



THE CATWORK YEAR

2023

Front cover

Our cover stars this year are Elvis and Larry, our last two remaining FIV boys out of the many we have cared for over the years.

They live together in a reasonably sized enclosed garden area near the house. There is outdoor space and a large chalet where they sleep and get fed.

Their area also contains some mini chalets where they can get away from one another if they wish. Actually, Elvis and Larry get along well.

See their respective stories on page 9.



The Catwork Year 2023

2023 found us caring for much older special needs cats in the home rather than in the garden like in the past.

Having finally acknowledged our advancing years, we realised we can no longer take on FIV cats who tend to be quite young when diagnosed.

Unlike in the past when our sanctuary began, more and more FIV cats are being rehomed by rescues - at last the message seems to have been getting through that FIV is no big deal. There are, however, the stubborn few vets and rescues who still think FIV cats should be destroyed.

It was sad to see the Fivory garden return to nature, the garden that had been home to so many needy cats over the years. However, the assortment of older, special needs cats who came into our life still kept us busy, four out of twelve being hyperthyroid.

Nine cats were under the Catwork umbrella, and we took on three - Frankie, Freddie and Gerry - on our own account.

As 2023 progressed our adopted house cats from the previous autumn settled into their new life alongside little Oliver, the only survivor in the house of 2022.



Frankie

Freddie

Gerry

Oliver

The early months of the year were, as ever, taken up with writing the yearbook to tell everyone what had gone on and how their money was spent!

In January we had a visit from cat friends Jayne and Alan, involving an exchange of Christmas presents, seeing all the cats and much laughter.

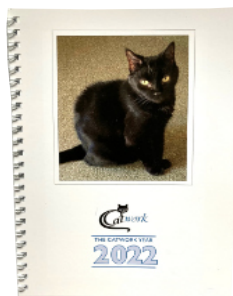


Frankie introduces himself to Jayne and Alan.

By the end of February, the 2022 yearbook was, luckily, finished and at the printers.

It was fortunate as I managed to fall and fracture my right wrist getting up in the dark one night.

The next few weeks were punctuated by trips to hospital for x-rays and my arm being in plaster rendered me pretty useless. Bob rose to the challenge, doing even more chores and learning some cookery skills. I could only supervise and get very frustrated! By Easter I was free of the plaster and gradually got back to doing more each day.



We heard the sad news that Stan Ducker had passed away. Stan and his wife Dot were loyal supporters for many years.

Both great cat lovers, they used to drive over in their open top sports car to visit us and the cats. We still keep in touch with Dot.

One morning in early March, we woke to find a covering of snow. Elvis and Larry, being the only cats living out in the sanctuary, kept their heads down in their cosy heated chalet, while the house cats looked out in some bemusement.



In the spring two more elderly cats came our way, separately, Tinker and Toby, in need of a retirement home - read their stories later.

A canal boat trip (my Mother's day treat) made a refreshing change from the everyday, as did my birthday outing in May to Watersmeet, a famous beauty spot in Devon (below), with both my children and two grandchildren. On a warm late spring day we enjoyed a cream tea amidst breathtaking scenery followed, later, by a scary (for me) ride up the cliff railway from Lynmouth to Lynton; and an equally scary descent - a memorable day!



Our Bristol friends, Sara and Lyn, paid their usual summer visit, which meant a pub lunch, much laughter and animal talk and treats for the cats.



In early summer I did a three week day course with my daughter Dora on poetry in translation. It was a fascinating course learning about just how many foreign poets have been translated into English.

In June we had a visit from Bob's daughter Dawn and family,



Dawn, Barbara, Becca, Pete and Megan.

Becca, Bob's 18 year old granddaughter, who is studying illustration at college, showed us a painting she had made of our Marmaduke (who died at the age of 19 in 2022). She has captured him remarkably well and clearly has an artistic future.



Imagine our pleasure when we received it as a Christmas present!

Later, in July, we had another visit from Jayne and Alan, this time with Dorinda as well, and again lots of laughter and treats for the cats.



Elvis and Larry get some attention and treats from Alan, Dorinda and Jayne.

Routine work with the cats kept us busy throughout the summer, made so much easier now that the vet outpost just across the road is open once more - routine treatments can be done there and medicines collected; we only need to go to the main hospital for procedures needing x-rays, such as dentals.



In September we had another visit from Sara and Lyn, this time with Annie. It was lovely to see them all and catch up on all the news.

