

Taking a stance against the skin trade

Many countries are taking a strong response against the trade in donkey skins to preserve their donkey populations for the people who depend on them for transport and agricultural tasks. But more needs to be done.

Countries that have passed legislation banning the slaughter of donkeys for meat or the trade in their skins include Ethiopia, Mali, Senegal, The Gambia, Niger, Burkina Faso, Tanzania and Botswana while Zimbabwe is taking steps to prevent the trade getting a foothold there.

The bad news is that there is still no end to the abuse and cruelty to donkeys to meet the demand for skins throughout Africa. In South Africa the National Council of SPCAs (NSPCA) recently responded to a tip-off and seized about 1 000 donkey skins and seven tiger skins from a smallholding east of Johannesburg. Equipment linked to the illegal donkey skin trade was also found. Evidence is that the donkeys were slaughtered in completely unacceptable and inhumane ways.

Huge impact on donkey owners

When owners lose some donkeys, the remainder have to work harder, resulting in less work done, weary animals and reduced income, whilst replacement costs soar. Transport of goods, school-children, elderly and sick people is affected.

Concerns in South Africa

Estimates are that at least 1.8 million donkey skins are being traded per year – stacked and shipped, undetected, from South Africa to China.

There is talk in the North-West Province of South Africa of establishing donkey farms to meet the demand for skins. No long-term viability or impact study has been done.



Different organisations will appeal to the authorities to suspend the development until further investigations have been done.

There is a real possibility that donkeys will become so endangered as to jeopardise their future. Governments need to take action before it is too late. The impetus for change will have to come from informed and rational lobbying and action by welfare bodies.

To work or not to work? – that is the question

Donkeys may never have a choice, but for the fortunate few who may have the option of rescue or retirement, the following thoughts from Dr Peta Jones from Donkey Power may be relevant.

Donkey Power



Dr Peta Jones is well known throughout Africa for her work in harnessing and hitching related to working animals. She is the Secretary of the Steering Committee of Animal Traction Network of Eastern and Southern Africa, ATNESA (<http://www.atnesa.org>) and a member of the National Steering Committee of the South African Network for Animal

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“For a healthy donkey halfway through its natural lifespan, exclusion from work can seem as much punishment as it would seem to a human. The trick is to ensure that donkeys do not overwork, and that they do not suffer from the work that they are asked to do because of wrongly-judged equipment. Before condemning a donkey to ‘rescue’, donkey lovers and welfare organizations need to be able to answer a range of related questions:

- *To what extent is it possible to change the working conditions of the donkey?*
- *If there are signs of injury, what was the cause of this?*
- *If change is not possible, and the donkey has to be removed from work or its owner, what will be its long-term fate?”*

The donkey must be the working animal which has received least attention. In many instances, it has been widely ignored by extension services, scientists, planners and policy makers.

Donkeys are no strangers to hardship

Donkeys for Africa questionnaire reveals interesting trends

Our questionnaire about donkeys' living and working conditions received responses covering Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, South Sudan and Somalia.

Trends in areas

Certain trends emerged. The number of donkeys per owner is smaller in urban and rural areas, as low as one or two, and increases in the pastoral areas where an owner generally has up to 10 or 15 donkeys.



A common sight in rural Africa. Improvement of cart and harnessing is evident in this picture.

Breeding of donkeys

There are few attempts to control breeding. Stallions may be gelded by owners or support organisations in some areas. Jennies breed as soon as they mature, from around two years old. They work until just before foaling down and return to work as soon as they are needed, often within weeks. The foal usually stays with its mother, running alongside her when she works. In isolated cases the foal is tied up to keep it off the roads while the mother works.

Common causes of death

Donkeys covered by our survey start work at about two years of age or younger, and work until death at about 10 or 12 years. The main reasons for death are overwork, illnesses, road accidents and wound infections, with drought being a less common cause. Generally the carcass is left in the field to decompose or be eaten by animals. In parts of Botswana, Mozambique and central Tanzania human consumption of the meat is increasing. The health hazards of this are obvious.

It is clear that donkeys lead hard lives. Their owners are often unable to ensure better welfare for them, as they themselves struggle with difficult living conditions. Ignorance of correct care often plays a big role in how donkeys are treated in harsh conditions. Respect to the organisations that work to address these issues.

