

## Free-ranging donkeys

How do we protect donkeys from doing what is natural to them?



Donkeys can survive in harsh conditions and they are intrinsically curious. This can put them in conflict with humans.

IMAGE:UNDARK.ORG - Los Angeles Times via Getty Images

In many areas donkeys are kept by people who live close to suburban or urban areas. The donkeys are used to generate income by transporting people, fire-wood, building materials, rubbish and so on.

These donkeys become a problem when they roam into the built-up residential areas, looking for food or water, or just roaming as donkeys tend to do.

In rural areas they venture into vegetable gardens and the reaction is to throw boiling water at them, causing bad wounds. When it is drinking water they are seeking, this has been addressed in some cases by providing drinking points for them in safe places.

When they roam into built-up areas they disturb rubbish bins, damage vegetation and cause traffic accidents. They scavenge on rubbish dumps with disastrous consequences when they ingest plastic or suffer from wounds caused by discarded glass, metal and wire.

In rural areas, donkeys wandering on roads cause numerous fatal accidents – especially at night. The *Sowetan* in South Africa reports that there are on average two vehicle accidents a week in the Limpopo Province, involving donkeys. “Authorities

are slow to react, with no warning signs for motorists while owners of such animals are difficult to trace” they say. (See our July 2017 and August 2018 issues about reflective collars.)

Many animal welfare organisations will be familiar with the demand to “Do something about the roaming donkeys!”

### How to remedy this?

There is no easy quick-fix answer. Impounding them is difficult, the owners don’t want to pay the fees to reclaim them and the pound bears the costs of caring for them until they can be auctioned.

“Fence them!” is offered as a solution. Not so simple: a suitable area has to be found, probably belonging to a local authority, fencing material is expensive and highly sought after and may quickly be stolen, leaving the situation as before. If they are fenced (as with all fenced animals) they have to be fed, have water and shelter, manure removed and be checked regularly. This is an added responsibility for the owners who are often already struggling to perform their own daily duties.

Let us know if you have any solutions to this problem.

**Many animal welfare organisations will be familiar with the demand to:**  
**“Do something about the roaming donkeys!”**

## Donkey welfare experts comment on the Skins Trade

In the previous issue we highlighted the link between organised crime and the illegal donkey skin trade. We asked some of our readers to provide their opinion about the problem and put forward some solutions. More information about the slaughter of donkeys, especially in Africa, can also be found in the library section of our website at [www.donkeysforafrica.org](http://www.donkeysforafrica.org)

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## African animal welfare organisations receive grants

The annual grant program from Animal-Kind International provides support to effective animal welfare organizations for short-term projects.

In 2022 nine grants were approved for projects submitted by Africa-based organisations. We mention them here as it is gratifying to see support for, and work done with other species besides donkeys.

- **HorseSafety-Ghana** (now known as **The Six Freedoms**) for their project Welfare for neglected horses in Accra and beyond, raising awareness and providing education for grooms and horse owners.
- **Botswana SPCA** for a Pet Sterilization Campaign.
- **Pwani Animal Welfare Community-Based Organization:** Their project is Providing safe living quarters for rescued stray cats and dogs at their shelter in Mombasa, Kenya.
- **The Twala Trust Animal Sanctuary:** Their grant project is related to Doggy Tuesday – a free weekly community veterinary clinic and feeding programme for Rural Dogs in Zimbabwe.
- **Zambezi Working Donkey Project** (Zambia) for their Community Education Project.

- **Democratic Republic of Congo: Save Animals DRC's** event Let's promote our valued dogs: an event showcasing dogs & advocating against dog fighting is scheduled for World Animal Day in October. In addition they work with police to identify and arrest promoters of dog-fighting.
- **Feral Cat Care:** Their grant project is Trap, neuter, return, veterinarian care and feeding of community cats in Bloemfontein, South Africa.
- **Hero in my Hood** will implement their grant to produce activity booklets and pet care materials for NGOs in South Africa: Teaching Children to Care for their Dog.
- **SPCA Grahamstown** (Makhanda, South Africa): Who Let the Dogs Out? is the SPCA's grant project to replace their 24 rusted kennel gates with new, safer gates.

We trust that these success stories will inspire more of our readers to identify suitable projects and apply for grants next year.

## Successful outreach actions in Zimbabwe



**Matabeleland Animal Rescue and Equine Sanctuary (MARES)** recently undertook education and outreach clinics in west Matabeleland.



