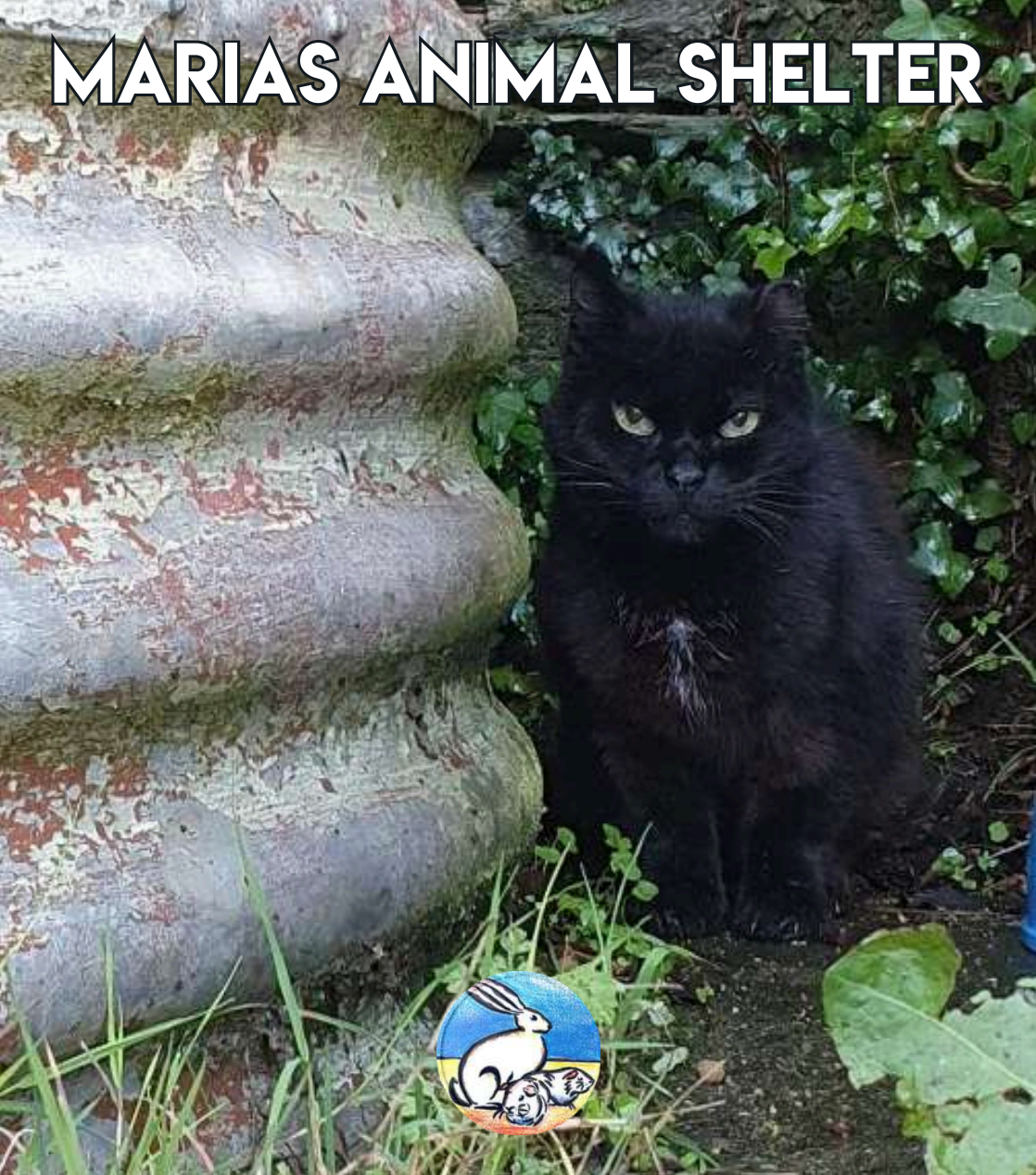


MARIAS ANIMAL SHELTER



NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 27: SPRING - SUMMER 2026

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Thank you for your continued support! In this new issue, we share behind-the-scenes shelter life, recent rescue updates, key shelter statistics, and practical ways you can help this month. Your support, whether through adoption, fostering, donations, or sharing our work, makes a real difference to every animal in our care. Together, we're giving vulnerable animals safety, comfort, and a brighter future.



Do you have something to share for the next issue? Drop me a message with your comments and suggestions!

