

Donkeys – under global threat?

At the fifth Donkey Welfare Symposium in California, USA, the different roles that donkeys fulfil were spotlighted. From serving as transport, draught and traction animals in rural settings, to being production animals in dairy and other farms, the value of donkeys is becoming increasingly recognised.

A moral and economic question

Is a donkey raised for slaughter at a registered abattoir better off than one working tirelessly for ignorant owners in impoverished circumstances? Who is more dependent on his donkey: the breeder producing meat, skins or milk, or the indigent owner with no other transport?

Donkeys are slow breeders and at risk from stress. Commercial farming is in place, as in China, where there are 16 registered farms with 10,000 head in Dong'E County alone. In spite of managed breeding programmes, the donkey population in China has dropped alarmingly over the last decades. Perhaps the humble donkey is warning mankind that he is not to be manipulated!

Grim future

Italian researchers have painted a grim picture of donkey breeding in Europe, saying most European breeds are under threat of extinction. The University of Pisa's Francesco Camillo and his colleagues, writing in the Journal of Equine Veterinary Science, described interest in donkey breeding in Europe as very marginal. In South Africa there is serious investigation by some government departments into establishing donkey farms. The goal is rural development and creating new market opportunities, expanding and enhancing existing markets and gathering market intelligence.

African challenges

Producing donkeys in the African rural context presents totally different challenges from the high-tech establishments on other continents, such as the donkey dairy industry in parts of Europe. Even there, welfare can be seriously compromised.

The question also arises whether the veterinary profession is adequately prepared to define and monitor good welfare once donkeys become production animals. Often the donkey is a forgotten species in professional curricula.

All in all, the future of donkeys could be under threat.

"Donkey science must ride on the consciousness of human kindness to establish an environment free from donkey abuse and cruelty."

Philip Mshelia DVM, Department of Veterinary Medicine, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria.

Investment in Education needed

There must be reasons why donkeys have traditionally not been successfully commercially farmed on large scale, particularly in Africa. Should the authorities not rather invest in education, focussing on improving the knowledge and skills of owners?

The better the donkey is cared for, the more productive it can be for its owner. The combined result is that the welfare of humans and the animals will improve, leading to greater stability and prosperity of the communities that still depend on these valuable animals.

CLICK

[http://www.j-evs.com/article/S0737-0806\(17\)30679-2/abstract](http://www.j-evs.com/article/S0737-0806(17)30679-2/abstract)

Read more about the fifth Donkey Welfare Symposium on Page 2



Demand for donkey skins has increased the price of donkeys for small farmers. In Kenya the price of donkeys has tripled in one year.

African focus at international symposium



A number of presentations at the recent Donkey Welfare Symposium at the University of California Davis, USA, provided a specific African focus.

Dr Amy McLean, organiser of the symposium, said: “The Donkey Welfare Symposium is a unique platform as it brings together several groups that normally wouldn’t be found attending a conference: donkey enthusiasts, scientists, researchers, charities, veterinarians, students and donkey owners. Many such meetings are geared toward just one of these sectors but the opportunity for everyone that loves, and is involved with donkeys – from professionals to the enthusiast – to interact and share in exchanging ideas and knowledge is a powerful opportunity for education and bringing awareness on a global level about these amazing animals.”

China affects Africa

Amy, who is Professor in the Department of Animal Science at UC Davis, reported on commercial donkey farming in China in her presentation *Donkey Production in China*. This makes interesting reading as the numbers in China have fallen drastically, leading to the trade in meat and skins with other parts of the world.

Welfare of African donkeys

Dr Philip Mshelia from the department of Veterinary Medicine at the Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria provided a dramatic picture of the working and living conditions experienced by donkeys throughout Africa. Serious welfare considerations and concerns were indicated in his presentation *Journey of the African Donkey*.

The Skins Trade

Alex Mayers, Head of Programmes at The Donkey Sanctuary (UK) presented the report on the global impact of the skins

trade, *Under the Skin*. This highlights not only the appalling practices arising from greed and cruelty to the donkeys, but also the social impact on the communities that depend on their donkeys for survival. Alex said: “This trade, in both its legal and illegal forms, results in a chain of welfare issues for the donkeys at every step, from sourcing to transport and finally to slaughter. These issues can not be ignored. The donkeys’ welfare and their real value in supporting people’s livelihoods is at risk.”



