



Essex & Suffolk Annual Branch Report

2023

Group Statistics

- Incidents completed 4777
- 11883 WO's Completed, 2509 of which were collections and rescues
- 38 Cases submitted for consideration of prosecution where severe breach of the law has occurred.

2023 was another year of challenges where the RSPCA looked for opportunities for growth and modernisation. As the cost of living increase continued to pose difficulties for many we found ourselves in a position where we struggled for boarding space nationally with lots of animals looking to find new homes. The animal welfare assistance vouchers were introduced which provided a great supportive tool to help those that found themselves in financial difficulties. We managed to keep many pets in a loving home with the support of the scheme.

The space limitation was a primary concern for many as we struggled to find spaces for case animals which we couldn't turn our back on. Thankfully with support from our branches, private borders and animal logistics team we managed to rescue all that were in desperate need. A special mention to some of our veterinary partners who helped us in a few tight spots this year, temporarily housing animals until we could find a space.

This also posed many frustrations for the team who would have loved to have resolved welfare issues by taking the animal to rehoming but this just wasn't possible and we were left with no other option but to make the owners accountable for their responsibilities.

The boarding space crisis led to great team work between branches, taking on animals from others areas, we really did have some wonderful support to aid getting animals to safety. I lost count of the number of times I 'borrowed' branch spaces for case dogs or centres juggled things around to create a space. Later in this year the Care Contribution Fund was introduced which is looking like a real positive to encourage more of that support and help branches to be able to provide further spacing.

As the inspectorate look for ways to improve, improving quality and time scales on cases was a consideration. Especially if it would open a door to reducing time animals spent in boarding during an investigation. In 2023, the Fields Investigations Team pilot was introduced. This grew over the course of the year from 3 officers to 7 officers nationally. This team was constructed of experienced case officers whose focus was solely case investigation work with

a focus on tackling the more challenging and complex cases. They also took on a number of more straightforward cases in order to overcome capacity issues in the field. This pilot is still ongoing but the achievements of the team so far look very impressive. Essex/Suffolk's DCI Caroline Richardson was one of the first three officers seconded to the team due to her incredible motivation around cases and proven track record.

The small transportable animals initiative was also introduced. This was part of the strategy for engaging the public more for animal welfare. It meant we were asking people to take small, handleable wildlife to a vet or rescue themselves. Advice was providing and updated on the website and provided to those calling in about those animals. This would free the inspectorate up to get those animals that needed the specialist skills of an officer and get to those suffering cruelty and neglect. Something no other charity does. The impact of this was impacted by the concerns and impact over bird flu which was another challenge the officers had to contend with.

Another area that we looked to improve was the roster to ensure there is sufficient cover for animals when they need us. As staffing changes and we had amended working hours over the years the roster was just updated and was due to be looked at as a whole. A roster review commenced with workshops and ideas suggested but this was put on hold a few months later as we came into the busy summer months. The summer action plan amended the working hours and gaining further statistics from that was deemed the best course of action before making any decisions.

As we entered the summer it became clear we were struggling to cope with the workload and another Summer Action Plan was introduced. As mentioned, there were some shift changes for the officers to finish an hour earlier at 8pm and this coincided with also reducing the opening hours of the NCC from 8-5pm. This allowed more support to be given during the core hours and more time spent on job assessment by the NCC.

As we progressed through the summer into August further action was needed which resulted in a change in jobs being taken by the NCC. Simply put we were taking more work in than we cope with. The decision was made to only take the higher priority jobs and focus on those animals most in need. This led to a decision to consider how each group was managing with their backlog and to reduce the jobs going to the field if there were a large number of jobs backing up. At its peak Essex Suffolk had 66% of jobs being unactioned. By being put on tasking to deal with just the higher priority tiers we managed to improve this considerably reducing down to having a much better ratio, at its lowest of 17.5% of jobs being unactioned yet. This meant we were getting to those animals in the highest priority situation. The system is now in place that when the unactioned jobs form more than 25% of the backlog the tasking is changed to just be taken the higher welfare concerns and focus on actioning those in a more timely manner.

Of course we must also mention to XL Bully being added to the dangerous dog legislation. This was a very worrying and concerning change in the law that would have a big impact on us. There was a lot of concern over dogs being brought in with no clear guidance from the government. This wouldn't stop us taking in dogs that needed it for welfare reasons but navigating the topic was challenging and created a lot of worry about whether dogs not of behavioral concern were going to get caught up in it.

There were some changes amongst our team over the course of the year. Sadly Inspector Jess Bush took the decision to leave the RSPCA and become a Welfare Advisor for the Donkey Sanctuary. This was a big loss for the team but a positive move for her and a great gain for the Donkeys, we are all pleased for her.

Inspector Jen Wildman returned from maternity leave to rejoin the madness and was straight back to dealing with cases. Sian Ridley took the decision to change her role from an Inspector to an ARO which fit much better with her busy home life. ARO Jen Richardson went on maternity leave towards the end of the year to have her first child. ARO Amy Marjoram returned from maternity leave in 2023 and went off again later in the year for her second child. ARO Yarrow reached her 20th year anniversary of working for the society, which is an incredible achievement.

Our current Essex and Suffolk team is:-

Chief Inspector Adam Jones 16179
DCI Caroline Richardson 12755 (Seconded to the Fields Investigation Team)
Insp Natalie Bartle 837
Insp Jen Wildman 16994 (50%)
Insp Nicky Thorne 881 (50%)
Insp Emma Beynon 15972
Insp Jason Finch 735
ARO Sian Ridley 14606 (60%)

ARO Amy Marjoram 13704 (maternity leave)
ARO Natalie Read 11613
ARO Rebecca Yarrow 10322 (80%)
ARO Suzi Fothergill
ARO Emma Baker
ARO Enola Evans
ARO Jen Richardson (Maternity)
ARO Jo Thorpe (60%)

As 2023 concludes we must reflect on some of the great achievements with some many animals rescued, many lives now improved by the actions and advice of our officers and some successful results in court getting justice for the animals who were severely mistreated.