[www.facebook.com/mareszimbabwe](https://www.facebook.com/mareszimbabwe)

An accompanying veterinarian treated donkeys in need of attention. VAWS Vic Falls and Greenline Africa were also involved. This project was supported by Animal Aid Abroad.

The MARES team was enthusiastically received in the town of Mabale and Chief Dingani commented that this was the first time help had been made available to working donkeys in this region.

After assessing and educating on donkey welfare, humane harnesses and carts, the team had a good idea of the needs of the community and will return to help further improve

the conditions affecting working donkeys and therefore also their owners. More humane harnesses are needed as well as adaptations to the carts.

The team then proceeded to Victoria Falls for a two-day clinic. Further humane harnesses and cart adaptations were implemented, as well as education on donkey care. A most encouraging observation was that harnesses that had been distributed a few years earlier were generally still in use, in good condition and no harness wounds were evident on those donkeys.



Replacing ineffective harnessing while educating donkey owners.



Good harnessing in action. Note the reflective collar.



MARES, VAWS and Greenline Africa were supported by Animal Aid Abroad. The team was welcomed by local leaders.



# Stopping the slaughter

[www.thedonkeysanctuary.org/end-the-donkey-skin-trade](http://www.thedonkeysanctuary.org/end-the-donkey-skin-trade)

**Combatting the illegal donkey skin trade requires co-ordinated action and awareness by all. Readers share their opinions:**

In May 2022 The Donkey Sanctuary released the first report on “Donkeys in Global Trade”. The report “A Ticking Time Bomb” revealed the extent to which the illegal skins trade has become embedded in organised crime and trading in wildlife parts. The release of this report coincided with their wider Stop the Slaughter campaign.

## Donkeys for Africa asked some of our readers their thoughts.

Karen Menczer, Founder/Director of Animal-Kind International, pointed out that The Donkey Sanctuary’s call for eCommerce and social media sites to ban the sale of donkey skins and remove all existing listings from their platforms, is a great step, but it is one step of many needed.

## More reports

The Donkey Sanctuary informed us that they are producing a series of reports focussing on different aspects of donkeys in global trade. They work closely with their partners in the illegal wildlife trade sector, and some arrests and prosecutions have resulted. There is now greater awareness of the situation and crucial enforcement bodies have been alerted.

We asked a representative of an animal welfare organisation operating in Zambia, to comment, and believe that the following observations are common to other countries too: “Here in Zambia the trade is growing, however it is kept underground and it is very difficult to get anyone to talk about it either at community or government level, possibly due to a fear of reprisals from the criminal gangs who run the business. No-one knows exactly who they are or the extent of their connections and influence. We gather snippets of information mostly from community members who have been approached to sell or had donkeys stolen, but it is fragmented and almost impossible to build a trail to follow. We know that certain NGO’s who work to counter wildlife crime are aware of the donkey skin trade and have linked it to the same people, but again it is a highly taboo and secretive issue.

Already there is a rise in donkey thefts in Zambia and the price of a working donkey has tripled in the last 2 years – from an average of ZMW 800 per donkey to between ZMW 2200 – 2500 now.”

## How does the donkey skin trade differ from the illegal wildlife trade?

There are no national or international level laws protecting donkeys.

Comments from our readers included that the donkey skin trade is more difficult to control: if one country bans the donkey skin trade, traders will just look to another country.

Outside of animal welfare and donkey communities, very little awareness exists about the trade and the cruelty involved.

The factors driving the demand for donkey skins are known and deeply ingrained.

## How can the problem be addressed?

Our readers agreed that governments need to take an active interest and raise public awareness. Aspects such as theft and inhumane slaughter need to be criminalised. Communities must be warned of the potential impact of the trade, as well as the laws.

Karen Menczer added that these measures require political will.

## How to generate political will?

Bottom-up advocacy, awareness raising, shared beliefs in a way forward including having institutions and mechanisms in place to control the trade.

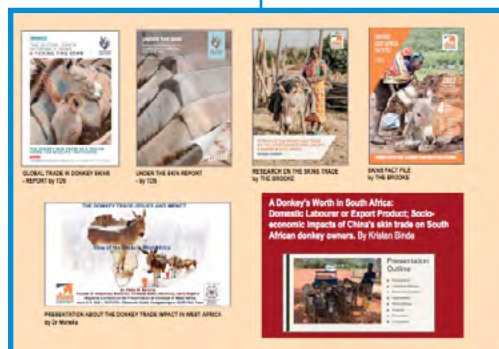
Dr Philip Mshelia, Department of Veterinary Medicine at the Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria, analysed the situation as follows: “The first step in tackling organized crime such as this is to ask important questions: Who are the facilitators? Where do the syndicates go from here?”