CHARLIE



STEVEN REES-WEBB

EMAIL ME: HELLO@SRWPHOTO.CO.UK

OUR PATRON

We extend our deepest gratitude to Tony Martin CBE, founder of the Anthony V. Martin Charitable Foundation and patron of our shelter. His unwavering support and dedication have been instrumental in advancing our mission at Marias. As a Commander of the British Empire (CBE)—the highest-ranking Order of the British Empire award given to those who have made significant and positive impacts through their work—we can truly attest to the profound influence he has had on our organisation and the community we serve.



HOW IT ALL BEGAN...

Whether you've been cheering on Marias incredible work for years or you've just stumbled upon our cosy corner of Cornwall, we'd love to share the heartwarming tale of how it all began...

Back in 2001, there was a charming little pony named Fly. Fly was facing homelessness because her owner, sadly battling cancer, could no longer care for her. That's when Maria, an animal enthusiast studying Animal Care at Duchy College, stepped in. She had no idea that welcoming this one pony would lead her to create a sanctuary that's now a haven for hundreds of animals!

Seeing a desperate need for a rescue centre in Cornwall for unwanted pets and animals, Maria took a brave leap. She decided to open a shelter and fund it herself—a bold move that soon saw everything falling into place.

As luck would have it, the land in the village where Fly lived was the perfect spot for a shelter. With permission granted, Maria, her husband Paul, and an amazing team of volunteers, friends, and family rolled up their sleeves. Together, they built the first sheds, pens, and cosy nooks—transforming a simple plot into a bustling sanctuary.

Fast forward to today, and Marias Animal Shelter is alive with the chatter and clucks of around 100 animals! Goats, geese, ducks, chickens, sheep, guinea pigs, rabbits, degus, gerbils, and hamsters all call it home. Most arrive because they've been abandoned or are unwanted. Some have been neglected and need a bit of extra TLC. Thanks to Marias dedication, many find loving new homes through her successful rehoming programme. For those who need a permanent place to stay, the shelter becomes their forever home.

To keep this wonderful work going, Maria registered the shelter as a charity with the Charity Commission in 2012. Relying entirely on donations, every spare moment Maria has is spent caring for the animals, fundraising, or spreading the word. Unfortunately, the number of animals needing help is on the rise—but with your support, we can make a real difference!

So, grab a cuppa and read on to discover what's been happening at the shelter, along with all the latest news. If you think you can help in any way, please get in touch, we'd love to hear from you!

LETTER FROM MARIA



Maria Mulkeen

Writing this in early February is quite depressing. It is cold, dreary and has been raining every day for weeks. I feel so sorry for the wildlife and farm animals stuck outside in this weather day after day, with no let up. Over winter we bought a hedgehog box and put it right outside our back door so Hedgy (the name we call him) can have food from us some nights. Hedgy does not have nightly feeds because I do not want him to become reliant on humans for food. Within a few days

Hedgy would come around and visit his food box and slowly he has also chosen to sometimes sleep in it as well, this might be partially due to our neighbours recently working around his old area, where I knew he used to spend a lot of time. I am hoping to buy more of these houses to try and give our hedgehogs more of a chance at surviving because there is getting less areas for them to roam, as people start to destroy all the wildlife around them.



I have to say an extremely massive thank you to our wonderful, fundraising co-ordinator Linda. Linda has a passion to help animals and is such a kind, caring person with a dedication to do as much as she can to help. Linda does have a hard job with us because fundraising is relentless and without money the animals will not be able to be helped. As well as co-ordinating the fundraisers, Linda has to work in our haybarn sorting out new donations, photographing for the next auction and

organising what containers or wardrobes to use and where to put it all. A lot of people don't realise we do not have a lot of room in there, hay bales are piled to the roof, bales of readi-grass in another area and there is always an activity of people passing by to pile the hay into a bag to use with the animals. When everything has been processed, it is then taken to another room for storing.



Bless her, Linda is a saint to put up with us. Thank you Linda!

Last year was a busy one, as normal. We had a lovely visit from the amazing, globally known Luke Gamble. It was an honour to meet him. Luke also adopted three beautiful guinea pigs from us. Luke Gamble (BVSc 1999) is a mixed practice vet and founder and CEO of the international animal charities Worldwide Veterinary Service and Mission Rabies.



He is an entrepreneur, author, adventurer, and more, and has appeared on Sky One's Vet Adventures as well as on Animal Planet and National Geographic. Last year, he received an honorary Doctor of Letters (DLitt) degree from the University of Bristol in recognition of the incredible impact of work in the UK & across the globe.

Luke came back a few weeks later to film a documentary about our charity called Animal Champions. I hate to be the centre of attention, but Luke has such a relaxed, calm, and funny personality that I soon calmed my nerves and enjoyed the experience. You can view the documentary using the link below.