Thank you to all who responded to our survey. Share your thoughts by emailing: editor@donkeysforafrica.org



Measuring welfare

Assessment has often been intuitive, with challenges in evaluating the effectiveness of support.

The Donkey Sanctuary created the simple framework The Hand, which enables qualitative measurement of welfare parameters. The Hand assesses the obvious welfare indicators (indicated by the thumb and fingers) like body condition, wounds, lameness, injuries and diseases as well as behaviour and demeanour. These are scored and mapped where appropriate, to identify patterns. The palm of the hand reminds us to consider the whole life of the donkey from birth to death, and the back of the hand represents social and economic factors affecting the animal. Long-term welfare improvement can be achieved by showing communities the benefits of humane practices.

Eseltjesrus Donkey Sanctuary in South Africa has developed workshop material using The Hand, including the natural behaviours essential for good welfare. The Donkey Sanctuary funded a series of these workshops. To date the direct reach has been 130 delegates who are able to apply The Hand and also earned their CPD (continued professional development) points if they were registered with the SA Veterinary Council.

See <https://www.thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk/blog/handy-welfare-tool> for a summary of the assessment.

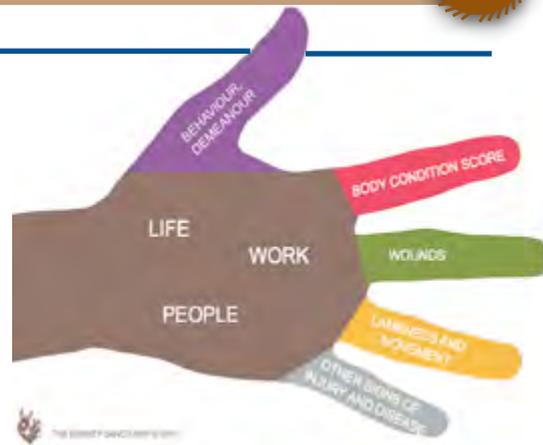
Animal welfare professionals are familiar with the Five Freedoms. There is now a more positive approach to these standards,

defining them as Five Needs. The Five Needs are the basic needs of all protected animals (including equids). The owner should meet these needs in the animal's management.

The five needs include:-

- 1) the need for a suitable environment
- 2) the need for a suitable diet
- 3) the need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- 4) any need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals,
- 5) the need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury or disease.

Full information is available in the Equine Welfare Compendium developed by the National Equine Welfare Council (UK). Refer to the link below. <http://www.newc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Equine-Brochure-09.pdf>



Donkey dairy farming

Farming donkeys for their milk is nothing new. Is it viable and what are the dangers to donkey welfare?

The benefits of donkey milk have been well recorded. DfA and The Donkey Sanctuary (UK) visited one of the few donkey dairies in Africa.

The Donkey Dairy farm in Gauteng, South Africa, was established in 2012 by Zak Hendrikz and Jesse Christelis. The focus on the farm includes buying donkeys from places of misery, or via auctions, and then rehabilitating these donkeys.

Sustainability (and love) is important

“We love our donkeys, and we constantly look at sustainable ways of working in harmony with our donkeys” says Zak from the Donkey Dairy. The owners feel strongly that uplifting and respecting donkeys will counter cruelty which is often fuelled by profit (such as with the skin trade). Research by the owners was conducted and the herd evolved into dairy donkeys with the milking process refined to produce pristine donkey milk. In time a range of natural skin care products also was launched, adding greater scope to the viability of the farm.

Happy donkeys produce good milk

The process of milking donkeys is very different to that of cows and goats. With cows, for example, babies are usually taken away from their mothers at a week old and either put on the bottle or sold, with then all of the mother’s milk used for production. However, donkeys are extremely sensitive animals and the jenny (female donkey) will only release her milk if her foal is present. At the Donkey Dairy the foal gets all the milk for the first two months to ensure that it gets the best start in life. After two months the foals go into a nursery group

during the day where they get high quality foal feed and grass.

The jennies are then turned out into a field next to their foals to graze.

Milked by hand, every three hours

During the day the jennies are milked every three hours as they do not have a reservoir for milk in their udders like cows. Milking is done by hand and the foal needs to be in sight or next to the jenny. This alleviates stress and stimulates milk release. In the afternoon the foals are reunited with their mothers and all milk produced in the evening is for the foal alone.

