

5th ANNUAL LORD WHISKY ANIMAL SANCTUARY INTERNATIONAL POETRY COMPETITION RESULTS

PRIZE-WINNERS

1st **SLOTH by Tina Cole**

Joint 2nd HOW TO SAVE THE PANGOLIN by Jane Bonnyman

Joint 2nd AN EX-BATTERY HEN REFLECTS ON HER NEW LIFE by A Cooper

HIGHLY COMMENDED (in no special order)

BASILICA DI SAN CLEMENTE AL LATERANO, ROME by Barry Tempest

THE CRAYONING by Barry Tempest

WOMAN WITH A MONSOON JACKET by Helen Kay

DEAD-HEADING HYDRANGEAS by Adele Cordner

TINO DOG by Anita John

AQUARIUM by Mary Gilonne

THE ART OF KNITTING by Tina Cole

COMMENDED (in no special order)

THE LAST BULRUSH by Sarah Tait

THURSDAY 9.52 AM by Sarah Tait

CONCERNING THE PRINCIPLE UNDERWRITING SEVERAL QUESTIONS LEFT AT

THE NATURE TABLE by Roger Elkin

WALRUS by Emma Purshouse

KEEPING MY HEAD by Anne Ballard

BIRDSONG by Terence Jones

SOFT by Marilyn Timms

ABOUT 18 WEEKS by Lucy Crispin

THE TWO MERCIES by Lucy Crispin

In addition, these poems were on our longlist – and there were many other excellent poems that deserve mention if only there were space

IN STEP WITH THE FAMILY by PHILIP BURTON

MY LIFE IS A FICTION OF SOMEONE ELSE'S IMAGINATION by SUE BAKER

THE WHOOPING CRANE by JANE BONNYMAN

ROUGH EDGES by JOHN DARLING

A GOOD DAY by MICHAEL SWAN

AND ANOTHER THING by A C CLARKE

LONG FURLONG by D W EVANS

LEONARDSLEE by D W EVANS

MARTHASTERIAS by MARK TOTTERDELL

TO MR WW ON THE OCCASION OF HIM SITTING DOWN TO WRITE A SONNET by ANNE BALLARD

AS SARUS CRANES RETURN by GLEN WILSON

SCARECROW AT DUSK by GLEN WILSON

A LATE SAFARI OUTING by AUDREY ARDERN-JONES

SHE CAN'T MAKE HER MIND UP by AUDREY ARDERN JONES

REPORT

Thank you to everyone who entered this year's Lord Whisky Poetry Competition and helped to fund the work of the Sanctuary. The quality of the poems was extremely high, and we would both say that there was almost no entry that did not deserve a listing. We had to make some very hard decisions during the judging process. If your poem's title is not listed, it is not because we did not enjoy and admire it.

In fact, the breadth and depth of the entries gave us a rewarding experience not only as judges but simply as readers. The poems were all anonymised before we saw them and read by each of us before we discussed them at each stage of deciding on longlist, shortlist, and winners – there were no heated disagreements but naturally we did not always concur – this is a reminder that different judges will come to different conclusions.

Although there was an open theme, a great number of the poems related to animals or to the natural world generally – it is indicative of this that all three prize-winning poems relate to animals – a sloth, pangolins, and an ex-battery hen. However, there was a wide range of topics overall. Below, we have written a little about the qualities of the prize-winning, highly commended and commended poems.

The writer of each individual poem's report is followed by our initials (MASS or DS) but you shouldn't assume that the poem wasn't admired by both of us!

Thank you again for your support and for sharing your work.

Derek Sellen and Mary Anne Smith Sellen, judges.

