



THINK YOU'RE AN ANIMAL LOVER? MEET THE WOMAN WHO SOLD HER PRECIOUS HEIRLOOMS TO HELP WILDLIFE, THEN THINK AGAIN! **GEORGE DRYDEN** TALKS TO ANGELA DOWNHAM



PICTURE: 460120-0

**CALL OF THE WILD:** Dedicated duo Angela Downham (right) with Helen Soame treating an injured hedgehog at the wildlife sanctuary in Kibworth

**A**tired Angela Downham greets me at her home and wildlife sanctuary in Rookery Close, Kibworth. The part-time chef and mother of one is exhausted after yet another bout of round-the-clock feeds for her patients, but her enthusiasm in talking about the hospital she founded 17 years ago is undiminished.

Angela launched the Leicestershire Wildlife Hospital after finding an injured wild rabbit which needed help.

She explained: "It was still alive so we rang around some vets. Most of them were very unhelpful and then we found one who was really sympathetic. He said we should keep him quiet and warm for the night."

"The next day, the rabbit was up and about, but the vet said there was nowhere to take him."

"No one could help, which made me wonder what happens to animals like this when they get knocked over. That's when I decided to set up the hospital."

Her rosy cheeks are a give-away to her years working in the outdoors, building the hospital from a one-patient clinic to a 24-hour crusade on behalf of wild creatures. Now there are about 3,000 cases each year and up to 40 phone calls a day requesting help.

Having made a determined start, she wasn't about to give the hospital up when the going got tough.

By the time it was costing £300 a week to run, Angela's brainchild almost became a victim of its own success.

"It got desperate because we had a lot more money going out than we had coming in so I decided to get rid of a few things."

But she didn't reach for meaningless junk and attic-bound items. Angela cleared her rooms of bric-a-brac and sold china ornaments left to her by her aunt. "I was reluctant to let them go at the time, but when I

# ANGELA'S ANIMAL HOSPITAL

look at the pleasure I have had spending it on the animals, I've no regrets. It was the right thing to do, but I did feel awful."

The sale of Angela's legacy helped pay for the aviaries in the garden and the neat rows of animal sheds opposite the

house, which accommodate an average 30 wild animals and birds at any one time.

No one's quite sure how she does it – and watching her juggling the mobile phone and taking notes while cooking the family's tea, I'm not either.

"I'm probably up during the night for feeds and rescues about three times a week as the weather gets warmer, but it lets up a bit in the winter," she says.

She has a eight helpers, including Helen Soame, the charity's telephonist. It is Helen who

talks about Angela's dedication – including how she remained dedicated to the cause even when she was struck blind for several months.

"At the time, she didn't know if she would ever see again, but she just got a few more of us in to help out while she recovered."

"If it wasn't for her dedication and determination, half the things that come in here wouldn't make it out again."

Angela regularly feeds young animals through the night and is always on 24-hour call – apart from the six or so days holiday she allows herself each year.

endings, however. Angela says: "We were called out to rescue a fox who had been trapped in a snare. When we walked through the gate, we could smell the blood on the fox, it was like a walking carcass, running about and banging into things. There was just bone and sinew hanging off its face."

"Snares are always particularly offensive as you know they have been set intentionally."

"It was so frightened, but we had to catch it so the vet could put it out of its misery."

The subject of Millie, the muntjac deer, brings tears to Angela's eyes.

"Millie came to us as an abandoned youngster. I raised her and then released her back into the wild."

"One morning two years later, someone found a deer hit by a car about eight miles away."

"When I went to pick her up, she just sat there and looked at me. I knew straight away it was Millie. I put her in the car, wrapped her up and brought her home to die. There was nothing I could do for her."

"Looking back, she was a success story in a way, because she had two years in the wild."

"Everything comes in to the hospital wild and it goes out wild. Otherwise, it's not fair. We don't keep anything."

But she's run out of time to talk. It's feeding time – and Angela knows better than anyone that wildlife doesn't stand on ceremony.

**"She also does all the fund-raising to get food in. She sold almost everything in her house once when she was running out of funds."**

Helen Soame, talking about Angela Downham

Helen said: "She had a badger in once that had been hit by a car. It was in a coma for three weeks. For the whole time, Angela turned it every two to three hours until it came round."

"She also does all the fund-raising to get food in. She sold almost everything in her house once when she was running out of funds."

Not all the stories have happy

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Each one-word answer has 9 letters divided into 3 segments, randomly placed. As you solve each clue cross off the 3 segments which form that answer and when all 11 clues are solved you will be left with only 3 segments. Combine them to form the final answer.

1. Sending abroad for sale
2. Queen who died of snakebite
3. Cargo ship
4. U.S. home of country music
5. Famous or important person
6. Self-assured
7. Venetian boatman
8. Global
9. Holiday after the wedding
10. Remove smells from
11. Meat eater

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TER	ITY	NIV	FID	IGH	ING
ORE	OON	DOL	CEL	TRA	WOR
HVI	FRE	EYM	DEO	EXO	GON
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IER	CON	LLE	CAR	ZED	ISE

Final answer.....

The winner for April 8, 2003: Mrs O Orton, Broughton Astley  
The answer was: BILLABONG

Send the word you are left with together with your name, address and telephone number by Friday to: Curve Competition Desk, Promotions Department, Leicester Mercury, St George Street, Leicester, LE1 9FQ. Or e-mail: curve@leicestermercury.co.uk