WATCH NOW ON YOUTUBE



[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/5LZ4_7UNVPA](https://youtu.be/5LZ4_7UNVPA)

BUTTONS

Buttons was one of 50 cats trapped on a farmer's land where the farmer no longer wanted the cats. If they didn't get removed within a few weeks, then the farmer was going to shoot them. None were neutered, so over the years there had been endless litters born.

Buttons arrived with his sister. Both had been neutered prior to coming to us. Because the cats were feral, we had to keep them in a small, locked area for several weeks and just feed and speak gently to them so that they would get to know that we were friends and not foes, and that food was being given by us. At the end of the introduction period, I gingerly opened the door expecting them to bolt, but surprisingly they just stayed there until one day they built up the courage and started to explore.



Every day the cats returned for food. I could get quite close to the female, but Buttons was totally feral. The cats had 2.5 acres of land to roam over and stay safe, but one day we had someone come and tell us that they thought the cat that had just been run over was ours, and it was. I felt so sad, as Buttons was now on his own.

For many years I tried to befriend Buttons, but he would not have any of it. I could get so far to him, but if the gap was bridged too close, Buttons would be off running. One morning I arrived to open up the shelter, only to find Buttons lying on the path with a tin can stuck on his head. I honestly thought he was dead, and even when I ran and picked him up to remove the can, he was lifeless. A minute or so later the oxygen must have returned to him. As he opened his eyes wide, he realised I was holding him and sank his teeth and claws into my arms. Oh boy, was it painful, but I was so relieved that he was alive.

Buttons did enjoy life at the shelter, and I would catch him watching what I was doing. I always talk to the animals, and I was so chuffed when he started to reply to me along with a blink of his eyes. Over the years his health started to deteriorate and along came the dreaded arthritis. Even though we could not touch him, medication was put into his food daily to alleviate any pain, until a few months ago, when I noticed he wasn't looking so sprightly and his coat was bedraggled. Then it was time to let him go. We went to give him his last feed and sedation, so we could take him to the vets without any stress and trauma, but he had chosen to go on his own and was found to have passed away in his bed at the age of 17. I so wish I could have given him a huge hug before he left us, but sometimes the animals just cannot get past their fear to trust us, and sometimes, I do believe they are right in doing so.

SHELTER STATISTICS

JULY 2025 – JANUARY 2026

132 NEW ADMISSIONS

152 ANIMALS ADOPTED

29 PASSED AWAY

61 WAITING TO COME IN

TOP 3 ADMISSION REASONS:

- 1. HOUSE MOVES**
- 2. STRAY & RESCUED**
- 3. POOR OWNER HEALTH**

DAY-TO-DAY LIFE: BEHIND THE SCENES

By Kelsey

Our day begins with breakfast for our long-term stray cats, Buttons and Shadow. Both have been pottering around the shelter for years, quietly claiming it as their own. Buttons is getting on a bit now, so his breakfast includes pain relief to help keep him comfortable. We also have a rather cheeky rooster who likes to steal his food, so we put a small amount of oats near Buttons' hutch to keep the peace.

As soon as possible, we begin our morning medication rounds. Each animal is closely observed to ensure they're bright, comfortable, and displaying normal, species-specific behaviours. Some of our permanent residents need extra care in the mornings – for example, cleaning Peanut's PA sack and giving pain relief to our goat, Toffee. Pictured here below is Elly, syringe-feeding permanent resident Peanut his morning medication.

Volunteer Kelsey feeding our boarding Rabbits



Just before the final medications are given, we hear the unmistakable sound of our guinea pigs "wheeking" at us, reminding us that its grass time. Medication is always followed by a treat, and the guinea pigs are particularly enthusiastic participants in this part of the routine.

We pay especially close attention to boarding animals, new arrives, those who are unwell, and any who have recently visited the vets. Careful monitoring is essential to their wellbeing, so we can assess behaviour, posture, appetite, overnight food intake, and whether they've been urinating and defecating normally. These small daily checks often make the biggest difference and give us the opportunity to catch abnormalities promptly.

Once medications are complete, our volunteers begin to arrive and quickly get stuck in. They tend to our degus, hamsters and gerbils first. Cleaning duties rotate between guinea pig and rabbit enclosures on a set schedule, helping us maintain high hygiene standards while keeping routines predictable for the animals. At the same time, lunch is prepared for the rest of the shelter – including our farm animals, all of whom have specialised diets.



Volunteer Elly cleaning bonding rabbit's enclosure



Volunteer Lewis cleaning our guinea pig enclosures



Volunteer Joanna cleaning a rabbits litter tray

Our farm residents include chickens and roosters, a goose, a duck, three sheep, and three goats. Feeding time requires a good sense of awareness (and humour): Lucy the goose never misses an opportunity to assert her dominance, the goats are enthusiastic to say the least when food is involved, and the wild birds are always ready to swoop in and steal vegetables if given half a chance.



