

A sustainable future for the African Donkey

Dequinet (Diamond Equine Network), based in Nigeria, organized a Zoom discussion for World Donkey Day 2023: “Promoting a sustainable future for the African Donkey”.

The event was initiated and co-ordinated by Dr Philip Mshelia of Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria, and the discussion was anchored by Annemarie van Zijl, Editor of Donkeys for Africa. Panel members were drawn from Cameroon, the USA and Nigeria.

In discussing the theme “Donkey-Human Interaction”, Dr Amy Mclean of the University of California Davis observed that educating young children about the sentience of animals and particularly donkeys, combined with interactions could lead to improved animal welfare. Amy commented that “if we have that bond and care, then we have a very integral part of our family, not just an item, a tool, but you actually have a living creature that becomes a part of your family, and is giving back. The soul of a donkey is so different than that of a horse or any other animal I’ve been with. There’s something about a donkey that touches you in a different way. I hope lots of people will have that experience, and I hope that will help them increase their appreciation for donkeys overall.”

Dr Sunday Agbonika, an animal-assisted therapy specialist, pioneers Human-Animal Interactions in Nigeria for the benefit of special needs children. He believes that animal-assisted interventions occur in rural communities in an informal manner. Donkeys are ideal for this noble task as their temperaments are suited to the demands of the interactions. Such intervention programmes can grow and develop into beneficial relationships for the animals and the children. According to a paper published in Italy, donkeys are the third most popular species in animal assisted interventions, after dogs and horses. In Ethiopia donkeys have been serving in such interventions for a number of years. Riding donkeys could really help with building muscle memory, especially with children or people who have locomotive issues.

“The beauty of donkeys lies in their uniqueness, not in how people perceive them”

Addressing the second theme: “Managing emerging donkey welfare concerns in Africa,” Dr Mshelia pointed out that the problem of illegal donkey slaughter became evident from about 2016, when both the meat and skins became sought after. Brutal methods of slaughter were commonplace and the accompanying widespread theft of donkeys destroyed people’s livelihoods.

Referring to the skins trade, Philip said “I don’t think it’s a business, because every business that does not have a sustainable commodity is not a business.”

Proclaiming a ban on the slaughter and skins trade is one step but unless there is implementation of the ban it is useless. What counts is the mechanism put in place to make the ban effective. In addition, to say we need more data is counter-productive – the slaughter continues while we collect more data.

Dr Maimuna Habib, retired Chief Veterinary Officer of Nigeria, commented that the price of donkey skins has fallen, there is less slaughter of donkeys and fewer buyers of skins. This will lead to an increase in the number of donkeys in the rural areas of Nigeria.

Dr Mshelia closed by adding that “People use donkeys not because they lack technological advancement, but rather because they hold a special place in their hearts. As a result, they encourage intrinsic positive factors that will be difficult to replace in communities that depend on donkeys.

The beauty of donkeys lies in their uniqueness, not in how people perceive them”.



INSIDE: Profile of SPANA
Improving the welfare of working donkeys and other working animals across the world since 1923.



Visitors' perspectives at the Gambia Horse & Donkey Trust



Three experienced equine veterinarians were sponsored by the BEVA Trust to volunteer at the Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust (GHDT) in February 2023.

They reported: "During our visit, we attended four outreach clinics where local people could bring their animals along to be treated. It was fantastic to see so many coming along purely for health checks – the owners were clearly educated that a healthy donkey is a donkey that is able to work more efficiently! Sadly there were many wounds from poorly fitting tack/harnesses and ropes being used as bits or as a way to control the animal by wrapping it around the pastern. It was extremely rewarding to be able to give well-fitted head collars to all animals that needed them. Education was a key part of these clinics- explaining to owners the importance of constant access to water, regular food as well as rest days for their animal in order to retain as much strength as possible.

Back at the main hospital we saw a huge variety of cases from tetanus to horrific fractures (that would normally be considered catastrophic back at home) to blood borne diseases, particularly trypanosomiasis. The diagnostic aids available were understandably limited - we were able to perform a manual PCV, TP & blood smears. All of the staff at the hospital were very keen to learn, always asking questions and keen to

learn new skills. We felt as though we learnt a lot from them too- especially how best to handle some of the feisty/stubborn donkeys!

