

Sounds of the Sanctuary – Series 3, Episode One

Redwings After Dark

Jude (Host): Hello and welcome back to Sounds of the Sanctuary the third series of the podcast from Redwings Horse Sanctuary. Welcome back to another series, bringing you here into the hearts of Redwings.

My name is Jude and I'm your host. And I'm going to take you to meet more of our rescued residents, as well as hear about some of the latest news from across the sanctuary, from the people who make it happen. If you're a returning listener, you will know all about Field Notes our accompanying episodes, which will feature Redwings experts as well as invited guests. As we explore some of the welfare themes that are raised in the podcast in more detail.

Hit subscribe on your favourite podcast platforms and you'll never miss an episode.

This episode, which lands just before Halloween, is appropriately called Redwings After Dark. But instead of all things spooky, we're finding out more about the nighttime welfare checks that happen across Redwings. Every centre has a nighttime check, but for this episode I chat to Sarah from our Nights Welfare team, which covers Hapton HQ.

This team might operate under the cover of darkness, but it's about time we shed a light on their crucial work, looking after our residents around the clock. First, Sarah chats to me about how the team works. And then we join her as an honorary team member and head out into the horse and donkey. And you'll see why I emphasize that hospital here tonight to deliver some feeds and medication.

(music)

Jude: Today I'm joining Sarah. And Sarah is one of our Nights team leaders and we are here to do a nice check and not any old night's check either. It's the night's check when Storm Babet is ravaging the UK. So we've battled our way through quite a lot of standing water to get here and the night's team come in, whatever the weather to check on the ponies. And so, Sarah, I wonder if you can tell us when we talk about night check, what are you actually checking for?

Sarah (Nights Team Leader): Okay, so our team, they just come in at 6:00. We still check sort of any movements that have happened and we also check who's got to be medicated, who's being fed. The rest of the team then comes in at 7:00, and basically that's when the full shift starts really. We're basically checking on the welfare of the equines and how they are in the fields, if there's any like any fences that have broken that sort of thing. So, we're doing like a full check and during the night and we have two sets of like feeds, we have night one feeds, night two feeds, and then same with medication as well.

Once we've done Hapton we then go out to the other farms, same there again really. We sort of check how the equines are. We have to report anything that's that seems a bit odd or if we've got any concerns with an equine. So, if we are working on the sites, or the vet unit, we contact the vet on call and sometimes where we're required to stay if there's an equine they're not happy with, to just sort of assist them really. And yes, just make sure that everybody's sort of happy really it. Yeah.

Jude: So it's a it can sort of really vary can't it, depending on whether you find anything on your check that like you say, you need to report to any of the vets and you may end up still staying with that poorly pony.

Sarah: Yeah, definitely Yeah.

Jude: And obviously this time of year, especially we're in October it's already dark, you guys have quite some serious head torches for this job you see you can go around and count, am I right? And then you count every horse in every field we do.

Sarah: Yes, basically we're given a list of all the fields with the horses on, and we basically have to go out to every field and count every equine that's in that field. And then that's also a good time to check everybody's up and about and nobody looks uncomfortable. So yeah, it takes quite a while.

Jude: Yes, I can imagine. And you mentioned some of the horses get feeds throughout the night. A lot of horse owners, if they're listening to this, might think that's a bit unusual as typically they might feed that horse in the morning and then in the evening. Why do some of our horses need those regular feeds around the clock?

Sarah: Some of our horses as classed as no long fibre so so they need to have those extra feeds is just really sort of help with obviously their weight as well, that sort of thing.

Jude: yeah, but it's spacing it out throughout the day, isn't it as well. Our no long fibre ponies whilst all the other horses might be happy munching on their hay or their grass our no long fibre the ponies can't eat that. So it becomes like all their nutrition is delivered in their feeds, which means they have to be fed around the clock as well.

Obviously you have got you get to see the side of Redwings that quite a lot of people don't get to see. Redwings after dark. Have you had is there any kind of special stories that stick out in your mind or anything that you've kind of come across while you've been here while nobody else is?