The autumn was dominated by vet consults for little elderly Gerry, who developed a really bad ear infection which proved resistant to all the usual antibiotics. Sadly, we lost her even though the infection finally cleared up.

I enjoyed another poetry day - poems by Carol Ann Duffy on wives, factual and imagined, of famous people - a fascinating and enjoyable day and a welcome diversion from all the Christmas preparations now in full swing.

Lesley, another friend from Bristol, fitted in a visit before Christmas. It's always good to catch up with like-minded people who care about animals.



Lesley gives Frankie some treats and a fuss in his outside day area.

We met up with family members at various stages over the festive period to exchange presents and then, suddenly, Christmas was over and 2024 was upon us.

Here's what happened to our cats, old and new, during 2023:



Oliver

Little Oliver was the only survivor of our house cats in 2022. He was found by the postman at Christmastime in 2007 as a kitten in a country lane. There was only one house nearby where he was eating bread off the bird table we were told! Armed with a basket and a tin of tuna, I met the postman and we located the kitten who, eager for food, was easily caught.

A vet check-up gave him the all clear and he became the latest member of the Hunt feline family.

As time has gone on Oliver, now 16+, has acquired several health problems, with which he seems to have coped well. He is hyperthyroid, has a heart condition, kidney issues and, during 2023, added pancreatitis to the list!

Each month Oliver has a Solensia injection which is a drug to help with arthritis in older cats; and every few months he has a blood test to check his thyroid and kidney functions.



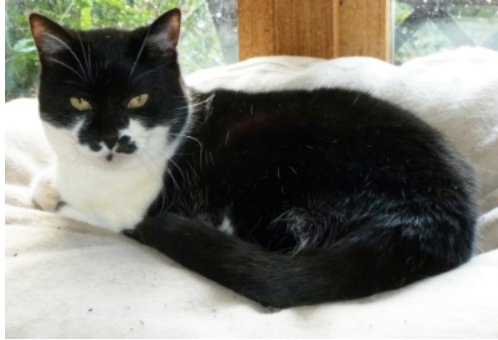
Tests included an abdomen scan, which left him with a bare midriff for a while.

Oliver is a sweet natured cat and has done so well to cope with his many health problems and put up with a new contingent of cats in the home.

The FIVs

Georgie

Lovely, nervous Georgie came to us all the way from Skegness, brought by Kath, one of our sponsors, when she came to visit. Georgie had lived on a caravan site and was fed by the site owner. Having tested positive for FIV we were contacted to see if we would take her.



Georgie, for a while, shared a chalet with another sweet, nervous FIV boy, Lenny, who sadly died young having contracted e-coli. Georgie, on the other hand, has so far enjoyed remarkably good health.

On the odd occasion when she's needed to see the vet, it's been a difficult job to catch her as she's so nervous. When visitors come she beats a hasty retreat through the cat flap.



Georgie shares the cat room in the extension with Toby, an even more nervous Tonkinese. They are usually cuddled up together in one basket.



Elvis

Elvis came to us in 2014 from a rescue in Wales which could not accommodate him at the time.

Elvis has enjoyed very good health so far. He has had the inevitable dental, but no serious health problems.

He seems to have mellowed with age. He now shares the section of the garden once used by our FeLVs with Larry. The boys spend most of the time in cold weather in the main chalet where the heat pads are - not daft are they?



Larry

Larry was booked in to be put to sleep as the rescue he was in considered he would very much not suit being an indoors only cat - still the only way that FIV cats are rehomed by most rescues.

Larry was brought down to us from Lincolnshire in 2021, his 'death sentence' having been changed to neuter, chip and vaccinate - Larry had a narrow escape!

He has been in good health since he came and has had the inevitable dental. Although appearing confident, Larry was very much not confident at the vets when having his dental; we had to fetch him home early as he was not happy!

The sanctuary seems to suit him well and he's actually quite affectionate.

The non-FIVs

Toby Tonk



Toby, a Tonkinese, belonged to a friend of ours. He had been acquired from a breeder and very definitely had not been socialised as a kitten. We call him our posh feral, who wants nothing to do with humans but likes other cats.

When Toby's owner, friend Phyllis, passed away in 2016 and her daughters were unable to take him on, we offered to have him in the sanctuary as it was clear that he couldn't be homed to a normal situation, being so scared.

Toby seems happy enough within the protection of the sanctuary, amongst his various feline friends. He currently shares the cat room in the extension with nervous Georgie. Their room leads on to an outside area but they are very much inside cats when it's cold.