Milk production in donkeys is extremely low, with only slightly more than a litre of milk per day, per jenny, being harvested. Managed diligently and professionally in this way, this small production makes donkey milk a rare and care-driven process.

It is a long term relationship

The owners of this donkey dairy say “We have a long term love relationship with our donkeys.” Zak agrees that donkey dairy farming might create welfare issues for donkeys. “Donkey dairy farming needs to be done with love and within a professional farm environment. Besides which, no jenny will produce milk unless she is a happy donkey. I suppose that is why our milk is so good?” he concluded.



Zak Hendrikz and Jesse Christelis started the Donkey Dairy, situated outside Pretoria, in 2012.

No jenny will produce milk unless she feels safe and happy and also has her foal next to her.



Milking is done every three hours by hand.



The herd, consisting mainly of rehabilitated donkeys, grazing peacefully at this donkey dairy.

For another example of donkey milk farming in Naivasha sub county, Kenya, watch this You Tube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQ8pQSiTGv4>

Ground-breaking research on African Horse Sickness

Dr Camilla Weyer-Mehtar recently submitted research on AHS Epidemiology through the Department of Veterinary Tropical Diseases at the University of Pretoria under the supervision of Prof Alan Guthrie and Prof Jim MacLachlan (University of California, USA).



Defined AHS controlled areas are implemented in South Africa.

Key questions have been raised about African horse sickness and Camilla's initial research focussed on the transmission of AHS to the Robertson area in South Africa in 2006.

Her study showed that

sub-clinical infections are a reality and a horse that was sub-clinically infected had taken AHS to this area. Another outbreak started in March 2011 in Mamre, a small village in the Western Cape. She worked on this outbreak together with Mpho Monyai of the Equine Research Centre, under the supervision of Prof Guthrie. Questions were raised and a definite pattern was identified. Guthrie said "You need people with very special skills to identify these patterns and to ensure that the data collected is beyond reproach. We have the unique situation where we have people in the field asking these important questions, with our laboratory investigating and providing the answers." The challenge of AHS transmission is relevant to all equids in Africa and we look forward to further research results.

CLICK

For more information about AHS research go to https://www.nc.cdc.gov/eid/article/22/12/16-0718_article

Brooke East Africa

A short profile of a donkey welfare organisation operating in Africa.

The Brooke East Africa (Brooke EA) is an affiliate of the Brooke Hospital for Animals in the UK which works across 11 countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East to reduce the suffering of over two million working equines.

Brooke East Africa works through partner organisations based in Kenya and Tanzania to improve the lives of over 300 000 working donkeys. They also support organisations in Sudan, Somaliland and Tanzania through their Innovation Fund. Strategic goals are to help more working animals in need in more places around the world, and to make lasting change by working with a wide range of people and organisations that can directly or indirectly improve the lives of working animals.

To achieve these goals, they implement four objectives:

- Increase the scale and reach of their work with animals
- Grow income and awareness to increase impact
- Deliver programmes to Brooke standards
- Increase accountability to donors and beneficiaries.

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Jupiter, the blue-eyed spotted foal

The Donkey Dairy in South Africa also breeds spotted donkeys. Coupled with this is the rare occurrence of blue-eyed donkeys. Recently a special foal was born. This little jack is a spotted sorrel with blue eyes. There are few records of such donkeys in Africa. Please contact us if you have any information or comment about this rare breed.



A lighter moment...

with credit to www.longhopes.org



Probably not for working donkeys, but bored donkeys often look for anything to play with. The answer is to have plenty of toys on hand to keep them amused.

Observation, and a request from the editor

The concept of a communication platform for African donkey welfare organisations developed after the African Donkey Welfare Workshop held in Bela Bela, South Africa in 2015. Initially we imagined the reach to be confined to those conference delegates. It is evident that **Donkeys for Africa** goes beyond that. Statistics on our website indicate that we have already reached hundreds of readers around the world. Thank you to all our partners, and especially The Donkey Sanctuary, for making this newsletter and our website possible and for promoting donkey welfare.

Communicate with us

Donkeys can reputedly hear other donkeys nearly 100 kilometers away in a desert environment. We like to hear from you, especially from all the donkey lovers working in Africa. We invite questions, comments and feedback on our articles as well as suggestions for further topics.

The Donkey Sanctuary
made this
communication
possible



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SANCTUARY

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 Donkeys-for-Africa