



DONEGAL'S animal cruelty prevention service is one of the best in the country dealing with up to 15 call outs per day. Funding for the excellent work done by the local service received a major boost ten years ago when a Duffanagh resident artist left Donegal's ISPCA a major bequest.

The founder of the Donegal branch of the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (DSPA), Mrs Pamela Geary organised the inaugural meeting here 43 years ago because of her great love of animals.

Mrs Geary and her late husband Mick later established an 11 acre sanctuary on their land near Ramelton where horses and donkeys can recover and enjoy a well cared for existence.

Mrs Geary recalled this week how the local branch for much of its lifetime operated on a shoestring with the founding members organising coffee mornings and other functions to fund their operations. All changed ten years ago when artist Miss AP Jury left a substantial bequest, having seen the excellent work they did.

"We were very fortunate in those earlier years in that, although we never had a ha'penny, we almost always managed to have an inspector. Our Inspector Mr Tony Cleary has been with us for 30 years and does an absolutely wonderful job looking after the entire county.

"It is very hard to understand how some people can be so terribly cruel to animals. I have seen the results of terrible cruelty over the years. If they can do that to an animal they can equally do it to a human being," Mrs Geary said.

She and Mick first came to live in Donegal in 1959 when he took up a post in Letterkenny with Irish Shell and later went on to become the Managing Director of Donegal Oil. They have one daughter, Marjorie.

Mrs Geary was elected the first Honorary Secretary of the local ISPCA branch in 1969 and is still there. Founding members included Mr Vincent Callaghan, Mrs H Myles and Mrs Grove of Castlegrave.

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A typical day for Mrs Geary or Mr McCleary can begin with the first telephone call coming at 8 a.m.

She is very grateful that the public are so aware of the need to report acts of cruelty but hoped they understood that the organisation only had the one inspector and it takes time to answer all the calls they get.

"Mr McCleary is really on call seven days a week and gets called to situations involving all sorts of animals. In the most extreme cases a person responsible for cruelty to an animal can be charged and prosecuted and there have been a number of cases taken to court in recent years," she said.

The provision of the dog pound in Letterkenny operated by Donegal County Council has been a huge boost and has resulted in many of these being rehoused. She paid tribute to the excellent staff at the dog pound.

However, Mrs Geary explained that there is currently a major problem in the county with stray cats.

"Responsible cat owners really should have them operated on. There are cats everywhere in the county and they are causing a problem. The other difficulty we have is the absence of a place to put stray goats.

"House owners can get quite irate if a stray goat wanders in and begins eating all their flowers and shrubs. If we get a call about this, it can prove difficult as you do not know if the goat's owner is taking care of it or if it has been abandoned," she said.

One of the worst acts of cruelty she witnessed was finding a horse with part of its leg gone and some of the remaining skin just rotting away. She also spoke of the horrendous condition a donkey was found in where its hooves had grown so long and twisted that the poor animal could not walk and was only able to eat the grass in a circle around it, but it too was rescued. To date they have rescued dogs, donkeys, ponies, baby seals and birds. One of the happier stories she told involved a small grey pony rescued from Inishowen.

"When Henry (the pony) first arrived he was terrified of everyone and everything. The gardai told the ISPCA about him wandering on the roads where he could have caused an accident. Mr McCleary went and saw him and brought him to the sanctuary at Ramelton.

"He is only now beginning to trust people again and is less afraid of everything," she explained.

The care the donkeys and horses in the sanctuary receive is borne out by their longevity with their horse Bandit, now 36 years old. Until two years ago it had the oldest mule, at 50, in the British Isles and Ireland.

"I feel very proud of the Donegal ISPCA for the great work they have done and the 12 strong committee are a very forward looking organisation but we could do nothing without our inspector, Mr McCleary, he is the vital link.

"Over the years we have helped a lot of animals in one way or another and I hope it continues to do so for many years to come," Mrs Geary added.

Pictured From Left:
Glyn Hughes
DSPA Helpline Co-ordinator,
Joe Simmons,
Drumkeen Car Sticker Winner,
Clionadh,
Chairperson DSPCA