Sloth. I was drawn into this poem immediately by the beautiful phrasing and cadences of the opening lines. The whole poem revolves around the idea of the creature whose body's 'soft pendulum ... wraps to mine', a mysterious companion who is so powerfully imagined that the reader hardly questions her reality. The 'I' of the poem lives in a parallel dimension, it seems, where the sloth's forest habitat stands in for the dangers and pleasures of the actual 'wider world'. The writer communicates these outside forces, some to be feared, through the imagined presence of 'hunters and their half-buried dead' and 'the ghosts of tree people'. This is a fine, magical poem. (DS)

I really liked how the leisurely pace of this poem and the imagery it uses, evoke the slow, considered, movements of the Sloth, and also how it distances these beautiful creatures from the vice that bears the same name. The writer describes how – '*As one we fear the wider world*' but admires how the Sloth – '*...has skills in navigation, there is no need for hurry*'. A lesson in looking to the natural world for ways to cope in our own increasingly unnatural lives. (MASS)

How to save the pangolin. Poems in the voice of an animal are hard to pull off without over-humanising the creature but the angry imperatives of this work give it such a powerful force that I am ready to accept the conceit. You might argue with the use of the similes – the pangolins wouldn't see themselves as dinosaurs or pinecones. However, in the end this is a poem written on behalf of the pangolins by a concerned human being and we read it as such. The urgent rhythm is set from the beginning, modulated by enjambment. There is some telling imagery – 'refit them ... like mosaic tiles, tyre treads', 'let our noses breathe in leaf scent' and 'fixed in a bid for sky.' The brusque final line seals a hard-hitting, significant poem. (DS)

An ex-battery hen reflects on her new life. The title of this poem immediately reminds us how all living creatures have feelings. It describes beautifully the almost breathless wonder of experiencing freedom for the first time, after captivity – '*I keep watching the way the light goes – the sky is so many skies*' The hen's awareness of both her own and her sister hens' improving appearance is really touching, as is her reliving the moment when she realised they were not being taken to a place of death, but instead to a place where they could now live normal, natural lives. The parallels with current news stories about human modern slavery cannot be ignored. (MASS)

Basilica di San Clemente al Laterano, Rome. This is a highly accomplished poem with a deceptively casual tone. Deliberate repetitions of the name of Rome – 'Rome where old is normal ... skin of old Rome ... fourth century Rome ... the bedrock of Rome' take us further and further back into the history of Rome, just as the I of the poem goes physically down into the depths of the basilica. A pattern of stresses is set from the beginning, establishing an unshowy but varied rhythm as the knowledgeable voice carries us through to the climax. Resonant phrases stand out – 'a world in the margin, untransliterated', 'continents merging at the shadowed altar'. I admired this poem from the first time I read it. (DS)

The Crayoning. This well-crafted poem describes an incident in childhood that has repercussions for many years afterwards. Straightaway the questions in the first stanza draw us in, showing us that it is the memory of having created the drawing that remains, rather than the detail of it, and therefore making the loss of it so much more painful. This is emphasised by the

skilful line breaks in the second stanza – *‘and mother was so proud she lent it / to grandma who, having enjoyed it / threw it away before we next went visiting’* A poem that will remain with the reader. (MASS)

The Woman with a Monsoon Jacket. The title leads us into this story of an all-too-brief friendship formed through shared passions – particularly for rescue hens. This thread runs all the way through this beautifully paced poem, which evokes the sense of how things become more precious when the time to enjoy them is limited – *‘applauded my hen pantoum’*. *‘She too had rescue chickens’*. *‘After the funeral I fostered her hens. Rescue birds don’t live long’* The final stanza movingly describes the sense of loss for what could have been – *‘I cried for unhatched things’*. (MASS)

Dead-Heading Hydrangeas. There is a sinister feel to this poem from the start – *‘A smiling crocodile is printed / on the blade of my shears. / Their work is efficient’*. The clever use of short stanzas, and the spare and clinical description of pruning the flowers, suit the theme perfectly. The mood carries on through the writer’s son playing Call of Duty – *‘I wince. / My boy rolls his eyes. / It’s just a game, he says’*. It ends with the arrival of a sobering news report, followed by the symbolic return of the hydrangea heads. (MASS)

