

Glenormiston Seaspray

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Little Glenormiston Seaspray arrived on the morning of 11th September, we think around 2 am. When we went to do the morning feeds, her dam 24 year old Millfield Seaspray was lying dead with the little bay filly standing beside her.

I had 400ml of colostrum frozen and cursed myself for being slack and not collecting more. After a few phone calls, I tracked down extra colostrum and also a little Australian pony mare who had lost her foal. The colostrum proved invaluable but the mare was too far past losing her own foal and wouldn't have anything to do with the foal. Besides that she was only 12.2 hands and the foal, who is a very large filly, couldn't reach down under her! So the foal continued on a foal milk replacer. In the meantime, we ran an immunoglobulin test to see if the foal had had enough colostrum to give her the antibodies she needed. The result was excellent. (There is now frozen plasma available to run as a drip into a foal in the event that colostrum is not available).

Tuesday morning was spent on the phone ringing every vet in a rural area within a 3 hour radius trying to track down a mare who had recently lost her foal. I eventually hit upon a Clydesdale mare on a thoroughbred stud who had produced a dead foal two days before. Unfortunately, they had disposed of the dead foal. Little Clydie came to Glenormiston and although she would allow the foal to suckle under sufferance, (which included sedation, a side line, front hobbles, a twitch, two attendants growling at her when she tried to bite the foal as well as her other back leg attached to a fence!!!) she didn't get to like this strange foal any more than she had when she first arrived.

On the Friday, we were just giving up on 'Little Clydie' when I had a call from a thoroughbred stud who had a mare with a 4 day old foal that had died at 5 that morning. They not only had the dead foal but they had the rug that the foal had been wearing. The owners wouldn't allow the mare to go away so we padded our horse trailer up with straw and mattresses and very illegally travelled a 'human mother' with a bottle in the float with our foal on the 2 ½ hour trip to the thoroughbred stud. She travelled well and we arrived to find that the mare was very excited to see the foal whickering and calling to her.

After letting the mare view the foal in the adjoining stall for half an hour or so, we put the little foal rug on our foal, sedated the mare and put Vicks in her nostrils. The mare was quite happy to accept the rugged part of the foal that smelt like her dead baby but put her ears back and tried to bite our foal's head and neck region because it smelt strange (despite the Vicks). Eventually we decided that the only chance of success was to skin the dead foal and try further tactics. This worked like a dream. With our foal wearing the dead colt's skin, the mare was very happy about the smell of her head and neck. She thought long and hard about the smell of our foal's back legs but after much smelling of the skin dangling at the back decided it probably WAS her own foal after all. From there we didn't look back.

We built a little pen in the corner of the stall and the foal was allowed to suckle every couple of hours with the mare and foal being held by attendants. By the following day they could safely be left together and the skin was removed (it was getting a little smelly!) and we gave the mare an injection to help bring her milk down better. In another day, the rug came off and Maxi now accepted that the foal smelt enough like her own foal to not know the difference. The foal still follows people rather than a horse and nudges you for a bottle but is very happy to have her own 'milk bar'. Unfortunately Maxi will not have further foals of her own as she has now lost 3 foals all by different stallions who were tiny and died within a few days of birth. This will be her only experience of motherhood.

We hope that this will allow little Seaspray to grow up as a horse rather than a 'person. Poddy foals can become very difficult and indeed dangerous because they think of people as their equals or worse, as less dominant than themselves. Seaspray has been given a chance to become a 'real horse'.

The other twist to the tale is that Little Clydie has been given a service to Praize so that she can hopefully be available at her thoroughbred stud ,along with two other Clydesdale mares, as a potential foster mother next year. It is Praize's first Clydesdale wife and he thinks she is beautiful. Has anyone else bred a Connemara to a Clydesdale?

This is our second experience at finding a foster mother. In 1991, when Oxenholm Dulcinea died foaling we were in the same situation, hand feeding an orphan filly every hour and a half. We found a thoroughbred foster mother who had lost her foal 3 days before through an ad in the livestock column of the local paper. This mare was in a lot of pain from wide cracks in her feet and perhaps this helped her forget her own foal's smell or perhaps she was simply a very maternal mare. She arrived in our trailer, dragged us to the orphan foal whickering all the time and immediately took her as her own. Her milk came back in after 36 hours and that was the end of the story. The books say it doesn't work like that but we were just lucky. Today, Glenormiston Dulcinea is a lovely well grown mare (having grown up on good thoroughbred milk) and is about to have her fourth foal. Hopefully, Glenormiston Seaspray will have the same happy ending.

