No fear ‘Spike’ forges instant connection with Maria

With a child’s heart

The instant rapport and confidence of a four year old with a donkey was startling to behold. In Spike, the little man from Melbourne, Australia, there was no argument. He wanted an equal and robust relationship with this benign animal.

Immediately Spike started to touch, pull and handle the donkey without any fear. The donkey responded with warmth, patience, calm and total acceptance of this friend of 15 minutes.

A genuine and mutual connection was made and it clearly demonstrated the power and wonder of the donkey to forge deep bonds with humans of any age! It was the first time Spike had encountered a donkey and it definitely won’t be the last!
Hot off the press

Finally! Our second edition Funky Donkey t-shirt has hit the streets. Depicting a bold and edgy donkey with attitude, the more masculine design is to challenge all those who may think that the Mannar donkeys are weak and on the decline. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Mannar donkeys are here to stay!

The design was once more artfully created by Sameera Rajapaksa who runs an inspiring graphic design business in Colombo. With a vague description handed to him of what we wanted, Sameera came up with a stunning design!

Thanks too to Rohan De Costa and Maduranga of Maxim Garments who have made and printed the t-shirts gratis so that the entire proceeds of the sales can go towards sustaining our donkey programs. Maxim Garments – a business with heart!

Now over to you! How many t-shirts will you buy? For local Sri Lankans the price is Rs 800. For those from overseas, the cost is AU$30; £20; US$25; €20 + postage. You will be supporting an integrated cause – animal welfare coupled with village economic development in war-affected areas of Mannar District, northern Sri Lanka.

Donkey Clinic Update

So there is only one final hurdle remaining before we can start construction of the Donkey Clinic & Community Education Centre. It has taken two years to clear the many blocks. The last is so simple yet has frustrated us for six months.

All we need is a letter on Sri Lanka Railways letterhead stating that our proposed building site at Thailankudiyiruppu, Mannar Island, does not fall within the railway reservation. A survey report has already been done by SL Railways and a letter sent to head office informing them of this. Yet we are waiting.

Al Hathir, Bridging Lanka worker and property owner, and director, Jeremy visited SL Railways in Anuradhapura and scanned the letter and survey report to have a copy of the documentation. Fingers crossed. Here’s hoping that official letter arrives very soon!
Eight tourists from Australia embarked on another Uniting Journeys adventure to Mannar. Uniting Journeys is developing a comprehensive ‘responsible tourism’ schedule of destinations and Mannar is firmly on their circuit!

Although a little hesitant at first, the tourists were eventually charmed by our four legged friends. They particularly enjoyed the time with the MARDAP children in another DAT session. Although it was a holiday for the teachers and students, they all made a special effort to come to the shelter to show off their donkeys and their much loved DAT program.

What was most significant to the visitors was the children’s obvious ease with the donkeys and the euphoric stimulation their interactions with the animals seem to engender.

Later that day the visitors huddled together in two groups brainstorming a creative concept for a proposed video to sell the benefits of donkeys to the authorities. The makings of a dynamic script with a forward-looking and positive message was the result of a couple of hours of intense work.

The visitors all bought the new edition t-shirts and also agreed to be the ‘mules’ for the transportation of this new stock back to Australia for sale there.
Following up the Girl Guides

While in Colombo, Jeremy met with the Girl Guides who had visited Mannar. He also thanked Ms. Speldewinde, the Principal of Ladies College where the girls study, for allowing her students to participate in our donkey program. She pledged the school’s ongoing support.

At a lively meeting with the Girl Guides during their lunch break, they brainstormed how they could help publicize the recent spate of cruel incidents befalling our donkeys.

Reports were being received that donkeys from Mannar were being slaughtered and their flesh sold as cow meat by unscrupulous business people on the A9 Highway. Others were also transporting donkeys illegally from Mannar to other parts of Sri Lanka, selling them to owners of coconut estates. The real danger is that few people know about caring for donkeys. Their abuse will surely result.

The girls volunteered to write newspaper articles, investigate how the message could be conveyed via television and radio, create an awareness raising video and plan a protest strategy.

Some strategic planning

While in Colombo, Jeremy discussed a number of donkey-related issues with Pubudu, a director of both Bridging Lanka and also the Species Conservation Centre.

The conversation included safeguarding our donkey clinic venture from individuals who may wish to undermine our plans. Pubudu suggested creating a more substantial connection with the Department of Wildlife through making the clinic and education centre a joint initiative.

They also fixed a time for the next donkey census – late November.

Unexpected visitor

Introduced by local, Elijah Hoole, Andrew Fernando, a cricket journo with Cricinfo, is currently travelling the road less travelled to capture the unsung wonders of Lanka. What better place to come and what better subject matter to focus on than the unique donkey colony of Mannar! Andrew is writing a special travel book and we were glad to help his project along. Hope Kelvin and Maria donkeys are featured!
DAT Centre at Murunkan

As soon as Jeremy arrived back in Mannar, the first thing he was interested in was the progress made on the DAT building. Finally his face showed signs of satisfaction in seeing one of his dreams starting to come true.

Much of the building was now complete. He also made suggestions about the security of both the building and the donkeys in the future, asking Chrishanthan, the MARDAP Officer in charge at Murunkan to better secure the building.

During the visit we had the chance of spending time with some of the kids from the MARDAP Murunkan School. They played very loud music and Jeremy joined the children in some energetic dancing.

Chrishanthan then took us to a welding workshop where we had to choose window frame designs. We are hopeful that the DAT Centre will be finished by the end of November.
Evelyn – Sponsored by Helen Gibbs

One and half years ago we let Evelyn come inside our shelter because she had a piece of tin wedged in her hoof which was causing obvious pain. We managed to remove the tin and very quickly her health returned once more.

In the beginning she was the dominant one among the donkeys, not allowing the others to eat. She was very selfish and difficult to handle.

Now Evelyn is one of our best behaved donkeys, very friendly with everyone and also one of the four donkeys chosen for the DAT program. Soon she will be heading to Murunkan to live permanently at the DAT Centre.

Musaeus – Sponsored by Visakha Tillekeratne

Musaeus is seven months old and was the first male to be born at our shelter. Being the ‘king’ of the compound, he got to choose when and where he mingled with us riff raff. If we choose to go toward him, he would wander away but when we sat still not bothering about him, he would choose to come close and get quite personal.

The donkeys Kelvin and Musaeus are firm friends and look out for each other. They are often seen grooming each other and hanging out.

Watch this video to see just how affectionate Musaeus can get with us! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjMIGcFM2tE

Kelvin Fernando, Programs Coordinator
October, 2016
A committed friend

It has been two years since Animal Aid Abroad first started financially supporting our donkey welfare work in Mannar. Religiously, every three months, a transfer would occur.

Janet nominated that the funds go toward sustaining the proposed Donkey Clinic. The clinic will need both technical, human and financial resources to continue providing a range of services – taming, feeding, wound care, inoculation, antibiotic treatment, microchipping, ferriering, deworming, and of course, grooming.

We are hoping for good news from the Urban Development Authority next month, that they will finally give us building approval for the clinic and community education centre. Once opened, AAA funds will go toward equipping the clinic and paying for veterinary care. Sincere thanks AAA!