



Steve runs the charity.

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The diary of an *unsung hero*

Steve Marshall is co-founder and treasurer of Caring for Cats Yorkshire & Humber, winner of the Best Cat Rescue Centre category at the national Wetnose Animal Rescue Awards 2012.

First things first

Working full-time as a shift manager sometimes means only getting a few hours of sleep before starting another day running the charity. My second job as co-founder and treasurer of our non-profit cat rescue is unpaid and 24/7. First I see to our own cats, which currently number 18 behaviourally challenged but equally loved domestic shorthairs and pedigree breeds, then I head off to the homing centre with two charity cats ready for adoption.

Rewards of the role

I greet the volunteer homer on duty that day, and introduce the newbies to the cattery. One is a 14-year-old black and white male that had been handed in when his elderly owner died. Sadly, this is not an uncommon story. Charlie is a timid but affectionate old boy and I'm hoping he won't be overlooked because of his age. The other is a beautiful, glossy black female, about a year old, trapped as a feral only three

months earlier and now as friendly and loving as you could want any pet to be. Seeing cats like these go on to be happily adopted by responsible families is the real reward of the job.

Emergency dash

While I'm still at the homing centre, a van driver arrives carrying a large courier bag. Inside is a matted and emaciated adult cat, crying pathetically. The driver tells me how he stopped in a lay-by for a break and heard a cat calling from behind a farm gate. He went to investigate and on seeing its pitiful state, drove it straight to us. The poor thing looks nearly starved to death, has an infected eye and needs immediate veterinary care. This sudden emergency takes me off to our supporting vets a short drive away. The cat is identified as an older female Ragdoll, but has no microchip. She is very weak and is admitted to intensive care for rehydration and medical treatment. We name her Twiggy.

Saving 16 lives

I set off back to the homing centre, planning to catch-up on accounts and VAT paperwork, but soon receive a call from my partner who co-ordinates all of our cat welfare matters. A local vet has rung her asking for the charity's help. Sixteen black and white cats were found at the home of an elderly person who unfortunately had to be taken into care. As there was no one else to care for the terrified animals, they had been sent to the vet to be destroyed.

All the cats are beautiful, healthy animals, aged around one to two years, and although timid will make lovely pets. It is precisely for cases like this, where no one else will help, that the charity was set up. I call the vet and come to an arrangement over accommodation, as it will take us a couple of days to make room for them all. But every cat matters and I know that however long it takes, we will ultimately find a loving home for each and every one of them.

Twiggy needs your support

Caring for Cats is currently looking after Twiggy (the Ragdoll mentioned above) who weighed less than 2kg when she was rescued. Co-founder Rose Atkin told us: "Either lost or abandoned, she had lost nearly two-thirds of her body weight over several weeks living rough.

"Despite this Twiggy was still so affectionate and craved love and attention, which our dedicated volunteers lavished on her. But we noticed she was slow to improve and a further vet check revealed a problem with Twiggy's heart. Thankfully, it can be managed with daily medication. Caring for Cats has pledged to provide this for the rest of her life."

Twiggy's chronic heart condition means she joins

the charity's long list of sponsored cats — animals that are either too sick, elderly or traumatized to otherwise find permanent homes, but who nevertheless deserve the chance of a better life.

Caring for Cats desperately needs help funding these animals. To see a video of Twiggy and to find out how you can help her and other cats like her, visit www.caring4cats.org or call 01430 872612. Every penny of your donation will go towards the cost of the cats' medication and care. ■



Steve with Twiggy.



Twiggy cannot be homed due to a heart condition.