It wasn't just horses & donkeys that we treated during our stay at GHDT- we also treated dogs, cats, goats, sheep & cows which as purely equine vets made us scratch our heads at times! The charity does amazing work for all animals within the country."

GHDT runs a project where they provide a donkey and sometimes a cart or plough to a family that cannot afford one. The recipient of the donkey must come for training in donkey management, provide shelter for the donkey and sign or thumbprint a contract promising never to abuse it. The donkey is visited on a monthly basis and one warning is given if there are any concerns. If on the subsequent visit the matters of concern have not been addressed, the donkey is withdrawn. Two hundred donkeys have gone out under this scheme and many of them return years later to retire at GHDT.

The Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust's latest newsletter is at <http://www.gambiahorseanddonkey.org.uk/summer2023.pdf>

Illegal donkey slaughter still rife in parts of Kenya

Report from Nicholas Mungiria in Kenya. kiraity@gmail.com



Donkeys rescued and being evacuated to a KSPCA shelter.



Horrific scenes of illegal and brutal slaughtering in the bush.



There has been an upsurge in illegal donkey slaughter in various counties in Kenya. The main motivating factor is the skins that are illegally exported. This continues despite the ban on donkey slaughter for export of skins. In addition the uninspected meat is smuggled into the consumption market, creating public health concerns.

In May, 63 donkeys were recovered from illegal slaughter bomas in an operation organized by the relevant security committee. Some of the butchers were arrested together with the vehicles used to ferry away the meat. Later the same security operation recovered another 78 donkeys from grazing fields and bomas just after they were delivered from various markets.

The animals were first detained at the Anti-Stock Theft Unit at Rwamburi. Later the security committee requested the KSPCA to take the animals into their custody for proper handling

and care. KSPCA called on other partners including Brooke East Africa and KENDAT for help in the maintenance of the donkeys that survived the gruelling conditions and long journeys.

KSPCA identified temporary foster homes for the donkeys near the Naivasha KSPCA shelter. KSPCA states "We look forward to helping these donkeys survive through the provision of veterinary care, proper nutrition and the support of donors to see the 128 donkeys survive, to win their case in the law courts and have them adopted to lovely homes."

There is an appeal for help from any organisations with the skills or ability to support KSPCA in these tasks.

Contact the KSPCA Director at Emma.Ngugi@kspca.or.ke or through <https://kspca-kenya.org>

A hundred years of caring

SPANAN (the Society for the Protection of Animals Abroad) has been improving the welfare of working donkeys and other working animals across the world since 1923 and was the first global charity dedicated to the welfare of working animals in low-income countries.

In 2022 the charity worked in 23 countries, including Ethiopia, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Botswana and Zimbabwe. In 2022 SPANA provided lifesaving care and treatment to 188,852 working donkeys across Africa.

Working donkeys support the livelihoods of families in low-income communities, through such activities as transporting food, water, goods and firewood. However, these donkeys often experience poor welfare, working in extreme conditions with no available veterinary care when they are sick or injured.

SPANAN addresses the welfare of working donkeys and other working animals across the world by ensuring the provision of veterinary treatment, training for owners in animal care and the teaching of animal welfare for children.

An example of the lifesaving difference SPANA is making to the lives of working donkeys can be seen in Mali, West Africa.

SPANAN is helping working animals across Mali, including donkeys working on the rubbish dumps of the capital city, Bamako. Here donkeys enable their owners to earn a small income by transporting waste to the towering rubbish dumps located in the city. Pulling heavy carts up steep slopes, with sharp objects underfoot, these working donkeys regularly toil in intense heat.



Working donkeys hauling heavy carts across the towering rubbish dumps of Bamako, Mali.



SPANAN runs animal welfare education classes for children across the world - (Ethiopia).

In these dangerous conditions the welfare of the animals is under threat and there is a high risk of injury and illness.

The SPANA team offers a lifeline to these working donkeys by providing essential care and support through the charity's mobile veterinary clinic. SPANA also delivers training and advice to help owners look after the welfare of their animals, ensuring animals have safe and comfortable equipment, access to a supply of fresh water and nutritious feed, and shelter from extreme conditions.