Tino Dog. This delightful canine character sketch, and one which any dog owner will find all too relatable, is also a very accomplished poem. I like the way each stanza begins with a description of Tino, which the writer then qualifies with some lovely descriptions – *‘..delighted with a perfume that gags the throat’*. *‘She throws herself willingly into the sumptuousness of a green grass field’*. *‘..sliding like a snake, back legs stretched long and sleek behind her’*. The last stanza neatly sums up all the descriptions of Tino, whose demands for a walk bring the poem quite literally to an end. (MASS)

Aquarium. This is a villanelle, that most difficult form, written in the voice of someone finding comfort, perhaps a false and inadequate comfort, in the company of fish in an aquarium. *‘I hear their every name / in shoals of missing voices ...’*. The properties of a villanelle – repeated rhyme words, a consistent metre, regular three-line stanzas – bind the poem together formally. In addition, every stanza but one contains the name of a different type of fish, Guppies, Platies, Tetra, etc., another element of the poem’s patterning. The aquarium itself acts as a correlative for the contained life of mourning. This is both a formally accomplished and a moving piece, with more felicitous phrasing than I have space to quote. (DS)

The art of knitting. It takes real skill to write about family members without lapsing into sentiment, and the writer of this poem has certainly demonstrated this here. A very relatable poem for those of us who grew up during the time when most people wore home-knits, and grandmothers were the wise matriarchs, always ready with a cautionary tale. The no-nonsense tone reflects this perfectly. The grown-up grandchild can now observe how knitting benefitted her grandmother too – *‘Knitting kept her old heart warm / wrapped in rabbit wool she knew the art of casting off the pull of memories’*. The second stanza neatly references the story of Little Red Riding Hood as a metaphor for worldly advice to the unworldly grandchild. (MASS)

The Last Bulrush. It is difficult for a judge when a poem relates to a familiar local, well-loved landscape. I had to discount any unearned prejudice in favour of this poem about East Kent’s river Stour but in fact, The Last Bulrush claims its place among the commended on its intrinsic merit – the use of broken lines and white space, the word music, the expertly achieved balance of phrase weighed against phrase, the informed description of the changing nature of the river. I love a phrase such as *‘the reedy times’*, one among many. The final line both echoes the call of the oystercatcher and celebrates the arrival of the river at the – *‘sea sea sea’*. (DS)

Thursday 9.52am. From the first, I loved the look of this poem on the page with its generous deployment of white space. This is an integral part of the poem, to lead us in slow motion through the flipping of a coin at a particular random moment. As the words twist down the page, they mime the progress of the coin, from the *‘milli-micro-nano-pause’* at the top of the toss to its *‘flip / and / spin/ through time/ to ground’*. From the *‘all-defining instant of its flip/ and / spin’* to *‘all the twists / of all the worlds/ of choice’* the poet lends significance to the otherwise trivial act of tossing a coin. A marvellous tribute to the power of the random. (DS)

Concerning the principle underwriting several questions left at the Nature Table. The poem expresses wonder at the *‘sheer perfection’* of beautifully evoked objects on the nature table in a young children’s school. These include such marvels as *‘last year’s wren’s nest’*, *‘the integrity of a sparrow’s egg’*, *‘those catkins, jiggling in citrine and ginger’*, *‘that wonder / of brushed fur of pussy willows’*. The poet suggests that this sense of wonder is lost in *“big school”* where *‘science and its rules’* demand cool detachment. The group chanting of a formulaic *‘rule’* illustrates the *‘demise of childhood’*, reminding the reader of Keats’s suspicion of those who analyse the rainbow. *‘Rule’* and *‘question’* are key to the poem. Although children are taught scientific rules, *‘what school has the rules ...’* to create that woven nest or the *‘clarity of purpose’* of the egg? (DS)