Lucy Goose, Boof the Rooster and Melvin the Duck



Rocky Rooster and his girlfriend Candy

With everyone fed and settled, the day continues with a long list of essential tasks: cleaning, washing, checking in with volunteers, paperwork, grooming animals, foot care for the goats, and tackling our seemingly never-ending bags of waste.

Once our volunteers have finished cleaning and fed the rabbits and guinea pigs, they follow this with hands-on animal interactions and lots of cuddles of course. After a short lunch break, staff get straight back to work, trying to fit everything in before 3:30pm. Throughout the day, we may also handle animal intakes and adoptions, greet supporters at the shelter entrance who kindly donate items for us to sell, collect auction prizes, and offer advice when needed. Alongside all of this, phones, emails, and messages still need answering – all while continuing hands-on animal care.

Our final round of medication is given as late as possible, ensuring animals receiving antibiotics or pain relief remain comfortable throughout the night. And, of course, our guinea pigs refuse to let us leave without one last serving of fresh grass.. a non-negotiable part of the day.

THE COST OF RESCUE

Rescue is more than care, it's a promise to give every animal the life they deserve. Keeping that promise comes with very real, ongoing costs, from time and food to bedding and vital veterinary care.

Take Matt, one of our permanent rabbits. Matt can't be re-homed because of lifelong dental issues. He requires specialised hay and dried grasses every day, carefully chosen to keep his teeth healthy. Each bag is expensive, but for Matt, it's not just food. Its comfort, relief, and a chance at a pain-free life.



Then there's Rolo, our bearded dragon. Her diet is complex: a variety of live bugs, supplements, and fresh greens, all to keep her thriving. The costs add up quickly, but each meal is a step toward her wellbeing, keeping her active, happy, and healthy.

Every animal in our care has their own story, their own needs, and their own path to healing.

Time is one of the biggest investments. Each animal requires daily feeding, cleaning, health checks, medication, enrichment, and close monitoring. Animals who are unwell, recovering from trauma, or elderly often need intensive, hands-on care that cannot be rushed.

They also benefit from quiet human interaction; simply sitting with them for a few moments can boost trust and confidence. Time is something that goes too quickly whilst being at the shelter.

The cost of food quickly adds up, from fresh vegetables and hay to specialised feeds. Ensuring proper nutrition is vital to keeping our animals healthy and preventing further illness.

Bedding keeps our animals warm, safe, and comfortable, but it is another constant expense. Clean, dry bedding is essential for hygiene, infection control, and recovery – particularly for those who are unwell, incontinent, or healing from surgery.



We've found the most effective form of bedding to use for rabbits and guinea pigs is newspaper and 'vet bed'. We use lots of straw for our farm animals to be comfortable. Veterinary bills are often the largest cost of rescue. Many animals arrive needing immediate medical attention, surgery, ongoing treatment, or long-term medications. Emergency care, routine health checks, and follow-up appointments are all important parts of responsible rescue work.

Donations help us meet these costs and ensure every animal receives the care they deserve. When you donate to us, you're helping make all of this possible. You're not just contributing to a bill - you're supporting a life, a moment of comfort, and a future full of hope. Every donation, no matter the size, directly supports the daily realities of rescue and allows us to continue providing safe, compassionate care to the little souls who need us the most.

HOW YOU CAN HELP US

Every single rabbit, guinea pig, and small animal in our care relies on the kindness of our supporters. If you've been wondering how to help, here are the five items that would make the biggest difference to us right now:

Newspapers

We go through an enormous amount of newspapers every single day for bedding. Clean, dry newspapers (no glossy magazines please) are always hugely appreciated. If you drop these off to us, please place them in our donation bins at the front entrance if nobody is around.

Fresh Vegetables

Fresh vegetables are daily essentials for our herbivores, and we get through it quickly. The items we use the most are:

- Romaine lettuce
- Spring greens/other dark leafy greens
- Herbs such as coriander, sage and parsley
- Cucumber
- Bell peppers
- Celery
- Kale

If you'd like to drop off a bag during your weekly shop, it genuinely makes a difference and is always gratefully received. Please avoid donating potatoes, onions, mushrooms or citrus fruits, as these are not suitable for our animals.

Dry food & Bedding

Donations of dry food and bedding are also always welcome. Any brand of dry food for our farm animals or small animals helps us enormously.

Critical care for herbivores

We always keep a supply of recovery food such as Critical Care for poorly rabbits and guinea pigs who need syringe feeding. It can be quite literally lifesaving during gut stasis or post-operative recovery.

