

Hope Rescue Hero Wins Top Animal Welfare Award

Wednesday 8 October, 2025

Hope Rescue's Vanessa Waddon awarded Naturewatch Foundation Challenge Coin for outstanding work supporting dogs

A dedicated animal welfare advocate from Wales has been recognised for her outstanding commitment to improving the lives of dogs. Vanessa Waddon, Founder and Director of Hope Rescue in Pontyclun, South Wales, has received a Challenge Coin from animal welfare charity, Naturewatch Foundation, for her work leading rescue, rehabilitation and rehoming efforts for dogs in need.

At a special event on 8th October held in the Welsh Senedd in honour of World Animal Day, Vanessa was presented with the Challenge Coin by Sarah Carr, CEO of Naturewatch Foundation.

The event, organised with RSPCA Cymru, brought together Members of the Senedd, Welsh Government officials, and representatives from animal welfare organisations to celebrate progress and opportunities for animal welfare in Wales.

The event also marked the launch of a joint manifesto to enhance dog welfare in Wales, calling on the next Welsh Government to take urgent action on key issues including breeding standards and effective enforcement.

Vanessa was nominated by Natalie Harney, Naturewatch Foundation's Campaign Manager for Companion Animals, for her tireless commitment to improving the lives of dogs, which includes overseeing operations that have rescued countless animals and provided them with loving homes.

This year, Hope Rescue was also a recipient of Naturewatch Foundation's Pet Rescue Grant, which helped them to fund vital veterinary care for 34 dogs rescued from a Welsh breeder. Many of the dogs arrived with medical issues and behavioural challenges due to low-welfare conditions.

Among those helped was Sabrina, a five-year-old bichon who arrived pregnant and suffering from a grade 2 heart murmur and an ear infection. After a difficult birth requiring an emergency C-section, both she and her pup have found loving homes. Cindy, a two-year-old Westie who needed spaying and dental care, and Declan, a four-year-old bichon who required castration and dental treatment, have also been cared for by Hope Rescue.

Over the past year, 1,038 dogs have arrived at Hope Rescue's centre, an increase of 38% from the previous year, with many coming from low-welfare and illegal breeders. Vanessa and her team not only provide a safe haven for stray, abandoned and abused dogs, but also campaign tirelessly to improve dog welfare legislation, and raise awareness about responsible breeding and ownership.

Vanessa Waddon said: "I am hugely honoured to receive this award on behalf of our incredible team at Hope Rescue. We are really proud to work with Naturewatch Foundation on so many important issues. Being here at the Senedd today provided an opportunity for both of us to highlight that, despite the incredible milestones that have been achieved, the work that's still needed, especially around regulation and breeding."

Sarah Carr, CEO of Naturewatch Foundation, said: "Vanessa and the team at Hope Rescue were obvious choices to receive the Challenge Coin. I received the nomination from the Naturewatch Foundation Campaign Manager Natalie Harney who knows their work so well. Vanessa and her team's tireless commitment to helping some of the most abused and neglected dogs in Wales makes them truly deserving of recognition. I am personally full of admiration for everything they do."

Recognising outstanding achievements – Naturewatch Foundation Challenge Coin

The Naturewatch Foundation Challenge Coin is presented to individuals whose work goes above and beyond to support and promote the charity's mission and values. A maximum of four awards are made each year, and Vanessa is the second recipient. These coins are a symbol of respect, recognising work that contributes to 'advancing animal welfare' and are highly treasured within the animal welfare community.

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About Hope Rescue: Hope Rescue is a Welsh-based dog rescue organisation committed to rescuing, rehabilitating, and rehoming dogs in need. Through the dedication of Vanessa Waddon and her team, Hope Rescue has saved countless animals from neglect and abandonment, providing them with safe, loving homes and ongoing support.

About Naturewatch Foundation: Naturewatch Foundation is a UK-based animal welfare charity dedicated to ending cruelty and improving the lives of animals through campaigning, education and advocacy. For over 30 years, the charity has led initiatives to tackle illegal and unethical practices, including puppy farming, animal experiments and wildlife crime. By working with policymakers, enforcement agencies and the public, Naturewatch Foundation strives to make the world a kinder place for animals.

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