The donkey skin trade system consists of donkey-dependent communities, donkey skin traders, and ejiao producers. In between these groups are facilitators. The prime movers of this industry, the ejiao producers, depend on the facilitators to sustain the industry. The traders capitalize on the lack of cooperation between stakeholders.

The enforcement agencies need to identify the facilitators and also think ahead of them. The illegal donkey skin traders thrive on loopholes within the system to avoid detection. Addressing this challenge is a herculean task but leveraging on the cooperation of national and regional governments will make it much easier to solve.”

The skins trade – legal and illegal – needs to be addressed through partnerships, greater awareness globally and increased measures to combat the illegal aspects. Governments also have a duty to their citizens to reveal the impact of the legal trade on communities.

**The message that donkeys are worth more alive than dead needs to find wider acceptance.**



Visit the library section of our website for more Skins Trade research material.



### Organisational compliance

Many of our readers work for welfare organisations that have to meet certain requirements to be allowed to function as public benefit organisations, non-profit or non-governmental bodies, or whatever the nomenclature is in a particular country and legal system. This establishes the body's credentials, lends legitimacy and reassures donors that their contributions will be appropriately managed and applied.

Meeting the requirements of audits, reporting to annual general meetings, keeping registers of members and so on may seem tedious and interfering with the delivery of aid to the animals, but remain essential to maintain the trust of donors.

Make sure that your administrative systems are in place, meeting all the requirements, and that your organisation is registered and remains so. Sadly many well-intentioned efforts take off initially with appeals to the emotions of potential supporters, but run aground when financial demands overtake the capacity of the compassionate carer. You can't do it all alone – you need the support of a team and the trust of the public donors.

### From the Editor

**Knowledge is power, and sharing knowledge does not diminish the parties involved, but rather makes them stronger. A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle.**

It is obvious that the donkey skins trade is a global threat and needs the combined commitment of different bodies at many different levels. Should there be a depository of relevant African information available to all who need such? It would have to be updated regularly as the trade, legal and illegal, is in a constant state of flux.

Perhaps it is time for another African Donkey Welfare

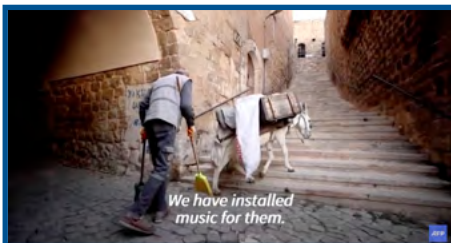
### Donkey Welfare Symposium

The theme for the 10th Annual Donkey Welfare Symposium presented by the University of California Davis is “The Past, Present and Future of Donkeys”. The event will be hybrid: on-line and by physical attendance, on Saturday 12th November and Sunday 13th November 2022. Registration will open soon. Keep an eye on <https://iawti.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/10th-donkey-welfare-symposium>



### Donkeys for Municipal Services

Not only in Africa, but also in Europe, donkeys are still used for municipal services as in the city of Mardin in south-western Turkey.



They have prescribed working and resting hours and retire after seven years of work. They even have music played to them, with Beethoven a favourite. Thank you to Ruža Fotiadis for this information.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=cfWlpWstlig](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cfWlpWstlig)

### Research in Ghana

A donkey owner comments: “Anytime I don't have money, I use the donkey to work and earn money at the end of the day. I can make at least 50.00 GH¢ and I can use that money to buy a female goat and it will reproduce”. The aim of this research was to understand the extent to which donkeys underpin the livelihoods of donkey owners in rural north Ghana, especially their use by women and children.

Donkeys help reduce the hard physical work of many farming and domestic activities and can also be rented out to generate income. There are actually more methods available to earn money from the family donkey than previously known. Donkeys are certainly important to their owners, who describe them as priceless. This research adds to our understanding of the impact of the ejiao industry, by detailing the considerable value of live donkeys to poor farming households.

### Get the research document:

**'Donkey ownership provides a range of income benefits to the livelihoods of rural households in northern Ghana'** from our website library.



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gathering, such as the one organised by The Donkey Sanctuary in 2015, where the donkey meat and skins trade was briefly mentioned under “emerging themes”.

Little did we know then, how that would explode onto the scene shortly afterwards.

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