sanctuary would cost in the region of £2500/\$3500, and at the moment there is barely enough for the regular sanctuary running costs. A second large wheelbarrow would be extremely useful too, but again, this costs 2200 shekels (approx. £450/\$630), and it's not even motorised.

During my time there, I also had the opportunity to do some filming around the sanctuary and during Lucy's outreach work. You can [view the video I made, presenting Lucy's work, by clicking here](#). I hope to add a longer, more detailed video sometime in the future.

I left Israel with mixed feelings. A heavy heart because of all the suffering donkeys endure, worries because there is so much to do and Lucy so urgently needs both practical support and sufficient funds to continue, but also with a hopeful heart because Lucy continues to be out there, doing her best to help those gentle creatures. This visit, like all my visits in previous years, served to confirm just how worthwhile it is to support Lucy's critical work in the Holy Land.

PS: I would like to point out that this trip was financed entirely by me as part of my support of Lucy's work.

www.lucysdonkeyfoundation.org.uk



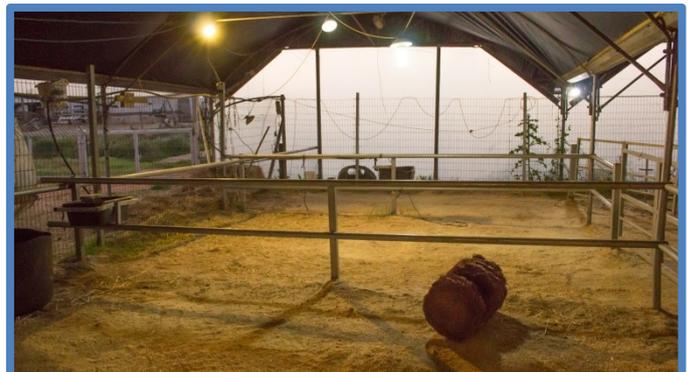
Preparing the oat supplements for the donkeys' dinner



The leaning fence of Pisa... It's not too difficult for crafty donkeys to stage a reenactment of The Great Escape...



The Stables, above, and some of the separate areas for more vulnerable donkeys, below



Below: Happy donkeys returning home for dinner after hard day of munching grass in the fields