Walrus. There were several deliciously quirky poems among the entries and this is perhaps the quirkiest, a seduction song by a walrus, 'your tusky bearded biker of the ocean'. The klaxon call of the marine lothario is expressed in the rasping sound and the word choice of the language of the poem: 'gargled arias', 'pazazu-pinnipedia', 'the cold Chuckchi Sea'. Despite the fanciful imagery, the reader feels that this is written by someone with a knowledge of walrus behaviours. It is so well imagined and expressed, in seven precise couplets, that I need little convincing that the actual Chuckchi Sea echoes with 'your mother sucks clams from their shells ...satan songs'. (DS)

Keeping my head. It isn't easy to put a completely fresh slant on a well-known historical story, but the writer of this poem has achieved this very successfully. The conversational style and gentle humour bring out the character of the narrator, and also seamlessly relates her back story - 'After all, / if he found me repulsive that was nothing to what I felt for him' and 'when my other women returned to Cleves, Grete remained with me'. The poem ends with a rather intriguing ambiguity in both the final stanza and closing couplet. (MASS)

Birdsong. The poem originates in the experience of hearing two cuckoos, 'one caller loud and echoing ... a second fainter', at the appropriately named 'Cuckoos' Brow'. The location is named on the OS map in 'black notation' and the poem itself is a verbal notation of the cuckoo calls - 'a steady measured line / of identical double notes'. The language excels in describing the joint song in a phrase such as 'a cool paired pulse /of alabaster minimalism', brilliantly meeting the challenge presented by any description of music in words. There is no extravagant drama, simply a carefully-paced, precisely phrased poem that takes the reader into the heart of the experience 'the thing itself, that had been awaiting / the late arrival of the audience'. (DS)

Soft. This is a hard-hitting, impassioned poem in the voice of a documentary-maker, secretly filming the brutal killing of animals in an area of the 'east' in order to feed the fashion and accessory industry of the 'west'. The people who do this work live in poverty and near famine - 'Blackened bean stems / scar patchwork fields / skeletal pigs haunt frozen yards'. I won't quote the distressing details of the core of the poem but the eventual end-products of the indifference and cruelty of the process include such frippery as 'a bejewelled pen ... slippers ... ear warmers.' (DS)

about 18 weeks. The return every summer of the swifts is often a source of inspiration for writers. In this very moving poem, we see them observed through a state of heightened awareness - 'I'd never noticed them before this year / but last evening watched, enraptured', and then encapsulated in the middle stanza - 'I must go straight in and write...the brief poem which would say everything about everything'. The change of circumstance, and mood, that follows this in the final stanza, is deftly and sensitively handled - a textbook demonstration of 'show, don't tell'. (MASS)

the two mercies. This is a deeply felt, emotionally authentic account of a process of mourning after the death of someone close. The language of the poem meets the challenge, describing the stages of mourning as two mercies; the first mercy is a 'strange unassailability' after the person left to deal with tasks such as 'stripping the bed, finding the will' (notice how 'finding the will' has a double interpretation) becomes 'a quintessence of pulse'. The second mercy arrives after 'residual days, stubbing toes/ on memories' when the mourner is saved 'by the pain itself'. The poem mimics the fluid variations of grief, with use of enjambment and flowing rhythm. (DS)

RESULT OF THE COMPETITION for entries by LORD WHISKY FRIENDS

We sadly had very few entries in this category but the winning poem fully deserves its prize:

The Friends Award: She can't Make her Mind up by Audrey Ardern Jones. This is a fascinating poem which captures the confusion and anxiety of, as I presume, an elderly person who has retreated into a childlike state. The title not only describes her problem but also focuses our attention on 'mind'. The gaps between phrases in the poem's layout captures both the patient's lack of cohesive thought and the carer's distress. The rhythm and the enjambed line breaks add to the effect. The poem is very moving, especially the lines which tell us that, in her imagination, 'an angel / came to her at midnight and kissed her cheek'. However, the poet does not shy away from describing the woman's difficult behaviour, her constant repeating of the refrain: *I don't like my mother, I like my father*. We might think of a Freudian interpretation at this point but the poet refrains from making any analysis, leaving the readers free to react as they wish. This is a realistic and affecting portrait of a carer-patient relationship. (DS)

RESULT OF THE COMPETITION FOR ENTRIES IN THE RESCUE CATEGORY.