Sarah: I would say one of the well, I call it perks because I'm an outdoor girl. One of the perks, you see a lot of wildlife. Yeah, we've got quite a few owls round here and that we've also got quite a few families of little polecats as well, so they're lovely to see they're quite little characters. We've, we've got a family at Hapton and then we've also got some over at Piggots. I, we went to do a visit there once and there was little family, they were under some pallets. Yeah. And I remember there was somebody on shift me, she was like "oh there's something under that pallet", we just thought it was rabbit, we have quite a few rabbits.

Jude: (laughter) We do, we have a lot.

Sarah: Yeah. Or a squirrel or something and yeah we sort of just watched it for a little bit. And this, this little baby polecat came out and it was really sweet. So yeah.

Jude: yeah, obviously a lot of people wouldn't be able to say they've seen that! Yeah, and I mentioned Sarah before we started recording that I've done the odd night shift at times when when they've been short staffed and they needed an extra pair of hands - and I was very excited because I saw my first badger. I've never seen a badger in the wild before until I did a night shift at Redwings. So yeah, we get to see all sorts.

So Sarah, your job is a bit different from maybe a lot. You know, you work after dark. What's the favourite part of what you do?

Sarah: Umm obviously the equines they are obviously, first, I always thought it the fact that it's outdoors you're out in the fresh air even a night like tonight. You know, it's it's cold and it's wet. But I personally feel so much better being outside. I've had of jobs in the past where I've been indoors.

And as soon as I came here, my wellbeing, sort of my mental health is so much better. And and it just shows you I've just I've always joked as well - I remember when I came for my interview, when I came through the main gates and just driving down that driveway and you've got the equines either sides, and they're all happy munching. It's like you just release and I find that when I come in at night now although it's not so easy to see now, but in the summer you do you come down and you just think I'm really lucky to work here. It's so peaceful. Yeah, and obviously working with the horses, it's something that I've always wanted to do and obviously I've come back to after family and, yeah, it's just lovely.

Jude: Yes. A colleague of mine once described driving here, driving down Hapton drive. It's like driving into a Disney film because you've got the ponies happily munching, you know, lots of bunnies hopping about, squirrels hopping about. And then I remember driving down once on my way out just after five, and there was an owl, a little owl on a fence. And then further along there was little hawk And I was like, yeah, really is, it's quite Disney Disney vibes isn't it?

But um and in terms of the horses, do you obviously especially the ones here at the Horse Hospital they will change depending on the horses that are in and everything. but do you ever build up special, special soft spots for any that you see regularly?

Sarah: Oh, yeah, I'd say so. I think as a team, we've all got favourites and yeah, you've obviously got the ones that of in a lot, or the ones that visit quite a lot! So when they come in it's 'oh so and so is coming back'. Yeah, yeah. I think everybody's probably a favourite here.

Jude: So do you have a personal favourite?

Sarah: I've got a few ones, I think to myself if I won the lottery that I'd have at home. I love Costa over at Rehoming at the moment who's lovely. Frieda, we've got Frieda as well, she's beautiful. So, yes, they are all lovely and I know a few of them have their off days, but they're all lovely.

Jude: Yeah, brilliant, so you're going to take me out now and we're going to go and deliver some meds to some of the patients here at the hospital. And we're going to meet a few of the residents that are here.

(break)

So we're now heading over to med one of the residents Frieda and I mentioned. (footsteps in puddles) The rain! You can hear that we we're having to splash splash our way over to her, so she'll hear us coming. She's in one of the vet stables here at Hapton

(donkeys bray loudly!)

Are we getting a welcome? Obviously, that isn't Frieda the horse that's giving us the welcome. This is Rodney and Ruby the donkeys. It's not your turn. yet I'm afraid it's not your turn yet. It will come. Hello, Frieda You know it's coming. So what meds is Frieda getting?

Sarah: Frieda has got five ICP.

Jude: Mm hmm.

Sarah: And she's also got one Bute.

Jude: And that's because she's in for She's lame at the moment.

Sarah: Yes. And she's also. Yeah, she's very laminitic as well. And yeah, she's 26, so she's not. young Anymore, so.

