

Compassionate handling

The value of a soothing approach



Gentle interaction with Anne Scharlow, animal communicator.

Any intervention with donkeys (or any animals) involves handling – whether to obtain a positive or negative outcome. Every handling interaction creates a memory in the animal and the human. This markedly influences every future handling interaction. Let us try to ensure that the memories are positive.

Challenges arise when the animals are not accustomed to handling, or have learned to evade interaction with humans on the basis of earlier negative experiences.

The skill of the handler will influence the reaction of the animal.

As animal welfare practitioners we owe it to the animals, and ourselves, to ensure that each handling interaction leaves a positive memory for both parties. This means being informed about the behaviours of each species. Sometimes it is inevitable that the animal will experience momentary discomfort, but we should ensure that the lasting memory of any interaction is positive, or at least neutral.

The tendency towards humane handling must be encouraged. It is safer for both the humans and the animals. Teach youngsters from an early age to handle animals gently. This can create life-long patterns and attitudes.

Practical difficulties do arise, for example in situations where large numbers of animals need attention in a limited time. In spite of this, humane practices are still possible and will result

in a calmer, less stressful event. Accustoming animals to certain procedures also helps to lessen their anxiety and fear.


With specific reference to donkeys

Where possible, mimic certain handling procedures under normal conditions – don't wait for a crisis.

Encourage owners to accustom their donkeys to wearing halters and having their feet handled. Owners can mimic farriery procedures even if they are unable to file or trim hooves. Handle the donkey all over. Accustom it to having its tail lifted as if to measure temperature. Pinch the skin on the neck as though giving an injection. Open the donkey's mouth gently to prepare for dental examinations.

Such interactions carried out regularly will habituate the donkeys to being handled without pain or discomfort. This will pay dividends when there is the need for interventions to address health issues.

This is time well spent – and the bond between animal and owner is strengthened each time.

	<p>Refer to https://www.thebrooke.org/sites/default/files/Compassionate-Handling-for-Life.pdf © Brooke 2019 Compassionate Handling for Life: Brooke Action for Working Horses and Donkeys, London, UK</p>
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Time for a different approach – Dr Philip Mshelia *Skins Trade Researcher*



*Donkey skins being laid out in the sun to dry at a slaughterhouse in Kenya.
Image: The Donkey Sanctuary*

The illegal donkey slaughter and skin trade have escalated across Africa. Many bans and enforcement efforts have been introduced, and many have failed. This may be due to a lack of community participation and economic alternatives.

To effectively protect donkeys, the approach must shift from reactive measures to a proactive, sustainable strategy.

Challenges in the Current Approach

- **Enforcement Without Economic Solutions:** Policy interventions often focus on bans without addressing the economic drivers of the illegal trade.
- **Lack of Alternative Livelihoods:** Communities that depend on donkeys for income are left with no viable economic options.
- **Limited Community Engagement:** Top-down policies fail to gain local support, leading to non-compliance and continued illicit trade.

Regulations designed to protect donkeys frequently collapse because they do not address the root causes of the issue—economic desperation and weak community ownership of the problem. To be effective, donkey protection policies must secure local participation, economic stability, and practical, community-driven enforcement mechanisms.

Reframing the Approach

A successful donkey protection strategy requires measurable, realistic goals. These should be mapped across all levels of society, ensuring accountability, economic resilience, and sustainable development.

A sustainable solution requires policies that integrate:

- Economic incentives to reduce reliance on the donkey trade.
- Stronger legal frameworks with practical enforcement mechanisms.
- Education and advocacy to shift community attitudes and behaviours.

Policy Recommendations

Integrated Economic Strategies:

- Develop alternative income-generating activities for communities that rely on the donkey skin trade for economic survival.
- Promote sustainable livestock farming and vocational training to provide new employment opportunities.
- Implement microfinance programmes to support small businesses transitioning away from donkey trade dependency.

Enforcement and Monitoring:

- Strengthen legal frameworks with clear enforcement mechanisms.

- Improve cross-border collaboration between governments, law enforcement, and local communities to disrupt illegal trade networks.

Community Engagement:

- Launch public awareness campaigns on the economic and ecological benefits of donkey preservation.
- Provide incentives for communities that protect donkeys, such as subsidies for alternative farming or business ventures.

Veterinary and Welfare Support:

- Increase access to veterinary services to improve donkey health and longevity.
- Develop subsidized healthcare programmes to promote responsible ownership and welfare.

Civil Society Partnerships:

- Strengthen collaborations with NGOs, farmer cooperatives, and animal welfare organizations.
- Support community-led advocacy programmes to enforce humane and sustainable practices.

The second Pan African Donkey Conference (PADCo-2)

will take place from 26 - 27 June 2025 in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. This significant event provides a platform for sensitising and uniting the whole of Africa in one voice, particularly with a consolidated position on the donkey skin trade (DST).

For updates, visit <https://www.au-ibar.org/events/pan-african-donkey-conference>



The Pan African Donkey Conference (PADCo) is a continental flagship on donkey welfare issues. Image: PADCo



Outreach in Botswana



In November 2024, Maun Animal Welfare Society (MAWS) organized an outreach project in the northern part of the Okavango Delta panhandle, with sponsorship from SPANA.