As the charity celebrates its centenary this year, the need for SPANA's work is more critical than ever. The welfare of donkeys and other working animals is at severe risk from global challenges such as rising poverty, climate change, deadly diseases and threats like the Donkey Skins Trade. The charity recently launched its new Strategy for 2023-27, which outlines SPANA's plans over the next five years to transform the lives of working animals across the world, and support the communities who depend on these animals for their livelihoods.



SPANAN provides emergency feed for working animals in desperate need during crisis situations.



SPANAN's mobile veterinary clinics help working animals in remote, rural locations.

Images ©SPANAN.

World Donkey Day

Globally many organisations used social media to raise awareness of the plight of working donkeys and to appeal for support to help them. In Botswana the Okavango Animal Welfare Trust held a celebration in Samochima Village. Local children enjoyed a specially decorated cake while the donkeys enjoyed treats.

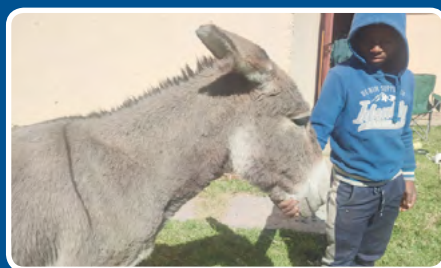


The multi-faceted role of donkeys

A newly published article appeared in the special issue of the journal *Animals* 2023 which had the theme: Improving Animal Welfare: A Key Factor for a Shift towards More Sustainable Animal Agriculture. The article is titled “Means of Livelihood, Clean Environment to Women Empowerment: The Multi-Faceted Role of Donkeys” and is available in our library.

The article reviews the value of donkeys in a variety of sectors, including agriculture, construction industry, and mining, as well as their role in empowering women and achieving sustainable development goals. A conclusion is that there is a need for the One Welfare approach where the welfare of animals and humans are considered interlinked to each other, so a change in human welfare will bring positive change in animal welfare, and improved animal welfare will increase productivity and household income.

Donkey knowledge in South Africa
amaTrac Uluntu held a successful training workshop at Khayaletu to teach the making and fitting of correct harnessing.



People usually hold and twist the bottom lip of a donkey to lead them. After humane education, this young boy leads his donkey gently with his hand.



Demonstrating, on a young donkey owner, how the back harness fits and how the harness and hitching system work together.

“Not to hurt our humble brethren is our first duty to them, but to stop there is not enough. We have a higher mission – to be of service to them wherever they require it.” St Francis of Assisi

Reflectors for donkeys

The Cape Town to Cairo highway passes through the Mtera district in the southern part of Tanzania. Here many donkeys are involved in road accidents, with severe injuries and loss of lives of the animals. The team from Tanzania Animal Welfare Society (TAWESO) has been fitting reflectors to carts and donkeys to increase their visibility to road users. This work is supported by SPANA.



Treating donkeys in Tanzania

Tanzania Humane Charity (TAHUCHA) hosted 15 intern vets from Sokoine University of Agriculture to participate in World Veterinary Day while during April they treated 169 donkeys at their Bukombe Donkey Sanctuary. In May TAHUCHA was called to treat two donkeys that had been attacked by a swarm of bees. They treated the donkeys by administering antihistamine, hydrocortisone and meloxicam. Cold therapy was also applied on the skin to reduce swelling, and sodium bicarbonate and malt vinegar were applied topically. Thankfully the donkeys recovered within two weeks. Appreciation to **Animal Aid Abroad** for their support.



From the Editor

When reading through our newsletters and attending workshops and conferences, it becomes clear that there are recurring donkey welfare issues that are the same worldwide. Harnessing, carts, pack-saddles, veterinary challenges, working donkeys at too young an age - the list is discouragingly familiar.

Are the solutions always the same? In some cases, yes, such as providing education and veterinary and other support. But often solutions won't work unless they are appropriate for the area where the problem occurs. For example, leather harnessing is beautiful, hardy, long-lasting and humane – if it is cared for, oiled, kept clean and correctly adjusted. But often leather straps have greater value than on the back of a donkey, or the facilities to care for the leather properly don't exist.

The path to a sustainable solution to any problem is to identify a locally appropriate answer, even if it involves plaiting dried banana leaves to create harnessing straps as was done in one case.


Never be too proud to engage with the community and the conditions where the problem arises. Learn from the donkeys – humility is a strength, not a weakness.

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