This year also saw some amazing collaborative working and we continued working with branches and other agencies to deliver the best we possibly can for animal welfare. We really couldn't have made such an impact without the support of all the branches, Police, Fire and Rescue, local authorities, partner charities and vets. Whether its support with taking on animals, transport, using their powers / skills we really couldn't do the work we do without the support of others and we are grateful for that support.

Stories in Essex/Suffolk

In yet another busy year on the frontline, here's a few stories we've shared this year.

Tangled deer

Thankfully we were able to "let it go"

Inspector Caroline Richardson and Inspector Jason Finch attended this deer rescue in Essex which sadly had been trapped for 24 hours. Sadly this is a fairly common occurrence for us, with deer along with various other wildlife becoming victims of fencing, rope, wire mesh and sporting nets. The list is endless. Therefore it is essential to regularly check netting, electric fencing etc and discard old fencing or materials that are not needed any more. Luckily for this deer the rescue was successful and the deer was safely released. This is not always the case though as animals can become too badly injured or found too late. Deer especially get

very stressed from the ordeal which can make release impossible or difficult. Therefore if you find an entangled animal, especially deer it's important you get professional help- deer rescues can be very dangerous and require specialist training, equipment and sometimes a vet for sedation too. In this example The inspectors tied the deer to a nearby tree, this anchored it to a point so they could then cut the old electrical fencing free from it. Remember please don't ever try this yourself and contact us or someone trained for animal rescue when specialist help is needed.



Goalkeeper hands needed

Not so wise Mr Fox

Careful Goal keeping hands were needed by Suzi Fothergill to rescue this poor fox which had been caught up in a garden football net. It's safe to say this family won't be playing football anytime soon. Thankfully it was a successful rescue and Suzi took the fox to South Essex

Wildlife Hospital for some TLC.



Flying high

Or should we say Dangling high?



ARO Emma Baker was called to a poor Starling in Ipswich which had become trapped in some material in the gutter of a house. Thankfully Ipswich Fire brigade were there super quick and safely retrieved it. Emma gave it a once over, removing the material from its leg and it was set free again.



Kittens cold and alone

No mumma cat around

ARO Amy Marjoram was called to these 4 tiny kittens which were only a couple of days old in an industrial bin that was being emptied at a factory near Halesworth. The kittens belonged to a feral mother, and with the nest site being disturbed it was unlikely the mother cat would have returned to them. On Amy's arrival the kittens were cold and lifeless. She got them warmed up ASAP, and they were transferred to the RSPCA Mid Norfolk and North Suffolk branch, where they needed around the clock feeding initially. Sadly two of the kittens did not pull through, but the other two remaining kittens are doing fantastic with their fosterer and are now taking solids for themselves.



Below, now named Benedict and Florentine
pictured at 4 weeks old:



Reclining chair

Think before your recline



ARO Emma Baker was called to this poor cat, which had become trapped in a reclining chair! Emma soon realised she was going to need some extra help so organised for a vet to attend to sedate the cat and then also the fire service who had to cut apart the sofa and mechanism to free the poor cat! The cat obtained tissue damage and needed a short stay at the vets for pain relief, but thankfully was soon able to return home.

Specialist Skills

One of our Suffolk inspectors in particular was kept busy this summer with multiple water rescues! Inspector Jason Finch, our National Water Rescue Team Coordinator, was called to several different incidents where his specialist skills and knowledge were desperately needed. To name only a few of the rescues, first we have a Heron in Ipswich that was tangled in a fishing line on an island of a lake back on May 5th. Jason suited up and successfully retrieved the Heron, safely removed the line and transported the bird to an animal hospital to dry out.



Flocking together for a Swan in Need!

Next we have a rescue where Jason was joined by ARO Natalie Read on June 7th, to save a swan with an injured wing. This poor swan would have otherwise been completely out of reach if it wasn't for Jason's Kayak. They successfully caught her and after a thorough assessment found that her wing injury was too far gone and unfortunately she had to be put to sleep. In instances like this we are grateful that we have the tools to minimise suffering where we can



Crash Landing in a heatwave!



ARO Natalie Read was called to a swan on the 26th of May that had managed to get herself stuck on someone's balcony during this summer's heatwave. The officer caught the swan, checked her over for any injuries and it appeared she was good to go. Natalie Read used her local knowledge to locate a local river and transported and released the swan back to freedom and even found some friends!

Dangerously Dangling!

On October 9th, ARO Enola Evans had a challenging rescue of a gull dangling from wire over a busy road, right on the Southend On Sea seafront! The bird was very high up and Enola knew she would need the assistance of F&R for this one. So with the use of their ladders and platforms, Enola and the team successfully cut the gull free. No wounds or injuries were seen so it made a speedy recovery at the local wildlife hospital. Well done to all involved.



A Little Too High...

Little Fluffy had quite the adventure, finding herself trapped up a tree for four days! At over 25metres high, ARO Emma Baker knew her own ladder wouldn't quite cut it so needed help from F&R. However it was a surprise to them all that they also found the rescue very challenging and unfortunately couldn't rescue poor Fluffy either. So the next day on October 17th, Emma returned with the expert skills of a tree surgeon who successfully managed to capture Fluffy using our reach and rescue poles and bring her down to her very grateful owners. A good meal and some water later, Fluffy made sure to give herself a good clean after all the drama. Hopefully no more tree climbing from her!