Is regulation an option?

Following up on this contentious subject, Dr Mactar Seck of The Brooke presented *Donkey Trade in Africa, the Brooke’s Approach*. Mactar posed the question: “Possibly an answer to the donkey trade for skins and meat is to seek regulation, as a call for a permanent ban is unlikely to succeed. Powerful global commerce is involved and the solution might be to find sustainable ways to manage and regulate the trade.”

The symposium, attended by delegates from around the world, also shared ideas about veterinary, behavioural and general issues concerning donkey welfare from a global perspective.

During this gathering the unique challenges faced by African donkeys were highlighted. The need for increased and sustained education, not only to donkey owners but also to African society at large was emphasised. “It is necessary to inform and educate people about the benefit of donkeys. In Africa especially, these mis-understood animals often have an essential role in uplifting rural communities” said Alex Mayers.



Content material for this symposium can be found at <http://donkeywelfaresymposium.homestead.com/Symposium-Content.html>

The biggest challenges and successes

Since starting in April 2017 **Donkeys for Africa** has reached an increasing audience of individuals and organisations involved with the welfare of donkeys.

We recently asked what your biggest challenges and successes of 2017 were.

2017 Challenges

One of the biggest challenges faced was that of community perceptions.

FAWCAM shared that it was difficult to change attitudes of the population in Cameroon who looked at the donkey owning communities as inferior dirty people dealing with dirty animals. This was echoed from some other areas in southern Africa.

Other challenges

included getting rid of ox yoke harness from the necks of donkeys (Tanzania); the lack of understanding to rest sick donkeys (Nigeria); the current drought in Tanzania; combatting the neurological form of trypanosomiasis caused by *T. Brucei* (Gambia); educating owners about donkey care, with that knowledge not being passed on once the donkey is sold on (Kenya and elsewhere).



A student training at the new centre opened by The Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust.

Read more at <https://www.horsetalk.co.nz/2017/03/16/gambia-equine-hospital-training-centre/#QP8zRd6s0LKqW56B.99>

awareness among the population about the role of donkeys in society and worked to stop the abuse of donkeys.

Emmanuel Onoja from Nigeria: "I treated a lame donkey, which the owner had almost given up on. It gave the owner so much joy and, as a result, made many more donkey owners wanting to learn about proper donkey care and welfare."

Chris Garrett from The Donkey Sanctuary said: "In Zimbabwe we made a nice lightweight cart that was really popular and is being copied. Aaron, from MWAMFUMBA in Zambia, was the designer, he then went on to Botswana and made another eight of these carts. We trained someone to build these carts who, in turn, is training others all over Southern Africa."

The skins trade

was of concern and was mentioned by nearly every respondent. TAWESO in Tanzania indicated that it was being met through intensive advocacy and involvement of all the relevant stakeholders. Action against the skins trade was specifically mentioned from Tanzania, Gambia and Malawi, including the closure of abattoirs and participating in the successful advocacy against the skins trade to a cross section of audiences.

Dr Richard Ssuna from Malawi said: "Our biggest challenge in 2017 has been a failure to harness our strength in synergy. There is a lot more that could have been done collectively in 2017. There were a lot of common voices throughout the region towards especially the donkey skin trade but I think collective action also has a place in advancing the message."

Successes in 2017

Below are some of the positive and inspiring stories that were shared with us:

Donkey Dairy in South Africa: "Buying more than 60 donkeys from auctions that would have otherwise probably have ended up at slaughter yards."

FAWCAM in Cameroon wrote that they had created an increased

From Gambia we heard that the new Makasutu Training Centre and The Derek Knottenbelt Veterinary Hospital have been opened by The Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust (GHDT), which has a major focus on educational animal welfare programmes to equip locals with the knowledge and skills to solve their own problems. The Gambian Animal Advocates Association was also growing rapidly in that region of Africa.

Tozie Zokufa from the Humane Society International explained the 2017 positives as: "The establishment of the Africa Platform for Animal Welfare and the endorsement of the Africa Animal Welfare Strategy for the continent of Africa was a positive step. The hosting of an Animal Welfare conference at the UN Headquarters in Nairobi was also a great success."

Responses specifying the main goals for 2018 will appear in our next newsletter. Please send us your plans if you have not yet done so.