JUDGED BY SANCTUARY FOUNDER, MARGARET TODD MBE

Thank you for much for entering your lovely poems where the connection between you and the animals was heart-warming. It has been very difficult to choose, but the winner of the Rescue category is Why would you want a rescue dog by Tanya Stubbs. Rescue dogs become in need of a home for a variety of reasons, some through bereavement, who take time to grieve for their owner, others because people's circumstances change and then there are the ones who have been badly treated and all signs of emotion have gone. My own dog Jodie was one of those and it took two years before she even barked, but what a reward it is when a rescue dog wags its tail for the first time. The journey you have made together has been so worthwhile. My second choice is My Tibbles, by Rose Beer, abandoned but found his soul mate, sharing every moment, giving love and comfort to each other until he went to a second heaven. How lovely they found each other. My third choice is Blissful Chaos, by Emma Waterson. What a wonderful relationship, sharing a great love and companionship, exploring new things together and trusting each other. This reminds me of my old dog Maisie who, when she recovered from losing her owner, gave her heart to me.

Shortlisted (in no particular order)

The following poems all pull at the heart strings and have been a joy to read. I would like to thank everyone for their work and for supporting The Lord Whisky Sanctuary Fund (Registered Charity 283483).

Bubba by June Fox
Room for One More? By Donald Adamson
My Rescue Dog by Matthew Sumner
To Cat, In Memoriam by Donald Adamson
Until we meet again by Dannielle Green
Saving Birds by Elizabeth Smith
His tail thanks you by Alexandra Paterson
Lost by Charlotte Oliver
Queenie, Enriched Battery Chicken No 81 by Anita John
House Call by Virginia Griem

PRIZE WINNING POEMS

Sloth by Tina Cole

Recently, I have adopted
a three-toed sloth, she has affixed
herself to my heart with such great

skill at holding on. Sometimes
the soft pendulum of her body wraps
to mine. As one we fear the wider world,

the rain forest floor alive with hunters
and their half buried dead, the ghosts
of tree people with thoughts restless

as motherless birds. Yet she has skills
in navigation, there is no need for hurry.
She picks our way forward with the grace

of a Balinese dancer, the precision
of each step filled with sure-footed wisdom,
that trio of toenails, like grey-brown

moon cusps inching us on. When
danger quietens itself into morning
her face is still filled with the sad

curiosity of a child.

How to save the pangolin by Jane Bonnyman

Untie your brogues, unfasten each belt and return to the store,
the warehouse, rewind to the factory, unpolish, unstitch,

empty the powder from the jars that line the room
of some quack, pour it onto the cool stone and un-grind,

reverse the turn of the pestle, then tip the scales back into sacks,
pile them onto lorries and retrace the route to the bloodbath;

refit them one by one like mosaic tiles, tyre treads, into
suits of leather armour and press them onto pink skins

and perform the trick to make us live again, so that our tiny
eyes catch the sun and our tails curl like olive wreaths.

Herd us into metal cages, and re-navigate rainforests, savannahs
and set us down on the scrub; let our noses breathe in leaf scent;

unlatch the doors and swing them wide, being sure to unhook
our long claws from the bars, fixed there in a bid for sky;

watch us as we stumble out like wombles in reptile coats,
tottering like miniature dinosaurs on our hind legs;

let us rediscover the tree-hollows, nooks, the digging spots
you stole us from, let an army of ants stick to our tongues;

repeat this a million times and more, until all of us are home,
shuffling across the red sand like overgrown pinecones.