Toby's main problems have been dental ones. In 2023 he needed another dental, a major one, according to the vet: "the mother of all dentals!"

We had to catch Toby the night before his operation as there's never any guarantee that we are going to be successful!

When the long procedure was completed, poor Toby was left with hardly any teeth. We had already been liquidising his food, so we continued after his op, but in fact he now eats



Toby and Georgie are good company for each other.

mainly biscuits, which he presumably can swallow without chewing!

Toby was extremely wary after his stay in the hospital.

On a good day Toby will allow me to lightly stroke him, but is out the cat flap like a rocket when anyone else goes into his room, poor little cat.

Toby seems happy enough with his friend Georgie.



Toby tries to look small after the dental experience.

Bubbles



We took on Bubbles as a 'boarder' in 2015 along with two other cats, Fidget and Marmite, having got to hear that their owner was being evicted. The boarding arrangement never really worked out and when, sadly, Marmite passed away and the owner was unable to pay the vet bill, we took on the two

other cats to ensure they were properly looked after, and paid the vet bill. Fidget, a sweet unassuming lady, sadly passed away in 2022. Bubbles moved into the cat room with Toby Tonk and Georgie for a while. Then, when we lost our dear little Gerry at the end of 2023, we brought her in to join the house cats.

Bubbles' main health issue is an allergy that she gets each year in early summer, which causes the skin around her neck and head to go bald and very red. We have never been able to find the source of the problem which does clear up eventually.

Bubbles loves being in the house and is desperate for a lap to sit on whenever the opportunity presents itself.

Our latest rescues

Frankie

We adopted Frankie from Ferne Animal Sanctuary, Chard, in September 2022. I was looking for needy, older cats who might have difficulty getting rehomed.

Frankie was an older boy, hyperthyroid and with a skin condition - he fitted the bill!

Having passed the strict homing protocol we went to meet Frankie, said we'd like to adopt him and went back the following week to collect him.



It turned out that Frankie's previous owners had been traced through his microchip, but they didn't want him back!

Frankie is a very confident cat and is always hungry; it's impossible to fill him up! Being a hyperthyroid stray wouldn't have helped!

Frankie is fed a hypoallergenic diet and has his thyroid levels regularly checked. He has grown into a good looking cat.

However, life with Frankie has not always been plain sailing. Once we allowed him out after many weeks inside, we quickly realised that our enclosed garden (or what we thought was an enclosed garden) was not big enough for Frankie. He was adept at getting over any reinforcements to the garden security and going off to investigate Nether Stowey.



Frankie is happy to 'help' in the office.

We even saw him climbing a 10 foot hedge to get out - like 'SpiderCat'. When we found he was frequenting one house in particular and upsetting the resident cat by his presence, we knew we had to come up with a plan to keep him contained.



Frankie loves to be outside...

We decided to make use of one of the fairly large, 'fully' enclosed garden areas with a chalet at either end, and that is where Frankie spends his days. Bob takes him out every morning after breakfast and brings him back to the house for supper each evening. This plan seems to have worked as Frankie seems eager every morning to hop into the carry basket to go outside for the day.



...which did lead him to having to find a difficult route back to the garden!

In the evenings Frankie is happy to spend his time in the house.

He is quite content to drape himself along the back of the settee and enjoy the comfort of the fire. Or if he gets bored, he will search through the toy box for his favourite catnip toy.

He has become quite affectionate and comes on the bed most mornings to greet us with kisses - what a character!



In the evening Frankie is happy to be an indoor cat and drape himself on the back of the settee...



...or find a convenient person to settle on.



Gerry

The next little cat we chose to come and spend her retirement with us was Gerry. Gerry was a tiny cat whose owner had died causing her to become a stray in Wales.

Gerry was sent to West Hatch, our local RSPCA centre, to stand a better chance of being rehomed. I really fell for this little soul - black, elderly and hyperthyroid - we had to give her a chance of happiness again.



We had to wait some time to get her as in the cattery she developed bad diarrhoea and her thyroid levels had to be stabilised. Finally, in October 2022, we went to fetch her home. The first few days were traumatic for us and for Gerry as we couldn't get her to eat, and certainly not tablet her. Off to the hospital we went where vet Sarah gave her a thorough check over and put her on a liquid hyperthyroid medication. Ever after, Gerry would have her twice-daily medicine dose in cat milk, once we discovered her liking for it.

