**Northern Region Report for the DBS AGM November 2023**

There’s no antidote to being smitten by donkeys, a fact that the multiplicity of donkey-centric activities in the Northern region can attest to. The variety of what members achieve with and for donkeys seems endless both in scale and scope. The idea of innovation runs through this year’s activities.

Deliberate activities and events were offered throughout the vast area of the region in the hope of attracting more of the membership to take part, and this had remarkable success on many occasions. New faces, human and donkey, appeared at shows and on more than one occasion for some of them. Again new faces and donkeys took part in walks. New faces appeared at craft courses and training sessions. We have to maintain this momentum.

Attending and competing at shows, with or without donkeys is a big part of what the most active members enjoy. In the last twelve months a grand total of 16 welcomed donkeys, an increase on previous years and thus a fact to be celebrated. Additionally, some members venture over the borders of the region to attend other shows northwards and southwards. Sadly, the autumn championship show had to be hastily rearranged from its intended location in the east to an indoor arena in the west when a storm was forecast. It is apparent when talking with members showing their donkeys that they are not all bent on winning rosettes, keen instead to use the events as enrichment for their donkeys and to enjoy the social side of getting together with fellow enthusiasts.

Indisputably, the spring championship show was our “showstopper” – it had the inspired theme of celebrating the Coronation which happened the previous day. Special activities with a coronation theme were included, especially the pageant for juniors – that involved making special costumes, crowns and decorating floats pulled by donkeys. The preparation and planning took countless hours, a fact that deserves to be widely acknowledged.

A series of training days for juniors and adults spanned a wide range of topics that included show preparation, differing aspects of care as well as prep for the national awards. Again the planning, delivering and hosting need to be acknowledged.

Several craft days were organised throughout the region; sadly those located to tempt participation on the east of the Pennines had no takers while those accessible on the west were successful. This is a vast region where physical barriers such as the Pennines, the Lake District mountains, the North York Moors can limited people’s prepareedness to travel, so we must find ways to overcome this and deliver added benefits to the members in far-flung places.

With this in mind two on-line challenges were offered to all members; an entry for one came from beyond the region! Other in-region entries came from juniors and new members. One of the two walks with donkeys was a repeat of a previous success; the other was on the “edge of empire” – a hugely heartening addition to the region’s portfolio. Again one visit was organised to a donkey rescue operation over the border tempting participation from some of the most northern members and Scottish members too.

That juniors take part not only in junior-specific activities but also in many of the events organised for adults is to be celebrated. That we have tempted some new applicants into membership (including a new club operated by an animal charity) is also to be celebrated.

Recently an initiative to secure discounts from equine supply companies for the region’s members has secured three into the scheme – part of the drive to widen the perceived benefits of continuing membership for all, including the less active.

The themes constant throughout the year’s activities have been to involve more participation within the existing membership (both by bringing less active members into our programme and by offering a greater number of activities) and to increase membership, with some encouraging successes. The committee driving the activities rocks; this region rocks!

Allison Roberts

Regional Delegate