



VOLUNTEER INFORMATION

Volunteer story

Jennie

Hello fellow cat-lovers!

I have just finished 2 weeks of volunteering in Skiathos and I am so pleased to be here, telling you all about it.

I have been coming to Skiathos since I was a child. My parents have always been drawn to the charms of the Greek Islands and as such, this seed was planted in me right from the start. Skiathos has a magic all of its own and the Skiathos Cat Welfare(SCWA) is like the cherry and the sprinkles on the cake for me.

I am now a 49 year old teacher, budding writer and mum of 2 gorgeous girls who are as cat crazy as me. Of course, we have our own little kitty at home. But as an adventurous person by nature, feeling the confines of single motherhood, coming out to volunteer has provided me with the vital freedom to be able to immerse myself in all the things I love and crave: cats, Greece, adventure and meeting new and fantastic people.

I came to the SCWA for the first time in July 2024 just for a visit with my daughters. I hadn't known it existed until the year before whilst on a visit to the Skiathos Dog Shelter when I lamented that I wished there was a similar place for cats on the island. "Oh but there is!" One of the volunteers there told me. I met Louise and immediately saw a woman whose life is dedicated to the very well loved and



cared for cats of Skiathos. The pressure she is under to not only care for the cats but also to manage the volunteers and entertain the many (though not nearly enough) fascinated visitors is a feat that I don't think many could achieve in the way that she does. She does this alongside Olivia, who I didn't meet that first day.

I mentioned to Louise that the following week when back home in the UK, my daughters would be going to their dad's and I was at a loss. She casually said why didn't I return and volunteer. So I did just that. Just for 4 days but 4 days like no other which left a lifelong imprint on my heart and soul and unlocking something I didn't know existed within me: the drive to do good, to be among cats and people who love cats and to do and be something unique, even if only for a short time. I hadn't cried in years, in fact my daughters had never seen me cry but when we boarded our homeward plane that last day of our holiday, I was inconsolable and



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I knew that something had been set in motion. I knew that I would be back. But Skiathos would never be just a holiday destination for me ever again.

I had only ever been to Skiathos during the summer season, between May and September, so to come in the run up to Easter in the backdrop of Spring was quite a different experience. The quiet streets oozed laid back charm and a peace and serenity that I had only seen on the island many years ago, before mass tourism really took hold.

Walking the coastline before and after a day volunteering gave me the time to both prepare and decompress. The Spring flowers dotting the coastline were a multicoloured and eye catching blanket of bright red poppies and pastel fruit blossoms and I will forever associate the rich and heady orange-blossom scent with my time on the island. But Spring also means something elseKittens!!!!

Louise and Olivia picked me up from the airport after a layover in Athens. I was so excited to be back that I wanted to go straight up to see the cats and not to my accommodation. It was like seeing old friends: Donald, Maria, Alekos, Ramone, Grace. Many cats I had met in the summer were fortunate enough to have been adopted and found their forever homes and so I didn't get to say hello to them. But sadly, there are so many who have not yet and who will one day hopefully make the most incredible pets and family members for people who have yet to discover them.

I noticed the tangible void created by the recently deceased Wesley. We all took a moment to process the impact his loss has on anyone who ever met him but Louise quickly took me into my favourite area, the vet room, where the cats who need special recovery time or medical attention come to convalesce.

Noelle and Meg who were awaiting neutering, sweet Simon who had lost the nerves in his lower body and as a result was struggling in





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many ways but a real darling in character, the demure and gentle lady, Clari, who was in recovery from having teeth problems but looking to soon return to her monastery home. The girls provide a great support and lifeline for the monks at the monastery who take great care of their resident cats but who rely on Louise and Olivia to help them do this. I said in jest that they are like the 4th emergency service on the island but I can't express how true this actually is.

I then met Melody. The absolutely beautiful young Melody. Mother to be and a very grateful and comfortable new resident. Pregnant and very close to her delivery, Olivia

had been trying for quite some time to 'trap' her. Please don't fear the word trap here. It's more like, safely gather her and bring her to her new home to feed and nourish her with the nutrients she needs and all the love and

attention a little kitty could ever need and wish for. And so we watched and we waited.

Meanwhile, my days were filled with feeding hundreds of fabulous cats, cleaning their living quarters, washing and drying their blankets and toys, making sure their water was fresh and full and that their litter was clean and dry, but it doesn't stop there, we also filled up food bowls and water at various feeding stations around the island, took regular trips to the vet, swept, mopped, scrubbed and of course kissed and cuddled as many of the cats as is physically possible. They may not all feel like it, which is fine but on the whole, you are spoilt for choice with so many willing feline friends keen for some love and attention.

It's hard not to gather favourites. I found myself telling almost all of them that they were my favourites. Jake, Strudel, Poppet, Clari, Panos...it really is a never ending list.



