



Interview ▶ Lovers of animals, the earth and nature

M.A. / P.C.



Marta Aleix and Pere Cadena

Founder and assistant of the Santuari Cel Obert

«When you let animals express themselves freely and feel safe, wonderful things happen»

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Marta Aleix was born 38 years ago in Andorra, and is the founder and director of the Open Sky Sanctuary. She studied Social Education, a specific module on mountains and alternative therapies. For his part, Pere Cadena was born in Cassovall 51 years ago, works as a machinist during the week and devotes all his time to the sanctuary at weekends. Both define themselves as lovers of animals, the earth and nature.

–How and when does the project arise?

–Marta: The project is called Santuari Cel Obert and it was born in Bonastre, Tarragona, eight years ago now. It arises from a constant desire to contribute something to the world. The love of animals is an innate feeling of many people, and this was my case. It is also promoted by my parents, since we had all kinds of animals at home. I suppose that the combination of the love of nature and animals, together

with the concern of the loss of these due to climatic situations, naturally pushed me to create a project of these parameters. It should be noted that it was nothing new either. In fact, I had already collaborated in sanctuaries, protectors and shelters, and the impact they generated on me made me decide to create my own, with my way of understanding life.

I managed to find a place in Tarragona where I lived for five years, and then I decided to go back to my parents, where I found a beautiful place, and that is where we currently live and where we met Pere.

–When we talk about sanctuary, what exactly are we talking about?

–Pere: A sanctuary is a space in which live, permanently, domestic animals or considered farm animals that have been rescued from very different situations. The difference between sanctuaries and some shelters, to give an example, is that the animals that live here do so for life. There is no option to adopt or take them in, but to spon-

sor them.

–And what about your philosophy?

–P: Well, it can vary from the defense of veganism, the proclamation of anti-speciesism or the protection of animals in slave situations. Not all sanctuaries stand for the same thing, but most of us spread respect for animals and promote people's awareness that they are sentient, sensitive beings with their own personality and that they should not be exploited for our profits let alone treated the way much of the industry does it. In this sense, we want to give visibility to what is behind each individual and for people to become aware of their own common sense.

–How many animals are there?

–M: We currently have 42. Our philosophy is few and very well taken care of. Thus, we are very demanding when it comes to providing the animals with the best attention, and this represents a lot of time and money for us.



«A sanctuary is a space where domestic or farm animals live that have been rescued from very different situations»

–How many did you start with?

–M: The project started with three adopted animals: a white horse, the Nevadet; a mastiff, Nepal; and a cat, Thea. We currently have horses, goats, dogs, cats, ducks, chickens, turkeys, a guinea pig and piglets. Beyond the quantity or the type, what surprises people the most is the good relationship they have with each other. When you let animals express themselves freely, and feel safe, wonderful things happen.

–What is its objective as a sanctuary?

–P: We want to be a sample of how animals can be treated, so that people get to know each one of them and fall in love with the beings they are. We want to raise awareness about the importance of not buying them, or that they inform themselves when consuming meat or products of animal origin, about the origin and condition of these, where they live, how they have been treated, etc. We also want people to relate to animals through play, sympathy or curiosity, not just to satisfy our hunger or our leisure interests.

-Could you give an example?

-M: Many people see chickens as the animal par excellence that makes eggs, and they would be very surprised to see that they are territorial animals, that carry out shared motherhood, very sociable and with an unusual curiosity. Ours sleep with the pigs and use them as transport to move around the farm. It's very funny [laughs]. Another example, having a close relationship with the horses is quite surprising, here everyone asks us if we ride them, and we don't. We are not against it, as long as it is with parameters that we have very clear. Accompanying them, observing them, walking with them, caressing them also creates very strong and different bonds from those we are used to; and the result is reflected when you spend some time with them and see how balanced and happy they are.

-How is the day-to-day life at Cel Obert?

-P: Having animals is equal to work. If you also add that we clear forests and recover abandoned fields so that the horses can enjoy the pastures, then there is even more. But it is so gratifying to see the result, that even if you spend months cleaning a space, just seeing them arrive and jump for joy is already worth it.

-How is it managed financially?

-M: As we mentioned earlier, maintaining a sanctuary, and more at the level we want, represents a lot of expenses. We currently have patrons who give us great financial support, also great people who have sponsored, and others who have made symbolic and very helpful contributions.

-Do the administrations take part, perhaps with a subsidy?

-M: We don't usually ask for it for two reasons. The first, because they don't give them to us, and the second, because we wanted people to be the ones who become aware of what we do and who can contribute a grain of sand to ours or to any project that seems consistent with their beliefs. What we do and usually ask is that before making any donation, people come to see what we do here.

-How many people are part of the sanctuary?



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«Beyond the number or type of animals, what surprises people the most is the good relationship they have with each other»

-M: We always speak in the plural when we talk about the sanctuary, since everything that has been done here has been thanks to each and every one of the people who have passed through Cel Obert. There are currently three of us at the head of the project, Hèctor, Eugenia, the forestry worker who helps us with everything, and me. In addition, there are people who currently help us unconditionally, such as Pere, Agustí, Jordi, Joan Carles, Patric, etc. We are a human family, just like the one created with the animals.

-It's a satisfying job that you're passionate about, but I imagine that not

everything must be good. What deficiencies do you have or what problems do you usually encounter?

-P: The work is beautiful and rewarding. However, in everyday life we live with a constant concern for the welfare of animals. The current water crisis also creates uncertainty for them. In addition, the administration does not make it easy either, when it comes to legalizing our projects, we are considered livestock farmers, since the sanctuaries do not yet have a space for us, but when it comes to asking for help, we cease to be - It's quite frustrating. Luckily there are entities that support us so that we are more visible.

-What are the criteria to be able to rescue an animal?

-M: The fact that we are an association of animals sometimes leads to confusion, and the fact is that many people think that we dedicate ourselves to adopting or hosting on a one-off basis, and this is not the case, we rescue them. In fact, we have a WhatsApp group, with reference associations in Catalonia, where we defined very specific criteria, precisely, to make the



«Being an association sometimes leads to confusion. We do not dedicate ourselves to adopting or taking in on time, but to rescuing»

population aware that we are not the garbage collectors of their irresponsibility, and our task is very defined.

-For example?

-P: Do not take horses from breeders or dealers, in the case of private ones, ask for some kind of involvement, such as paying for castration, or temporarily fostering. We also defined a maximum number of animals, each sanctuary or association knows its own, to continue providing a quality service to those who are already with us. If we can't take care of a case, we spread the word and help the animals find a home. Unfortunately we cannot take care of everyone we would like to.

-Any words to share?

-M: I once read one that I have burned into my heart that says: «No one can love what they don't know». For me, showing our project is giving others the opportunity to know what they haven't seen about animals, and they can end up loving them, just as much or more than we do. ≡

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