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Orphan foal rescued by Irish Horse Welfare Trust

A colt foal aged just one week old is the youngest victim of the equine welfare crisis in Ireland. The foal was spotted in a drain in Co. Kildare by nearby residents who acted quickly and arranged to get him to the Irish Horse Welfare Trust's rehabilitation farm in Co. Wicklow where he is now being cared for.

Staff at the IHWT have been caring for the orphan foal around the clock, as he needs to be fed a milk replacement formula every few hours. The chestnut colt has been named AJ and is responding well, although Sharon Newsome, founder and manager of the IHWT, says "he is very young to be on his own but we hope he will be ok." A special little rug was ordered especially for him and his stable is fitted with a heat lamp to help keep him warm. A tiny miniature pony is also keeping him company.

The Irish Horse Welfare operates as the only dedicated Equine Charity in Ireland. The facility in Woodenbridge, Co. Wicklow, can house up to 100 equines at any one time and it has been operating at full capacity for many months.

"It has been one of the most severe winters and, mainly due to the recession, we have had one of our worst years ever at the IHWT," explains Sharon. "Our policy is to never turn away an animal. Loan homes have been found quickly through the network of friends of the charity. While many of the rescued animals go on to find a new and loving home, there are usually another 10 new ones to fill that place at the IHWT farm."

As Ireland's only dedicated equine charity and despite the support of the horse racing industry, the specialist facility is currently stretched to its limits. "In 30 years working with horses, I nor my colleagues have never seen anything quite like this, our worry is that this may only be the start as the recession deepens and as foaling gets underway again," says Sharon.

The cases encountered by the IHWT rescue team this year are mainly horses which have been left on mountains, forests or fields, with no water, shelter or food to survive the coldest winter in 50 years.

"A lot of our time is spent on the side of mountains and forests, trying to locate animals that are in distress and getting them back to the IHWT for treatment and care. We are here to help. We want to work with owners ultimately to get the right care for the animals. However, we will enforce and work with the Gardai where it is necessary as ultimately the welfare of the animal is our priority," she adds.

The IHWT currently has a huge array of horses for re-homing, as well as mares foaling, and ponies and would welcome prospective owners to get in touch (www.ihwt.ie).

“It is a wonderful feeling to take a rescue horse out of a situation and bring it into a home,” says Katie, IHWT rescue owner. “With two rescues under my belt, in our yard, and they get a lot of special treatment; you just can’t help it after seeing where they have come from. It is a really rewarding feeling you get watching them in the fields. I couldn’t recommend it more.”

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