Jude: Yeah. So it's a pain, some pain relief yes. To keep her comfy while she's here on box rest. Yeah. and Frieda is a beautiful Appaloosa. She's got a very speckly nose haven't You, darling. hey.

Anyone that's visited Aylsham may have met Frieda before, and she's one of our equines that came from the infamous Amersham Rescue. And you're still going strong all these years later aren't you darling? *"Hey, I don't want to talk to you Jude, I just want my food"* Because meds come in tasty tasty packages. So, you know something tasty is coming, don't you, sweetheart? Hey. Hey.

Sarah: This is basically I've taken a handful of food, she seems to like balancer. So. So we've got little bit of balancer for her. We basically pour the medication into the feed and give it a good mix, and then just sort of make sure that she eats it, basically. Yeah. And we do this before we give them any feeds, any forage anything like that, just to make sure it's gone in really. Yet she's usually pretty good, actually. She will then sort of eat it straight away. Some of them you you will see them eat around the tablets.

Jude: Yeah.

Sarah: And yeah. You sort left with them in the bowl.

Jude: Yes.

Sarah: But she seems to be quite good. So hopefully she'll be tonight as well.

Jude: Hey sweetie There we go Tucking right in there. She knows the drill.

Sarah: She does. Yeah. She's pretty good at she's you know the drill.

(donkeys banging their hooves on the stable next door)

Jude: You've got quite noisy neighbours haven't you darling Hey, look out. And are the donkeys expectantly waiting for the hay nets.

Sarah: Yeah, so they have hay later. So about 8:00, they will have their feed. And we've also got to the left-hand side, we've got Hope and Lucy as well. Hope's on medication as well. Yes. I believe they are mother and daughter next door. So, yeah, they are you know, not very big.

Jude: Because some of our stables, if we've got bonded pairs, they will come in come in together. So, yes, two little ones. And they're sharing a stable. And the donkeys. (donkeys bray) Yes. Hello. You also share a stable? Yes. Hey, sweetheart. Do you find they're always pleased to see you because they know that food?

Sarah: Yes.

Jude: Yes, they see the head torches and they're like, it's nighttime snack time.

Sarah: Not quite when if we we go in with, like medication, which is in paste form. Some of them are like, no, we don't want that but nine times out of ten that they realise they're getting food and they're happy.

Jude: Yes yes. You're a popular team How's Frieda you to getting on. She munched her way through just a few crumbs left.

(Donkeys bray again)

Yes. Thank you, Rodney. Rodney and Ruby are from Redwings Ada Cole in Essex. They're up here for some handling training, so they're staying up here with us for a bit of training supported by our Behaviour Team. And you both got a cosy stable out of the rain as well. Just shouting about it. Hey, making your presence known.

Sarah: all done all done.

Jude: Fabulous. So as well as delivering meds, we also deliver feeds on all night shift. And we've got Cooper, Cooper's food. And Sarah tells me that Cooper is always especially pleased to see his tea.

So hopefully we will hear him chatting in a minute when we go around the corner and he realizes that we've got it. Can't see him yet. We've just come around the stable block and can see a few heads peeking out over doors. Hey, Cooper. We've got your dinner.

(Cooper nickers)

Aww, Cooper is so excited.

(open stable door)

He's barely letting Sarah get it in the bowl. And try and keep some in your mouth darling. There we go dinner is served.

Sarah: He can't eat quick enough.

Jude: He's quite a messy eater. He's managed to get quite a lot of it on the floor around his bucket as well as going in his mouth. But I'm sure he'll get around and Hoover up the crumbs he will do.

Sarah: Yes, that would be spotless, when we come back later Yes

(noises of Cooper chewing and nickering)

Jude: Do you make happy chewing sounds? Right we'll let you we'll let you eat. Aww, Cooper's even got sparkly letters on his door spelling his name out. Bless him. I feel like Cooper might be a bit of a favourite.

(music)

Jude: Field Notes this week discusses fireworks as Bonfire Night rapidly approaches. This period is probably one of our night's team's most busy times of year. Sarah, explained to me what this season can mean for her team.