Auction donations

We regularly hold fundraising auctions to help cover vet bills, food, and rescue costs. If you have:

- Unwanted gifts
- Brand new pet items
- Hampers
- Vouchers
- Handmade crafts
- Quality second-hand items

HOW YOU CAN HELP US

We can turn them into vital funds for the animals in our care. Please follow our auction page on Facebook - "**Marias Animal Shelter Online Auction - Registered Charity 1147719**" where Linda, our designated fundraiser, posts items regularly for you to browse and bid on. We also have another Facebook page "**Buy, Sell, Cornwall Raising Funds For Maria's Animal Shelter Probus**"

Share & Spread The Word

Even if you can't donate physically, sharing our posts helps our animals reach the right adopters and supporters, whether that's on Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok. Our new TikTok account can be found at @mariasanimalshelter where we post daily funny, adorable, and informative videos and updates about our animals.

Amazon Wishlist

If you would prefer to send something directly to the animals, you can purchase our most-needed items via our Amazon Wishlist. Visit our website and click on "Amazon Wishlist", or alternatively scan the QR code below to access it instantly.

Every bag of veg, every stack of newspaper, every donated item helps us keep going. Small rescues rely on small, consistent acts of kindness. We're incredibly grateful to have your support behind us.

Donate to Us Directly

There are a few simple ways you can support Maria's Animal Shelter with a donation.

Our preferred method is JustGiving, as we receive 100% of your donation. There is also a bank transfer option available through JustGiving. If you are eligible, you can also add Gift Aid, which means we receive an extra 25% at no extra cost to you.

You can also donate by bank transfer, which is quick, easy, and free, and again means we receive 100% of your donation.

Lloyds Bank **Sort code:** 30 88 22 **Account number:** 18735760

If you are eligible for Gift Aid and choose to donate by bank transfer, please complete our Charity Gift Aid Donation Form by emailing mariasanimalshelter@hotmail.com

Another option is to donate via PayPal. Every donation helps us cover the day to day costs of caring for vulnerable animals. If PayPal is your preferred method, please choose the Friends and Family option when making your donation.

Thank you so much for your kindness and support. Every donation really does make a difference.





CANDY'S JOURNEY

Candy came to us as a stray just after Christmas, found wandering around St. Austell, but sadly nobody came forward to claim her, suggesting she was most likely dumped – a situation that, unfortunately, is all too common. When she arrived, Candy was timid, unsure of us, and wary of her surroundings. Since then, she has been spayed and has successfully bonded with Gordon, who already has a home. Here they are in their bonding enclosures (left) and here together (right), pleading for a treat.



Bonding rabbits isn't a simple process. It can take weeks or even months for rabbits to build a positive relationship. Rabbits are territorial animals and forcing them together too soon can lead to aggression, injury, or long-term stress. That's why we approach bonding carefully and methodically. We use bonding gates to allow the rabbits to interact safely while keeping them physically separated. Their food bowls and litter trays are placed near each other so they can gradually become familiar with one another's sights, smells, and behaviours.



Over time, and once both rabbits show signs of calmness and curiosity rather than fear or aggression, they are allowed to meet under strict supervision by Maria. During these sessions, we scatter hay, forage, and treats in a neutral area. This is crucial: if the environment carries one rabbit's scent, territorial behaviours can flare, potentially derailing the bonding process and causing stress. For Candy and Gordon, the process went relatively smoothly – they quickly demonstrated mutual curiosity and affection. This pair truly seems like a match made in heaven. Candy is now outgoing, sociable, and ready to begin a new chapter alongside her loving partner, Gordon. They have both now been adopted.

WHAT I LEARNED VOLUNTEERING AT MARIAS

Before I came to Marias Animal Shelter, I had just begun studying level 3 animal management at Duchy college; In college, my days were shaped by schedules and controlled practical lessons. Every animal interaction was supervised, planned, and designed to teach a specific skill. While this foundation was essential, stepping into an animal shelter as a volunteer introduced me to a greatly different reality of animal care. At Marias animal shelter, animals arrive with unknown histories, complex medical needs and unpredictable behaviours, there are no controlled settings, and a lot more independence and quick thinking needed. Working in the animal shelter requires patience, empathy, and the ability to respond calmly in high pressure situations, it gives a real taste of what working in the animal care industry is like.



Unlike my college experience, where learning outcomes were clearly defined, Marias animal shelter teaches me lessons that are less structured but equally valuable; Here I began to understand how small consistent actions could significantly improve the neglected or abandoned animal's welfare.

