

## Pacemaker Saves the Life of Cherished Companion Animal

Prince Buttons gave his human a terrible scare when he began staggering, and then collapsing. Dependent on him and his half-brother Rolo for a reason to get out of bed in the morning, Button's very ill owner couldn't have been more relieved when this specialist team stepped in to help.

**Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker**

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Prince Buttons, a five-year-old miniature donkey in England, suddenly began having episodes of staggering, followed by collapse
- Buttons' owner got him to an equine hospital for evaluation, where he was diagnosed with a potentially fatal heart condition
- A veterinarian at the hospital was able to assemble a team of experts to implant a pacemaker in Buttons to regulate his heartbeat
- Today, a "much friendlier and happier" Buttons is recovering at home and is once again enjoying life out in the paddock with his brother

Prince Buttons, a five-year-old miniature donkey living in England, gave his human a terrible scare when he began staggering, and then collapsing.

*"It was horrific," Buttons' owner, Denise Hart, told Horse and Hound, "and the first time it happened I thought he'd died. Then the episodes became more frequent and sometimes he would be cantering around the field and just drop to the ground."*

*"I was very worried about him and [his half-brother] Rolo would also get very upset and stressed. He would be my early warning system because he could sense something was wrong and bray very loudly even before Buttons collapsed."<sup>1</sup>*

Hart contacted the Rainbow Equine Hospital in Malton, explained what was happening with Buttons, and arranged to get her miniature donkey to the hospital.

### Buttons Is Diagnosed With Potentially Fatal Heart Condition

The Rainbow equine internal medicine specialist team observed Buttons and did some testing, and team member Gemma Tyner diagnosed the little guy with a potentially fatal heart condition called bradycardia, which is characterized by a very slow and irregular heartbeat.

Tyner said Buttons' heartbeat repeatedly "blocked," or stopped functioning normally, for up to 24 seconds at a time, during which blood was not pumping through his body, causing him to collapse.

*"Buttons' condition was very serious and that is a very long time to go without a normal heartbeat," Tyner said. "Unfortunately, it's not something that can be managed with medication and, sadly, euthanasia had to be considered. If left untreated Buttons' health would continue to deteriorate because his heart would gradually weaken and his other organs would begin to fail as well because of blood not circulating to them properly."*

*"But I was able to tell Buttons' owner the good news that there was an option to save his life, which was fitting a pacemaker."<sup>2</sup>*

## **Buttons Gets a Pacemaker**

Tyner assembled a team of veterinarians to treat Buttons, including a specialist in internal medicine and two small animal surgeons who perform pacemaker surgeries in dogs.

The pacemaker, which is the size of a "large box of matches," was inserted into a pocket in Buttons' neck, and the wires were connected to his heart. The operation took five hours.

The device was programmed to activate if the donkey's heart rate drops lower than 30bpm, and it also sends an alert if his heart regularly drops below this rate.

*"We are absolutely delighted how successful the operation was and with Buttons' recovery," said Tyner. "The pacemaker, which should last Buttons at least 15 years, has been extremely well tolerated by him. He hasn't collapsed since it was fitted, which means it's doing its job, and hopefully it will allow him to enjoy a long and happy life."*

## **Today, Buttons Is a Friendlier, Happier Miniature Donkey**

Buttons is recovering at home with Hart and his brother Rolo, who was with him to lend support at each of his hospital visits.

*"I can't thank the team at Rainbow enough, and everyone else involved in Buttons' surgery, for saving his life," said Hart. "Gemma did an amazing job bringing such an experienced team together and Buttons was looked after extremely well at the hospital."*

*"Fitting a pacemaker is a major procedure, but I would be totally lost without Buttons and I had to do everything I could to help him. I've been very ill with breast cancer and bone cancer and my two donkeys have helped me to stay positive and given me a reason to get out of bed in the morning because they rely on me to care for them. They are such a joy to have around."*

She continued:

*"Since the surgery, Buttons is a different donkey and he's much friendlier and happier, which shows how unwell he was feeling before the pacemaker was fitted. It's so lovely to see him enjoying life out in the paddock with Rolo and it's all thanks to the team at Rainbow and the external specialists who all worked to undertake this unique procedure."*

Prince Buttons is thought to be **one of just a handful of donkeys** in the world to have undergone the pacemaker procedure.

## **Sources and References**

<sup>1,2</sup> [Horse & Hound, June 21, 2023](#)

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