



# **Annual Branch Report 2020 - From the Devon & Cornwall Inspectorate Group**

Thank you for taking the time to read this report. I won't need to elaborate too much to explain that 2020 was a difficult year for us all.

Firstly I should say that as I write this report in early 2021 it is with great relief that my team and their families' health have not been adversely affected by the global pandemic. I hope that you and your families are all still safe and well.

2020 was always going to be the beginning of change as we took on the new and ever evolving Wilberforce software that manages the daily workflow of complaints, collections and rescues that are scheduled to the officers. As the pandemic hit the system held up well and we altered our way of working to prioritise the most serious work and continued to support the public and animals whilst minimising the risk to our officers.

During the year we continued to investigate complaints and help rescue animals across the group area, managing to deal with 3104 incidents and reporting 16 cases to our prosecution team at Headquarters.

We congratulated Abi Kemp and Ellie Burt as both announced they had become pregnant. I am pleased to say that both Ellie and Abi have now delivered healthy baby girls, please welcome Wren and Cora to the team.

During 2020 we also had to face the realisation that the RSPCA was struggling financially. A restructure began that meant the loss of a number of front line officers with the North of England bearing the biggest brunt of job losses. It was a worrying and sad time for the whole team and wider organisation. The Animal Collection Service (ACO's) was disestablished and the Animal Welfare Officer (AWO's) role was renamed and up-skilled to take on more serious complaint work. This created the new Animal Rescue Officer (ARO) role and I'm pleased to say that all three of our ACO's were able to successfully transfer over to ARO's and are at varying stages of their training.

ARO's will now work alongside the Inspectors and investigate all levels of complaint work as well as continue to help rescue and collect animals at risk. The role allows for greater flexibility for seasonal work and allows for greater efficiency. This new work dynamic will also allow the Inspectors to focus more on their evidence gathering and case work.



The reorganisation meant that Chief Inspectors took administrative responsibility for new group boundaries (SSW2 border expanded and became the whole of Devon & Cornwall). Inspectors and ARO's started working without boundaries allowing the computer system (Wilberforce) to decide the best officer to attend incidents in the most efficient time. The system is far from perfect and mistakes have been made but we are working with the NCC to get the best from each other.

In North Devon El Bunny still continues her valuable work for the Branch and has provided support to the Inspectorate team by helping with collections, rescues and welfare assistance. Our Wildlife Casualty Volunteers have also been of great help, but they also had to ensure that they and their families were shielded and so we had a much reduced service during 2020 as a result. We are incredibly grateful for their continued support.

We also recognise the amazing work of the Branches. During 2020 we could see the financial strains you were under and the difficulties maintaining contact with the public who support your valuable work. It is credit to you that you kept the centre doors open (albeit in the car park to keep Covid safe) helping the public and the field officers bring in these distressed animals and providing a safe place for them to rest. Our relationship is symbiotic and we must maintain this so we can support each other for all animals.

As always we are also supported by other agencies which is also much appreciated. The Police, Fire Service, Coastguard & RNLI are vital to our work, especially as we have limited resources. Veterinary Practices from all across Devon & Cornwall help provide much needed justice to the neglected and poorly treated animals. Gables Farm, Woodside Animals Centre, Animals in Distress, North Devon Animal Ambulance, British Divers Marine Rescue and numerous more. We are most grateful to them all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Abbott'.

**Richard Abbott**  
**RSPCA Chief Inspector 378 - SSW2 (Devon & Cornwall)**