Volunteering at Marias shelter bridged the gap between academic knowledge and real-world experience. It has reshaped my understanding of what it truly means to care for animals, not just as patients but as individuals with unique personalities and requirements. It has made me think deeper about what I would like to do after education, and if I would like to open my own shelter, it had never been something I'd thought about before, but working here has shown me just animals that need a home and need support which has inspired me to potentially take that path in life.

From working here with the other volunteers at the shelter, I have noticed a wide difference between people who want to work with the animals, and people who just think its fun and a straightforward way to get qualifications. Many of the people I study with at college do not actually want a career that supports animals, do not show compassion, or even seek to support any animals in general; the volunteers at the shelter are here willingly, knowing that they aren't going to get qualifications or money in return, just the contentment of helping these animals, giving them a better life, as well as preventing further suffering.

I see this not just in the people who volunteer, but the people who donate. Whether its money, food, enrichment, items for the auction, or even adopting an animal helps. It supports the shelter and the animals and has made me realise you do not have to want to work with the animals to assist in meeting their required welfare and support them in being nursed to full health.

Deciding you want to work with animals cannot be done after only working in one environment, the many different environments in animal care all propose different work, and difficulty; so to truly know what you want to do, you need to find experience in multiple fields. Whether its veterinary nursing, zoo-keeping, kennels, or rescue centres for big or small animals, they are all vastly different and there may be one you enjoy more than the other.

COMPASSION FATIGUE: CARING DEEPLY IS HARD

Compassion fatigue is the emotional and physical exhaustion that comes from caring deeply for others over a long period of time. It happens when someone is repeatedly exposed to suffering, distress, and loss without enough time or support to recover.

You still care. You still want to help. But your nervous system becomes overwhelmed. You keep showing up, even when you're exhausted to your core, and eventually, your heart feels heavier than your strength.

Shelter and rescue workers are particularly vulnerable to this because we witness neglect, abuse, illness, abandonment, and death on a regular basis. We meet animals at some of the worst moments of their lives. We hold the frightened ones, sit with the sick ones, and fight for the fragile ones. And sometimes, despite everything we do, we still lose them.

Harriet was one of those moments that stays with you. She came to us already carrying more pain than anyone had realised. What should have been manageable had quietly become something much more serious. From the outside, she was small and gentle, but inside, her little body had been fighting a battle for far too long.



For days, our team poured everything into care - warm baths, careful feeding, medication, monitoring, and reassurance. We made small changes to help her settle and checked on her constantly. Every tiny sign of comfort felt like hope. Every small setback felt heavy.

When it became clear that her body could not recover, we faced the decision no rescue worker ever takes lightly: choosing peace over prolonging suffering.

Those are the days that sit quietly in your chest long after your shift is over, a reminder of both the depth of your love and the limits of what you can do. The questions creep in – "could I have done more?" – even when you know you gave everything you had. These are the days when caring deeply doesn't always change the outcome.

There is a particular kind of weight in caring for lives that depend entirely on you. The emotional pressure is constant. Resources are limited. There are always more animals needing help than there is space for. Even on your best days, there can be a quiet sense of never quite doing enough.

COMPASSION FATIGUE: CARING DEEPLY IS HARD

Over time, that weight can show up as guilt, self-doubt, exhaustion, burnout, or sadness that lingers. And yet, we continue, because the animals deserve it.

It's precisely because of experiences like this that boundaries matter. Taking breaks, sharing responsibility, or stepping back when needed is not about caring less – it's about caring sustainably. Without boundaries, the work can consume us. With them, we can remain steady for the animals who need us next, even in the face of heartbreak.

For every happy adoption photo, there are unseen tears. Quiet car journeys home, difficult conversations, and even harder decisions are carried silently by staff and volunteers. We take comfort in knowing that Harriet did not leave this world alone or frightened. She left surrounded by warmth, softness, and care.

Pictured below is our founder, Maria, sharing a gentle moment with elderly degu Toast, who has since passed. Toast was dumped on someone's doorstep and spent his remaining days at the shelter being properly cared for, kept warm, and loved every single day.

That is why we continue. Compassion fatigue is real. The heartbreak is real. But so is the love, and the difference it makes, one small life at a time.



WHY SMALL RESCUES MATTER

Small rescue shelters matter more than most people realise. Maria runs Cornwall's only dedicated shelter for rabbits, guinea pigs, and other small animals. Every creature she takes in, often abandoned, surrendered, or overlooked, gets a second chance at a safe, happy life. With patience, care, and love, she helps them heal, thrive, and find companions and homes. Thanks to her and her wonderful team, the smallest voices are never forgotten.

Being the only shelter in Cornwall for these animals comes with huge responsibility. To ensure every animal receives the care and space they need, we have waiting lists. These aren't barriers. They're safeguards, helping us manage resources, prevent overcrowding, and prioritise the most urgent cases, those who are severely neglected or mistreated and need to come in as an emergency.