She proved herself to be a strong-minded but affectionate little soul for whom the other cats had a healthy respect.

Gerry spent a cosy winter beside the log fire, often on Bob's chest giving him head bumps. In the summer she ventured out into the garden, but not often, and we noticed she seemed to be a bit arthritic, so she began having a monthly injection of Solensia to help the condition, just as Oliver does.

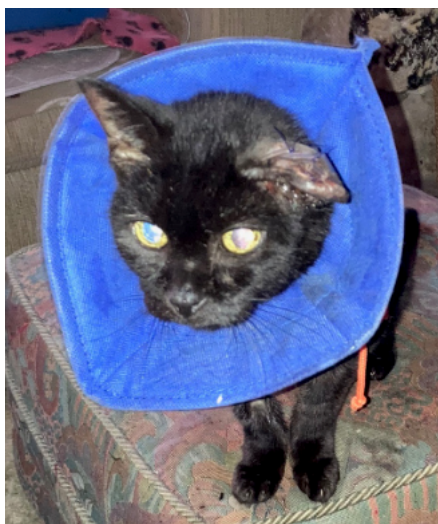
Come the autumn, little Gerry developed an ear infection which simply wouldn't clear up. All the usual antibiotics and ear cleaner were tried,



During the summer, Gerry enjoyed some time outside in the garden.

but to no avail. We were constantly having to take her to see a vet, either over the road or at the hospital. Vet Sarah finally decided we would have to send swabs off to the lab to find out what sort of infection we were dealing with. It turned out to be an unusual and hard to treat infection that only a heavy-duty antibiotic

would treat. Gerry's poor ear became very swollen with a haematoma, probably caused by the constant shaking of her head. We were treating her with ear lotions and the new antibiotic twice a day. The haematoma was drained a couple of times but still the ear flap refilled with blood, so eventually she ended up having to have surgery to sort out the haematoma. Gerry came home wearing a protective fabric bonnet which she coped with very well. Finally the stitches were taken out and the infection cleared and we breathed a sigh of relief.



Gerry, having had her ear sewn up, coped very well with the fabric bonnet.

Our relief was short-lived however, as Gerry started losing weight. Kidney problems were suspected, so tests were done showing this not to be the case. She was hospitalised and put on a drip for 24 hours which we hoped would do the trick. Very sadly, it did not. Little Gerry, up until now a good eater, just wouldn't eat anything at all.

We and the vets were baffled. Over the two months of her problems, she had been seen by almost all the different vets at the hospital, and they had all consulted together with their own expertise and knowledge, but little Gerry had defied them all.

As vet Sarah said, we'd exhausted all the possible treatments in the cupboard and nothing worked. The poor little cat seemed to have given up, yet she was still purring and being her usual affectionate self, but still refusing to eat. We felt defeated.

It was with great sadness that we took the decision with vet Sarah, who knew her best, to put her to sleep. Gerry slipped away very calmly, still purring.

This characterful little cat had been with us just over a year and we lost her on our 42nd wedding anniversary at the end of November.

We are so pleased that we were able to provide her with a retirement home where she was much loved. For one so small, she has left a big hole in our feline family.

Fred

I began following the website of the sanctuary from where we had adopted Frankie - fatal!

I saw the cutest looking ginger cat needing a home and it was love at first sight! He remained on the site for some time and we found out later that he had 'behavioural problems'. He had been rehomed but quickly returned because of these problems which were inappropriate toileting and hiding away! Poor little cat. Having come from a multi-cat household containing 35 other cats, no wonder he had problems!



The RSPCA had intervened and deployed the cats around various rescues in the area. Fred was the last one left and seemed 'stuck' in the sanctuary. No harm in going to meet him, we thought (I was really smitten!).

Far from hiding away scared, Fred came straight out of his room and sniffed our hands and we just knew we had to give him a chance.

Two litter trays containing earth and lots of toys were placed in Fred's room as well as cosy beds of course.



We went to pick him up a week later. Fred, upon arrival, went and hid under the bed, which was to be expected. However, he didn't remain there long and soon came out to give us fusses. I was over the moon! We didn't really experience any of his behavioural issues although, like so many nervous cats, he hides whenever he hears a strange voice, and the visits to the vet for vaccination and later a dental were somewhat traumatic, both for him and us!

For weeks after his dental, Fred would hide at breakfast time - the time we had to catch him up to go off to the hospital. That was in November; he has only just stopped hiding at that time of day as we write in January!