Then one morning, Olivia and I arrived to the usual furry welcome which cannot fail to lift your spirit and make you smile from the inside out and went to see Melody. Melody and one tiny white and ginger furball. She was in the throes of labour. We were lucky enough to witness her giving birth to the second and third kittens shortly after. What an absolute superstar she was. Purring her way through



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labour, making it look easy, cleaning her babies one by one and patiently allowing them to feed and suckle away, this perfect little lady became a natural mother just like that and definitely one of my favourites!!!

Louise and Olivia had already wanted to name two of them Mango and Parsnip and I think we said Clementine/Clemence for the third. But actually, the girls like to get to know the little characters and often a name appears somehow and seems to suit each one very well indeed so I am yet to hear the final decision. After I returned home, I saw on

Facebook that Melody had adopted a tiny newborn kitten abandoned at bins still with its umbilical cord attached and taken it on as one of her own. Melody: mother, gorgeous little soul, absolute superstar!!

Even before this particular volunteering highlight, we had received a phone call from a woman, Sophia, who had a cat give birth to 4

kittens on her balcony that week and she had been happily feeding the mum. Until the mum went missing. After 2 whole days without their mum, Sophia called Louise about the abandoned kittens and off we went to get these 4 little souls. It was touch and go since 48 hours without milk is a long time for kittens and a question mark hung over their survival. In no time at all, they were being bottle fed and loved by Louise. I gave it a try but it wasn't easy since they had been used to their mum and were actually distressed and hungry.

I had also never seen such tiny kittens before. Only one had its eyes open. We fed them, cuddled them, wrapped them in blankets in a safe cage with a heat pad and gave them some peace and quiet and then it was necessary to care for them around the clock.

Olivia kept them overnight in her home alongside her own fur baby but they came with us each day for the ongoing care they needed. We kept a close eye on their weight and gradually, they settled and began to thrive. I was flabbergasted at their progress in just over a week. All of their eyes opened, they gained





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weight and confidence and two gorgeous tabby boys, a ginger boy and a sweet little tortoiseshell girl became part of the family. Just like that!!

The volunteer accommodation is in the heart of Skiathos Town and even comes with its own resident cat, Voodoo, a rather considerate and loveable girl who is very accommodating and provides a great comfort to someone coming home at the end of a working day. She got under my skin and saying goodbye to her broke my heart a little bit more.



You are never far away from Marion, who is one of the charity's greatest patrons. She is like a fairy godmother and on my first full day, she arrived with a whole heap of warm chicken and vegetable-packed stew enjoyed by every single cat and some of the volunteers too.

No 2 days are the same. There is an infinite amount to do but the energy and love you feel drives you forward. Chatting and getting to

know the other volunteers as well as Louise and Olivia, gives you the drive to carry on, the giggles to keep you smiling and the shared passion bonds you throughout it all. To think that all this is going on while we are back in the humdrum of our daily lives is both reassuring and moving.

My last day arrived far sooner than I expected. Yes I had missed my daughters and I was looking forward to seeing them again but the sadness in my heart was beginning to weigh heavy. I had enjoyed making my own Greek salads, walking around the serene town, reading my books on benches alongside new cat friends, the occasional gyros, the signs of Spring but mostly the cats.



The time I spent with them is something that can never be erased. I was keeping myself together despite how I was feeling inside but as I boarded that plane to Athens I fell apart. The other passengers kindly averted their curious eyes. At this time of year, everyone is here for a reason. It's not the holiday season. I fleetingly wondered what had brought them all to the island, mostly visiting family, but for me it was simple: cats. The cats of Skiathos. The stinging of the hot tears on my cheeks reminded me that this is something that I cannot simply do twice. I want to return. I want



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Skiathos in a safe and loving space where they can thrive and survive. There is no donation too small.

There are so many cats that need help and resources are limited although the care and time of Louise, Olivia, Marion and all the cat people of Skiathos seems limitless. Please help them to do everything they can. They devote their lives to the cats of the island but they need your help. Please!!!

For now, I am back in the United Kingdom but a piece of my heart is forever with the cats on Skiathos. Until I see them again. And see them again, I will. My heart will lead me there.

Love,
Jennie
(April 2025)

to be part of the community. As many times as the commitments of my life will allow.

The cats are so loved and cared for and the people involved in this process are many. But it's still not enough because literally every single day, the vast numbers of cats who need care and protection grows. Their care is expensive and donations only go so far.

The community of people who care, the volunteers, Louise, Olivia, Marion, Victoria, Kitty, Bev, Mary, Anjie and Dave and all the many smashing people who help are doing an amazing job but it's not possible without the financial support from people like yourselves who can make donations to keep the cats of