How Small Rescues Make a Difference

Specialised care. Small animals have particular needs that large shelters often can't meet. We provide the right housing, diet, and enrichment.

Preventing suffering. Without small rescues, many animals would be neglected, abandoned, or put down because they don't fit in standard shelters.

Behavioural rehabilitation. Small rescues use their expertise and dedicated space to help animals heal emotionally, bond with companions, and prepare for life in a loving home.

Education and advocacy. We teach the public about correct care and welfare needs. This reduces future surrenders and encourages more responsible pet ownership.

Community support. We provide resources and advice to struggling owners, helping animals stay safe in their current homes whenever possible.

Reducing overcrowding. By managing intakes thoughtfully, we make sure no animal is lost in the crowd, and each one gets the support they need.

Standing up for the "small voices". Guinea pigs, rabbits, and other small animals are often overlooked. Small rescues ensure they are recognised, cared for, and given the opportunity to flourish.

Small rescues like ours are a lifeline for animals who would otherwise be ignored, and they play a critical role in creating a more compassionate and informed community. Every animal deserves to be seen, and every small rescue that stays open is proof that the smallest voices still matter.

A POEM FOR MARIA

For twenty-six years and counting,
she has lived in the soft rustle of hay
and the sound of tiny feet on clean bedding.

Rabbits stretched out after breakfast,
noses twitching in the morning air.
Guinea pigs wheeling the moment they recognise her footsteps.
Degus busy and bright in the daylight.
Chickens murmuring in their coops.
Sheep and goats leaning gently into her hands,
as if they've always known her.

She meets them all the same way –
steady, practical, gentle.

While most people are asleep,
she's already there.
Unlocking doors,
calling each one by name,
checking eyes, teeth, and tiny paws,
listening for small changes
only she would notice,
making sure everyone is safe.

She catches the slightest differences –
a quieter wheel,
a slower step,
a look that says,
"I'm not quite right".

Thousands have passed through her gates.
They have learned
that safety can be rebuilt.

It isn't glamorous,
It's mud, heartbreak, and early mornings.
It's phone calls that begin with,
"Can you take one more?"
And somehow, she does.

She keeps the whole place breathing –
All those fragile lives
held together by her stubborn, loving hands.

If angels exist,
they probably smell like hay
and answer to the name Maria. <3

MORE THAN NUMBERS:

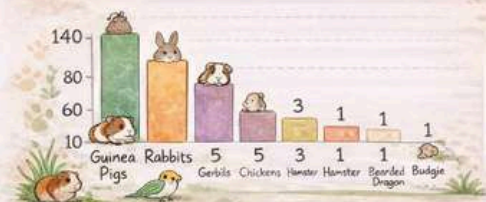
Animals Surrendered Last Year

Last year, 221 animals came through the doors of Maria's Animal Shelter. On paper, that number is just a statistic. In reality, it represents 221 individual lives, each with a story.

The majority were guinea pigs (150 animals, 68%), followed by 52 rabbits (24%), along with smaller numbers of degus, gerbils, chickens, a hamster, a bearded dragon, and a budgie. Small animals don't always get the attention they deserve in rescue, despite how many of them need help.

Animals Surrendered Last Year at Maria's Animal Shelter

Species	Number Surrendered	% of Total
 Guinea Pigs	150 	68%
 Rabbits	52 	24%
 Degus	10 	5%
 Gerbils	3 	1%
 Chickens	3 	1%
 Hamster	1 	<1%
 Bearded Dragon	1 	<1%
 Budgie	221 animals 	



The most common reason for surrender (53% of cases) fell under animal welfare concerns. This includes companion animals whose bonded partner had died, pairs who had fallen out, animals found stray or abandoned, hoarding situations, accidental breeding, and cases where owners recognised they could no longer meet their pets' needs.

Many guinea pigs arrived after losing a cage mate. When one dies, the survivor is often left alone, confused, and grieving. Behind those numbers are animals left without their companion, and owners who just needed some guidance.

Housing instability was another major factor. Thirteen percent were surrendered due to moving house, often because pets were not allowed, or because families were facing sudden relocation or homelessness. Owner health issues (7%) also played a significant role, including serious illness and elderly carers no longer physically able to provide daily care.

Financial hardship (5%), children losing interest (5%), and returns following failed bonds or changed circumstances (3%) also contributed. A small number were abandoned outright, surrendered due to allergies, or given up during relationship breakdowns.