Fred is such a handsome, lovable little character who always greets you when he sees you and spends the evenings by my side on the settee, only taking notice of the tele when wildlife is on.

Fred is a bit younger than we meant to take on (probably middle aged) but he's certainly special needs, and I believe we were meant for each other!



Fred particularly likes wildlife programmes on the TV.

He also takes a keen interest in 'special events' on the news - wasn't sure about those hats though!

Ah, that's better, more wildlife; Frankie was also interested this time.



Tinker

In April we received a phone call from the sanctuary from which we had rehomed Frankie and Fred. "Would we consider taking on an elderly black cat whose owner had died and who was very shut down?" Of course we said "yes".

I feel especially sorry for cats who have been bereaved, especially elderly ones whose whole world has been suddenly turned upside down.

We are always prepared to give a cat all the time it needs to adjust in a new home.



During the summer, Tinker spent much time just outside the kitchen window.

We went to fetch Tinker home and she hunkered down in a hooded napper, only eating at night, but responding to strokes and fusses. This went on for about a month, then suddenly one morning she came out to Bob in the kitchen meowing. That was the breakthrough; she seemed to have made up her mind that this was an okay place to be.



Tinker spent the first month hiding in her napper.



We tried introducing her to our lap, but she was frightened when she heard cars passing.

Tinker migrated to the kitchen, the only room she seems happy to be in as it's quieter than the sitting room in the front of the house where she seemed frightened of the sound of cars passing.

In the summer Tinker proved to be a real outdoors cat; she found her way up on top of a platform outside the kitchen window where she would stay for a large part of the day. Sometimes we had a job to

get her in at night. With the arrival of cold weather Tinker took up position on a cushion on the kitchen window seat, where she spends a great deal of time sleeping. If she gets a whiff of tuna, however, Tinker is soon off the window seat and asking for some. Tuna is definitely her favourite food, along with Royal Canin cat biscuits.

Tinker is a sweet cat who is no trouble at all and we're so pleased we were able to offer her a retirement home.



During the winter, Tinker spent most of her time on her cushion on the kitchen window seat.

Toby

Through a friend we got to hear of a cat desperately needing a home. His owner was very poorly and had to be hospitalised. After hospital she was going into a home. The lady had hung on before accepting help as she was so concerned about what would happen to her cat, Toby, who was 14 years old, hyperthyroid and had lived inside the flat since a kitten.



Toby was being fed by the friend who had been doing the lady's shopping, but he needed to be rehomed. It wouldn't be easy for a cat of Toby's age and health issue to be rehomed, and the rescues in the area were all full to bursting.

We wondered if we could risk taking on yet another ginger cat, one who had never met other cats or been outside.

Anyway, we wanted to help and decided to offer Toby a home. By taking

him on we were helping not just the cat, but his owner and our friend Stella who had been having sleepless nights over the situation.

Toby's feeder, accompanied by Stella, brought him down from Weston. On arrival we were surprised to see such a handsome cat who looked nothing like his age. Toby didn't seem at all phased by his new surroundings and seemed very interested in the other cats.

We kept him in his room for a couple of days, then Bob fixed a see through grille gate across the entrance so Toby could see the other cats



and they him. Toby seemed really interested in the others so the screen was soon removed and Toby came out to meet and greet the others; he seemed quite pleased to have some feline company. We were pleased and relieved at how the introduction had gone.

Toby needed blood tests to see what his thyroid levels were doing as he hadn't been getting his medication for a while. This was sorted and later in the year he had a dental.

When he eventually ventured outside into the enclosed garden, he seemed to really enjoy it. Toby loves to sit on papers that make a noise and can be quite a pest in the office! He also likes chasing and playing with Fred.

The whole rehoming has gone very well and he seems content with his new life.



Toby loves the fresh air outside, not having known it all his life until now.



Toby also loves sitting on papers!

Humbug - our feral cat

Last, but not least, Humbug, our sweet feral cat, is still frequenting the end of the garden where he has a shelter with a bed inside and where biscuits are put every evening, and water of course.

We took Humbug on from the RSPCA in Northampton where he had been fed as a stray in someone's garden. That came to



an end, however, and Humbug was taken into rescue in the hope he would come round from his feral ways. After many months of being frightened and hiding away in rescue, this didn't happen and Humbug was clearly not going to be able to be homed; he remained very frightened of people and would hide whenever he could.

Sanctuary life had seemed possibly to be an answer for such a cat, and we agreed to take Humbug on in 2021.

