

POETRY COMPETITION 2020 JUDGES REPORT

Judging this competition was a joy. The love for animals and nature that came through in almost everyone was remarkable. Yes, there were pets – so many cats and dogs, each with their own personality – but there were also pigeons and starlings, oak trees and dandelions, tigers and parakeets. Even a ratite!

Some images have stuck in my memory and may be there for some time: a tortoise foot reaching out for stability in a changing world, an orangutan saved from a life of smoking cigarette butts while onlookers took pictures, a falcon holding an entire coastline on the hook of its beak. Wonderful vibrant and pin-sharp observations. But there were also many poignant, more personal stories that equally will remain with me: the dog that was buried with its collar and bowl, the horse that galloped the waves to rescue its rider, the cat that was thrown from a car because she was pregnant. That last one had a happy ending, thankfully!

This is a wonderful cause to support and I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to read and judge all the poems. So many made the longlist and it was terribly difficult to choose between them. Please do not be disheartened if your name is not listed amongst the winners. The standard was incredibly high!

Jane Lovell

Main Prize

- 1st Tortoise by Lucy Dixcart
- 2nd Smoking Is Not Normal Behaviour For Orangutans by Victoria Gatehouse
- 3rd Kestrel Over Lynmouth by Martin Penn

Highly Commended

The Common Gull by Chadleigh White
Gallop by Estelle Price
Fox Skull by Scarlett Ward

Commended/Shortlisted

Thoughts on a Field by Philippa Hatton-Lepine
Remembrance by Mark Totterdell
The Possible Deaths of a Pigeon by Barry Fentiman Hall
Ratite by Eveline Pye
What I Buried by Tina Cole
When You Vanish by A F Patterson
Gilbert's Garden by Kathy Finney

Previously Unpublished Section

Winner – The Visitation by Lucinda Moore

Shortlisted

Kite by Alex Smith
On Being Adopted by Ruby Tildsley
A Blankness of Swans by Charlotte Murray
Cara Mia by Lucy Heuschen

Rescue Section – judged by Margaret Todd MBE

Thank you to everyone who sent in their poems. They were a pleasure to read, but difficult to choose between. A lot of thought had been put into all of them and I would like to thank both Jane Lovell for judging, and Derek Sellen for organising, the competition.

The results of the Rescue Section are as follows:

1st Rescued Together by Lisa Davies

What a lovely poem that says so much about just how close we and animals can get, almost at times becoming one.

2nd No Pets Allowed by Jackie Fisher

This poem says so much about some landlords. Of course. It depends on the tenants but we come across such lovely people whose pets are part of their family and it is so sad when they have to part with them.

3rd Look for me by James Parker

Again, showing the devotion of animals and the love and devotion they give us.

Other, very special poems:

Lady of the House by Peter Stafford

How lovely to have an unexpected visitor who becomes part of the family, always there with laps to share.

Promise Me by Mary Jarrett

I am sure these poignant words are most true. I have seen so many animals look into the eyes of their owner when the time has come to an end to say 'don't be sad, just remember me, our love will never die'

Mimi by Geraldine Paine

A lovely poem of the dance of nature

The Warrior King by Sarah Henderson

A cat who has lived life to the full and now come home to roost and live his dreams.

An Animal Is For Life And Not Just For Christmas by Kelly Wood

This poem says so much about how our animals really care and seem to know when we are feeling low. Once an animal gives its love, it is forever.

Ellie, Lurcher x. Female, 2 years old. Available. By Vanessa Vaughan

I often feel how lucky we are to have known so many wonderful creatures and this poem says that despite the untidiness of the house and the fur, the writer was privileged to have known you for 16 years and would not have changed a thing.

Do Animals Have A Soul? By Iris Turner

Apart from a different language, people and animals have good thoughts and bad and I am sure they have a place in Heaven.

Eulogy for a Rescue Cat by A C Clarke

A cat whose owner knows him/her so well.

Leaps and Bounds by Ben Parr

A poem about a dog who at last found a home and is full of joy.

Black Diamond by Paige Wajda

The lovely thought that a horse much loved in its lifetime, but asking the foals to look after him in their sheltering eclipse.