Notably, 23 guinea pigs were born at the shelter after pregnant females arrived in rescue. These babies are a visible reminder of the impact of uncontrolled breeding and overwhelmed situations, as well as the safety net we provide when things spiral out of control.

Age-wise, the largest group surrendered was young adults aged 1-3 years (42%), animals in the prime of their lives. Babies under one year made up 23%, while 24% were aged 4-5 years and 11% were seniors aged six and over. These aren't just unwanted babies; they're grieving companions, middle-aged pets who lost their homes, and elderly animals looking for comfort in their final years.

Every percentage has a real story behind it: sometimes hardship, sometimes heartbreak, sometimes life not going the way anyone expected. Small animal rescues like Maria's are there when animals suddenly need help. But we can only do that with support.

If you care about guinea pigs, rabbits, and other small animals having somewhere safe to go, with companionship and proper care, please consider supporting the shelter, whether through donations, auction items, supplies, sponsorship, or simply sharing our social media pages. If you already do, thank you. We truly couldn't do this without you.

Animals Adopted Last Year

In 2025, 125 animals found new homes through the shelter. The majority were guinea pigs, with 82 rehomed, alongside 32 rabbits and 11 other small animals, including degus, gerbils, hamsters, and birds. We were able to use foster homes to give certain animals a safe, temporary place while they waited for adoption. Each number represents an individual life and a fresh start made possible, and that only happens because people care.

COMMON MYTHS (AND THE TRUTH)

"Rabbits and guinea pigs are easy pets" or "they're starter pets." These animals are complex, intelligent, and sensitive. They deserve the same thought, preparation, and commitment as a dog or cat, not to be treated as a trial run for pet ownership. This myth leads to impulsive purchases, improper care, and often abandonment. Many rabbits and guinea pigs end up sick, stressed, or surrendered because their owners weren't prepared.

Why They Don't Make Good "Starter Pets"

Social needs are complex. Rabbits need a bonded companion and guinea pigs thrive best in pairs. Housing them alone can cause serious stress or depression.

Nutrition is specialised. Rabbits need a diet high in hay, fibre, and fresh vegetables. Guinea pigs require a constant source of vitamin C. Feeding mistakes can lead to life-threatening issues like gut stasis or scurvy.

They need space and enrichment. A hutch is not enough. Rabbits need room to hop, run, and dig. Guinea pigs need a spacious set-up to explore and hide. Daily enrichment and exercise are essential.

Long-term commitment. Rabbits can live 8 to 12 years, guinea pigs 5 to 7 years or longer. Caring for them consistently requires real preparation and dedication.

Fragility and vet care. Both species are delicate, easily injured if mishandled, and require specialist exotic vet care.

Other Common Myths That Cause Harm

Rabbits are "low maintenance" or "cheap." They need daily attention, enrichment, and ongoing costs for food, bedding, and exotic vet care.

They can live alone happily. Social isolation causes stress and depression. They need companionship of the same species.

They don't need a vet unless they're sick. Preventive care is crucial to avoid chronic or life-threatening conditions.

Guinea pigs can survive on pellets alone. Hay, fresh vegetables, and vitamin C are essential. They can survive without pellets, not without hay.

Rabbits like being picked up and cuddled. Most rabbits find lifting stressful. Forcing interaction can cause injury or trust issues. We only handle rabbits when needed, such as health checks, medication, or vet visits.

The Real Impact

These myths lead to chronic stress, illness, behavioural problems, and premature death. They perpetuate the idea that small animals are "disposable," which drives the very problems small rescues like Maria's exist to fix.

Small rescues rely on supporters who understand the reality: these animals are intelligent, sensitive, and social. They need informed, prepared, and compassionate care.

CAN YOU HELP MARIA RESCUE AND CARE FOR SICK AND UNWANTED ANIMALS?

Any amount you can give will go towards giving an animal a clean and warm bed, food, care and medical treatment while we try to find them a new and loving home.

DIRECT DEBIT

Could you spare a small amount each month? £2? £5? £10?

You can setup a "recurring direct debit" directly through your bank either online or by giving them a call and using our bank details below.

BANK TRANSFER

Make a quick and simple transfer directly to us, this is the easiest method and ensures that 100% of the money goes to the shelter:

ACCOUNT NAME: MARIAS ANIMAL SHELTER

SORT CODE: 30-88-22

ACCOUNT NUMBER: 18735760

ONLINE

Donate online with a credit or debit card using PayPal (No account required), follow the link on our website:

WWW.MARIASANIMALSHELTER.COM/DONATIONS

CHEQUE

To donate by cheque please make them payable to "Marias Animal Shelter" and post them to our admin office:

MARIAS ANIMAL SHELTER, 44 PARKENGAR, PROBUS, TR2 4JT

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