Jude: Sarah, we are in sort of in the middle of October now, so looking towards Bonfire Night and the fireworks that may happen in the area, you have experienced some fireworks so far. What kind of measures do the nights team put in place on nights where, you know, there's going to be fireworks happening nearby?

Sarah: So basically, we know already ready for next month that we've got a couple of events coming through. The businesses have been very good and let the company know.

Jude: Yeah.

Sarah: So we can also plan ahead a little bit. We've obviously got the the four different farms to get to during that night we work alongside during the day team as well. So last time when we had fireworks where some of the day team actually worked into the evening. Whilst the times when the

fireworks were on, we did extra checks around Piggots as well and just basically constantly checking around Hapton sort of making sure everybody's okay.

Touch wood, last time it was okay and the horses didn't really sort of they weren't too fazed by it. But we always think you just got to go out and be prepared and it could just take like one, one, one loud bang and obviously it could upset a whole field.

Jude: Do you find as in your role as team leader? Does it worry you? Would you be more worried about that sort of shift than your normal night shift?

Sarah: I would, yes. Yes. It's even like when we have like really bad thunderstorms and just the whole behaviour of the equines change, of course, they're all the more on edge. So when we go out to sort or feed some of them or medicate some of them, they are a lot more lively and a lot harder to medicate.

So I think as we get closer to 5th November, and I'm sure it's not going to be just the 5th of November with all the events going on. Yeah, you do have to be a lot more alert.

Jude: So not only are you thinking about the safety of the horses, you're thinking about the safety of your team?

Sarah: Oh, definitely. You go, you know, yeah, this is still really important. It's got to be safe for you guys that these horses are fed and medicated.

Jude: Definitely. You're doing it in circumstances where they are maybe the horses are just maybe more rattled and yes, their fear responses are heightened.

Sarah: Yeah, definitely. We are always told if it ever seems unsafe, you don't go on field. Yeah, we work alongside, you know, we work in pairs or more, hoping that we have more people in shift, but we never put ourselves in danger And we are never expected to put ourselves in danger if we can't medicate a horse yeah it just doesn't happen. You know everybody's really understood understanding about it as well. Yeah yeah. It's just all those things you really have to sort of gauge it when you get to the field and if they seem settled yet, still doesn't mean that they might not just all of a sudden go funny, start running around. you sort of thing.

Jude: Does it frustrate you like the fact that on a normal night you'd be able to get around to do everything just fine? But because of fireworks, you may then these horses may end up missing that medication.

Sarah: Oh, definitely. Yeah, it does. And now I'm I go to these events, you know, I love to see fireworks but I can also sympathize with people with animals. You know, we've we've had dogs in the family, which have always been on edge for the fireworks, and you can't go out and leave them basically it's really scares them. So yeah, it does make you cross when especially when people don't let you know you've got animals nearby, you've got rescue centers nearby, at least have the decency to say to people about it and at least we can prepare then.

Jude: So, like you say we're quite lucky in that a lot of people nearby here know obviously we're here and they know we have a large number of horses and they will let us know, which means you guys can put things in place like extra team members on that night and I guess you can be prepared with extra forage and stuff if you think that will help settle the horses. So that's really key, isn't it?

Sarah: Just yeah.

Jude: See, the more notice you guys have, the more you can be prepared. You don't get caught out in a situation where you're not expecting the fireworks, and obviously the behaviours that come with it.

Well, I hope this fireworks season, like I say, touchwood, so far it's been good. So hopefully everyone will be happy and yeah, come through fine and have a settled night.

(music)

And that brings Sounds of the Sanctuary to a close. This week's Field Notes will expand more upon the topic of fireworks at Redwings.

Last year, extra staff for the night checks and extra forage to keep our heads munching and hopefully happy through local fireworks displays cost Redwings, almost £1,500, over £300 a night at our South Norfolk Farms. As a charity, those funds are precious.

This week's Field Notes continues. our campaigning work as Redwings echoes calls for increased regulation of fireworks and awareness of the risks that fireworks can pose for horses.

Hit subscribe to be notified as soon as it goes live and hear more about how you can help.

Thank you.

(outro music)