

### NEWS OF PONIES IN CARE

The weather has begun horribly in 2010 with a long spell of snow and frost. This type of weather is very hard on old horses and ponies, especially those which began the winter in poor condition. A number of older brood mares with their 2009 foals at heel have been admitted, so the yards have been very noisy places. It is not our policy

to rehome mares with their foals, so the pairs must be kept until foals are weaned and handled. The handling begins at birth; young foals are naturally very curious and a few minutes of 'quality time' spent with a foal in the field each day, results in a confident youngster, who is happy to be led, groomed and have his feet trimmed. Early lessons are

never forgotten and these simple steps are a crucial part of a young horse's education.

Every foal stays with its mother for six months and he learns from her as well. Loading into a trailer is a lesson best learned at an early age; if a mare goes up the ramp confidently, her foal will usually follow. If she is a confident traveller, he learns to be that way too. We always make sure before starting weaning, that foals are accustomed to eating grown-up feed. They learn this from the mares, when they are fed together. Where possible, we try to keep a batch of mares and foals together and when weaning time comes we remove one of the mares at a time – just for a day here and there. As time goes on, we increase the separation time and little



Are you my new friend?

by little the foals become more independent. They also form friendships amongst themselves and by the time the mares are removed altogether, the trauma is negligible. We do sometimes have to be tough though! There is occasionally one

foal which cannot bear to be without Mum (and it's usually a boy) so we have to take the mare to a different yard. Invariably, once the mare is out of earshot, everything settles down and the foals get on with their feed. Out of sight – out of mind!



On foal-minding duties

### NEWS FROM THE CENTRES

The centres are having a busy winter. Lockwood is still under quarantine restriction for the strangles virus and sadly, has lost a couple of ageing donkeys. As this goes to press, one of our Wales establishments is having a pony tested for strangles. We have everything crossed that the test will not be positive

because this would have a grave effect on our equine operation in Wales. Both Felledge and Gonsal are under enormous pressure to take in the normal winter casualties and the Society is having to rely on its sterling private boarders to support them. Stray ponies in the Midlands are giving the Inspectors

a headache. They are not always the responsibility of the RSPCA, but sadly it is very common for a stray pony to be injured and then we must get involved. The logistics of catching ponies on a busy road in the dark are the stuff of nightmares. When these ponies come into the centres, they are usually very frightened and stressed. It takes quite a few days for them to settle and begin to exhibit normal behaviour.

The population in our yards can get very static at this time of year as we find our time is taken up with the caring, not the rehoming. However, demand seems good and ponies are still finding good homes. As usual, in rehoming, things never go to plan. Last week, Felledge sent their list of horses for rehoming to the Rehoming Officer,



Rehomed before the website

so that the appeals could go on the website. Two of those appeals had hardly appeared, when Felledge rehomed them unexpectedly. Likewise Gonsal had a lovely cob mare lined up for breaking

and schooling when someone applied for that very thing. So we never know what is going to happen, but a good home must never be ignored! Our friends at Redwings Horse Sanctuary are being very supportive

as well. Some of the ageing mares which are really too old for our rehoming scheme will be travelling over to Norfolk at the beginning of March, to live out their days in comfort and security.



Rehomed the same day