Tortoise

He'll see us all out, my grandfather said. Since then, three generations of children have watched him heave his tessellated shell over the grass – neck elongated; good eye fixed on a dandelion. For decades, he thrived on bread and milk – *totally unnatural*, the website said. He's carb-free now. Solar powered, he rams garden furniture; bulldozes brambles; teeters on edges, clawing at the air with scaled legs. He had a companion in the seventies, but she didn't survive. In the eighties, he devoured a dropped trifle at a garden party. In 2009, he clamped his beak onto a toddler's fingertip, aiming for cucumber. Every spring we await the crackle of hay as he begins his ascent and emerges, unaltered, from his cardboard chrysalis. And year after year we greet him – his custodians, with our changing faces.

Lucy Dixcart

Smoking Is Not Normal Behaviour For Orangutans

says the director of Melaka zoo, as Shirley
a young adult, is put through rehabilitation,

her mobile hands, grown proficient
in gathering lit butts from concrete

now reclaiming the textures of banana
and bark, the pliant and the rough

tested against lips, rolled and considered
by teeth and tongue. Nothing here

to draw deep into the burn of her throat
and expel from nostrils in fummy rings

to blasts of laughter, an aiming of screens,
the tossing in of a new flicker

for her to pick up, all of which she's learnt
is normal behaviour for humans.

Victoria Gatehouse

Kestrel Over Lynmouth

Driving down the coast road off the moors we saw her
only a stone's throw out from the cliffs, hung to spear
the scarp that sheared away from her down to the bay.

Her wing tips flickered as she balanced on the winds,
beak a hook on which clouds, sea, rocks, the chain of cars
and town below were weighed. The breeze buffeting us

could not deflect a bone of the death in her skull
or turn her iron glare, but only ruffled her
as if she herself were a shudder of the air.

She had no time for us, the clanking animals
paying her obeisance from the edge of her realm,
enraptured by the stillness of her violence,
and as we rumbled on she dived.

Martin Penn

The Visitation

Unbidden, the giant puffballs appeared overnight on the quad lawn.
Grass Out of Bounds to Pupils?
-the puffballs paid no heed.
Not Us, they said.

They arrived, without reference to anyone:
perfect giant meringues
on an incongruous manicured baize.

Their disregard for their surroundings was apparent:
such red-brick pillared portals
were nothing to the ancient race of the Fungi.

For that morning, they stood
 Untouchable
beyond the reach of student boot-
for the quad lawn was *not* to be trespassed upon.

Their visitation a subversive autumnal delight
in that most serious of all terms, Michaelmas.

Defiant. Ludicrous. Delightful.
Giant puffballs: their ways are not our ways.

Lucinda Moore

Rescued together

My cat and I are bonded
by more than our shared home.
Her simple, graceful presence
ensures I'm not alone.

At rest we breathe in unison,
my side nuzzled by her head;
circling, then settling down,
she moulds my lap into her bed.

Occasionally touching noses,
my face caressed by a gentle paw;
however much I give her,
I find she gives me more.

While seemingly doing nothing
her effect on me is plain;
both physically and mentally
I have the most to gain.

The day I took her home,
I gave her a place to be;
but when she chose to stay,
it was she who rescued me.

Lisa Davies

NO PETS ALLOWED

Landlord, Landlord how can you say
I can live in your house, but my pet cannot stay?
Landlord, Landlord why don't you see
That my little cat means the world to me?

A dog in a flat is wrong I know
A dog needs a garden and somewhere to go
But a cat in a flat is okay, it's true
If the cat must stay in, if it has the cat flu

Landlord, Landlord I would, if I could, buy a house of my own
But instead I must pay money, rent to live in your home
Landlord, Landlord is it right that with all your houses to let
You want the people's money, but you don't want their pet?

And how about your old tenant, who lives on her own
Don't you know she'd love a pet, so she's not all alone?
So Landlord, dear Landlord, please have a heart
Please allow pets in your lets and give them a fresh start.

Jackie Fisher

Look for me (rescue you)

Look for me and I am always there, waiting and sacrificing,
behind you I hold up your shadow, add to your strength,
forever will I be the one to rely upon, to support your soul,
but never asking for anything in return, or expecting anything,

Look for me and I am always there, listening and believing,
following you I heal your woes, bring peace to your turmoil,
forever will I call you through this labyrinth, to be your light,
but never wanting anything in return, or taking anything,

Look for me and I am always there, loving and wanting,
next to you I take your reach, complete belief to your doubt,
forever will I hold you in my arms, to have your heart,
but never demanding anything in return, or faking anything.

James Parker