Unfortunately, the wily little cat managed to escape from his area which had a cosy chalet and outside space. We couldn't figure out for some time how he had got out, then we saw some disturbed wire fencing and we realised he had dug himself out!

Saddened by his escape, all we could do was put some shelter at the end of the garden outside of the Fivery and hope he would find it if he wanted. We continued to put food out for him but, after some initial sightings, all went quiet. We saw no sign of Humbug for a whole year, then, one sunny day, there he was sunbathing on top of the fence at the end of the garden looking content and well fed. He had clearly been able to cope on his own.

We put biscuits in the little chalet every night and set up a night camera. Now, two and a half years after he went missing, he is a regular nightly visitor and, during the recent cold snap, spent much of each night in the shelter. He appears to be quite content and healthy, so we feel he's probably enjoying his freedom.



Humbug's hutch with napper, cushion, food and water.

That was the year that was

You will have read in this yearbook that 2023 has been a year of change for us, but still many things stay the same.

In the early days of these yearbooks we often had a section entitled: 'What we are up against'; it seems that we still need such a section even though things have evolved and changed over the years, both at Catwork and in the problems facing special needs cats generally.

Those of you who have been with us over the years will know that we never planned any of what we have been involved with, but have just adjusted and adapted to each cat we were asked to help. In the early years this meant building more and more facilities in the sanctuary, initially for all the FIV cats who came our way due to a poor understanding of the virus and many vets and rescues putting down cats who tested positive for FIV. After a while we then had to adapt and adjust also to care for those cats with FeLV (leukaemia virus), and later still those who had more psychological problems, often as well as one of the viruses.

As you know, we are now adapting again. Due in main to our age we are unable, responsibly, to take on the younger cats as we used to. However, our website (FIVcats.com) together with the booklet we wrote back in 2011, still seem to be of good value. We frequently receive emails from across the world, thanking us for the information, and often asking for advice about their specific situation. We are always careful never to give veterinary advice, but can usually share our experience as well as that of others that can help owners make their own decisions.

This is much helped by the 1000 FIV cats project we started in 2014 which collects information from owners of FIV cats across the world. This is still growing and currently has 1162 FIV cats listed. The results and reports from these owners are available for anyone to read from that section of our website.

It is sad and rather worrying for us that these emails from people who have an FIV cat, often newly diagnosed, tell us there are still vets out there who tell them they should not keep their FIV as they have other cats, or even, still in some cases, that their FIV cat should be put to sleep just because they have the virus.

This is what we were up against right from the start of our work, and the purpose of the website and booklet was to give everyone the understanding that those attitudes are not relevant.

Although we can no longer take in FIV cats to the sanctuary, at least we can maintain the information and respond to all contacts asking for our thoughts and advice on their individual situations

Recently, apart from the emails and website, Barbara's extensive range of contacts has sometimes enabled her to help find solutions for cats where rescues were having difficulty; so although we can't take them directly, we can sometimes still be directly helpful!

One major concern we have is that, due to the situation over the last few years with the pandemic and rising cost of living, there are very many more un-neutered cats out there, with a tsunami of kittens throughout the year flooding into the rescues. There will inevitably be an increase in the stray cat population and, as it is the strays who often need to fight to survive, they are therefore more likely to transmit and spread the viruses; the FIV incidence will increase again. With the misunderstanding of the realities of the virus still existing, the problems we encountered all those years ago when we started are likely to return - and we wonder why we feel depressed about it all! It does make us determined, however, to continue with what we can do to help in whatever way we can.

You will know that we are now concentrating here on helping a few older cats, often bereaved, which is particularly disturbing to us, knowing they will have lost everything they have known for most of their lives. These older cats, worried and confused, often needing ongoing medications, would be some of the hardest for rescues to find homes for, so we seem still to be helping 'special needs cats'!

Our plan for 2024 is, therefore, to continue what we are doing: helping the older cats we have taken on; answering where possible individual requests for help and advice; maintaining the FIVcats.com website; increasing the 1000 FIV cats project and generally doing anything we can for whatever need comes to our attention.

Of course, none of what we have done, or hope to continue doing, would be possible without the amazing support of our very special sponsors and supporters together with the excellent treatment given to our cats by Quantock Veterinary Hospital. So, a huge thank you to all you special people who help us help these special needs cats.



Catwork is a sanctuary for cats with special needs particularly those who test positive for FIV and FeLV

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