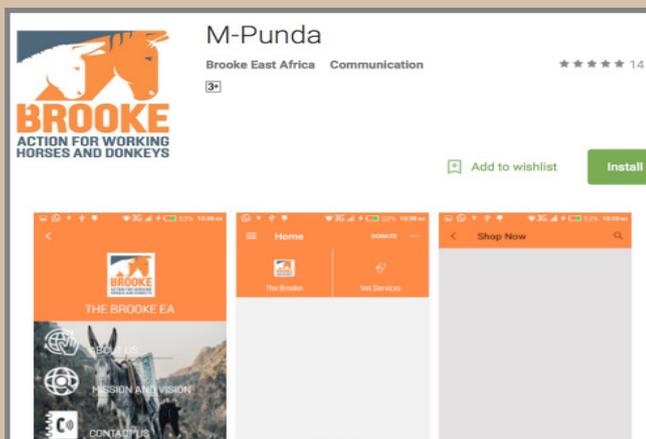
Thank you to all who responded to the questions. All respondents achieved some positive results – and that is what counts for the donkeys that benefitted. Let us continue to share our work, and strive for further improvements in donkeys' lives.

Co-ordination of animal welfare in Southern Africa

In December a meeting took place to structure a way of collaborating and coordinating animal welfare work in the Southern Africa region. The meeting was organised by Tozie Zokufa, well-known in animal welfare in Africa. Animal welfare representatives from Botswana, Malawi, Tanzania, Namibia and South Africa; as well as Dr. Hiver Boussini, the African Union delegate responsible for Animal Health and Welfare, attended this inaugural meeting.

Help is a phone call away!

The Brooke East Africa is happy to bring to you the M-Punda android mobile app that will help you find veterinary services for this region from your cell phone. Go to the Play Store and download the application, install it and register. Then search for the required services and call. You can contact Kendat Kenya at <http://www.kendat.org/causes/animal-welfare/> or via facebook@kendatkenya, for more information.



A safety moment...

Remember to drive carefully if you are travelling during the holiday season. Donkeys don't read the rules of the road and might not give way. It is equally important that owners of donkeys are educated and reminded to look after their animals and not let them roam unattended.



Research on possible donkey farming in RSA

A delegation from the North West Provincial Government in South Africa recently visited Eseltjiesrus Donkey Sanctuary in the Western Cape, to examine practical aspects about donkey care.

The intention of the delegation was "to change the image of the industry and the donkey because we believe that there is more value to the donkey than is currently explored. We want to develop the value chain of the donkey and by-products to benefit traders." They also expressed concern about welfare issues that had already arisen in that province, as well as the impact of theft of donkeys on their owners.

Eseltjiesrus pointed out that the best by-product of donkeys is their traction ability and that they are extremely hard workers, easy to manage by women and children and relatively low maintenance under natural conditions. The Sanctuary also pointed out the importance of taking note of developments around the skins trade in other African countries and provided the information available at Donkeys for Africa.



Back row l to r: Johan van Zijl, Eseltjiesrus, Sebetso Morofi, farmer, Ketlile Mabiletsa, Director: Farmer Support, Langa Madyibi, Director: Veterinary Services, Gabothuse Sepako, Agricultural Economist. **Middle:** Juanita Lourens, Eseltjiesrus. **Front:** Del Jones, Animal Welfare, McGregor, Ntshipi Maeco, Agricultural Economist, Thapelo Ratshikana, Deputy Director: Field Services Dept. and Annemarie van Zijl, Eseltjiesrus.

From the editor

Good co-ordination and communication amongst donkey welfare organisations is a requirement when providing effective educational and welfare benefit to donkeys in Africa. Several initiatives have been launched this year to address this, with Donkeys for Africa being one such initiative.

Our reach and impact as a communication portal has grown past our initial expectations. Our message is effective and we receive regular contact requests and information from our readers. Thank you for helping the donkey population in Africa. Knowledge is the best weapon we have in the fight against the skins trade and the abuse of donkeys. Keep sending us information and your feedback.

Supported by



THE DONKEY SANCTUARY

Take care during this holiday season and try to provide as many donkey ear rubs as possible!

-  editor@donkeysforafrica.org
-  www.donkeysforafrica.org
-  Donkeys-for-Africa