Now leave us alone.

An ex-battery hen reflects on her new life by A Cooper

We run – run out to see , all of us –
legs getting strong – find the leaves
they put out – so much space
all eating no fighting.

Then they open the other door – big grass
to claw and dig-
Clouds flying white – grey – purple
- I keep watching the way the light goes - the sky
is so many skies

and look at their feathers – look at *mine*
all grown again – no sore skin now – preening
and flapping – flapping and preening
- even our beaks have grown back
Pecking all day in the lovely air.

Death I thought – in that moving thing
but it stopped – they lifted us out – her then her
then her then me – into the sleep house.

settled us on the perches
- we'd never perched before.

She can't Make her Mind up by Audrey Ardern Jones

I tell her it doesn't matter what one she chooses
the apricot orange purse or the black and yellow
fifties clutch bag with a chain shoulder strap
her favourite is a basket made of shells spelling out
her name Nancy the trick is to know what to say
when she repeats again and again *help me help me*
I don't like my mother I like my father - she sits curled
in a high backed chair tapping fingers on the arms
most days her bed remains unmade she tells me
she'd like a hundred hands to hold her and an angel
came to her at midnight and kissed her cheek I show
photos on my phone old neighbours in the garden
Nigel cooking sausages on his barbeque she laughs
clipping and reclipping the large gold clasp on a red
plastic handbag I promise her I'll be back soon
please don't leave me don't leave me I don't like my mother
I like my father her voice echoes through the corridors
windows emptying other lives rain outside

Why would you want a rescue dog? by Tanya Stubbs

Why would you want a rescue dog,
When you can have a spritely pup?
A dog full of life and laughter,
Where the only real way is up...

Why would you want a rescue dog,
You don't know of their past.
You don't know what they've been through,
Or how long they will last...

Rescue dogs are difficult,
Rescue dogs are hard.
Rescue dogs will chew up everything,
Both in your home and yard...

These questions we get asked a lot,
They are always on repeat.
To those with bad assumptions,
Your myths I will defeat...

I choose to rescue for the dog,
I don't rescue for me.
I open up my heart and home,
To the souls you do not see.

Believe me when I say it's tough,
But they're worth every minute spent.
Teaching them to trust again,
To learn to love your scent.

The dogs come with a history,
Of horror and of pain.
I choose to adopt rescue dogs,
So they can learn to love again.

The battle can be difficult,
But believe this to be true.
When you choose a rescue dog,
They might just rescue you!

My Tibbles by Rose Beer

Tibbles was a rescue cat,
One eyed, bold and thin,
I truly loved him dearly,
From the day I took him in.

He was such a caring cat,
And seemed to want to please,
He'd listen to me for hours,
As he nestled on my knees.

I'd tell old Tibbs my troubles
And he'd look me in the eye,
If ever a cat could talk,
I'm sure he'd say, "don't cry".

He truly was a lovely soul.
We had a language of our own,
He'd come and snuggle up close to me
When he knew I felt alone.

Tibbles went to heaven,
It clearly broke my heart
I didn't want the day to come,
When we had to part.
So Tibbles is now in heaven,
He's way above the sky,
But is that a star that's twinkling, or Tibbles caring eye.

Blissful chaos by Emma Waterson

You came,
Slowly at first; then all at once,
Learning to love, as if you never had
before,
With each gesture, you began to trust,

I found that I was never alone after that.
Messages of joy were conversed between
me and her,
Neither fully understanding the other, both
chatting nevertheless,

Inseparable,
I found myself more and more often guided
by you,
Showing you the world as if it was new,
Which it was for you.

We often found each other in the sun,
Basking like cold-blooded creatures
That need sunlight to survive,
And you'd fall asleep, curled up,
Trusting me to keep you safe.

Paw prints on my heart, more permanent
than a tattoo.