Besides routine attention to small animals, services also covered donkeys and horses. These included treatment for parasites, basic wound care, hoof trimming, harness checking and discussions on care and treatment of working equines.

The team consisted of the volunteer Vet surgeons Dr Justene Tedder and Dr Braam Luyt, the volunteer farrier Freddy from Shakawe, four assistants from MAWS (Vasco, Charlie, Metlha and Carmen) and Kagiso who came from Equine Assist to share his knowledge. Two volunteers from Samochima Village, Thomas and Olethilwe, were also involved.

A total of 247 animals were assisted in this outreach: 172 dogs, 15 cats, 42 donkeys and 18 horses.

More donkeys were expected. The main reason for the relatively low numbers of donkeys was that it was ploughing season and the donkeys were working.

Treatments included Panacur for the internal parasites and tick grease for the external. The farrier provided hoof care to all the equines in need of it. Wounds were treated; with most of the wounds arising from bad equipment (on the chest or from hobbles/saddles) and bite wounds.

This programme will be ongoing into 2025.



Metlha with a donkey in Samochima.



A family and their donkeys.



World Donkey Day

World Donkey Day is observed in many countries on 8th May – to recognize the contributions of donkeys and to raise awareness of their needs. Have you ever wondered about the origin of this day?

Meet Dr Raziq Kakar – the founder of World Donkey Day. Dr Abdul Raziq Kakar is a distinguished animal scientist



Dr Kakar. Image: arkbiodiv.com



with many decades of experience, specialising in sustainable livestock production, particularly focusing on camels, and dromedaries as potential dairy animals. Dr Kakar is also the founder of World Camel Day. Together camels and donkeys play a vital role as working animals that are resilient to feed and water scarcities.

After teaming up with Dr Peta Jones in South Africa, Dr Kakar's concept of a day to honour donkeys gained momentum and now donkeys have their own day!

<https://arkbiodiv.com/2025/01/29/world-donkey-day-recognizing-the-unsung-heroes-of-human-civilization/>

Working animals' support in disasters

Thanks to Brooke's advocacy, the United Nations General Assembly has adopted a resolution on disaster risk reduction, formally recognising the vital role of livestock and working animals as key to disaster resilience for communities, and calling for their protection.

Once implemented, this resolution means that working animals will be protected from death or injury during disasters. They will be evacuated, taken to safety, and provided with water, food and medical care. This will enable them to continue their contributions as working animals.

Apart from their daily contributions to survival in dependent communities, working animals play an important role in addressing climate disasters. A donkey can get into disaster-struck zones where there is no vehicle access due to damaged roads or bridges. They can help evacuate people and bring in supplies and rescue workers. In the longer term, working animals help rebuild destroyed infrastructure and aid economic recovery.

Source: Bond www.bond.org.uk/news/2025/01/



Welfare concerns in Ghana

A valuable paper researching donkey slaughter in Ghana has been published by Kate Fletcher et al. It is available in *Animals*: <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/14/24/3673>

This study shows that donkeys in Ghana currently experience welfare compromise during all stages of the slaughter process. Aversive handling practises and ineffective slaughter methods delay the time to loss of consciousness and increase suffering.

Kate Fletcher is a PhD researcher in the Animal Welfare Science and Ethics Department at the Royal Veterinary College in London.

See our front page article on Compassionate Handling. Every animal, as a sentient creature, deserves respect up to its final breath.

From the Editor

The future of Donkeys for Africa – an invitation

Regular readers of our newsletters will know that 2024 saw the passing away, all too soon, of our publisher and thought-shaker, Peter Blum. We honour his creativity, technical skills and above all – his deep compassion for donkeys.

Our priority is to regain momentum and to continue providing a much-appreciated network service across Africa to support all persons involved in the care and welfare of donkeys.

May we ask YOU, our reader, to kindly consider the following proposed development:

The establishment of an advisory panel for Donkeys for Africa.

Our intention is to continue with the production and publishing of DfA newsletters and to expand the library, but with counsel and guidance from persons closely involved with donkeys across the continent.

Please let us know your thoughts on this proposal.

You may possibly also wish to indicate your willingness to participate. Another option would be for you to recommend any person who could play a role in this revised approach.

The modus operandi and the parameters of this venture would be negotiated by the participants.

We look forward to hearing from you as soon as you have time!

Donkeys for Africa – promoting communication about donkey welfare across Africa.



Annual Summary of the Meru Animal Welfare Organization (MAWO)

MAWO, working in Tanzania, has published its 2024 Annual Summary. Read the full report in our library or at <https://www.meruanimalwelfare.org/>

Volunteer Programme with MAWO: Applications now open for 2025!

Calling Veterinarians, Veterinary students, Vet nurse students, pre-vet students, gap-year students and anyone passionate about veterinary fieldwork and animal welfare – see the MAWO annual review for dates and how to apply.

AfricaAnimalWelfareConference

The detailed report of the 8th Africa Animal Welfare Conference - Action 2024 is now available at https://www.aawconference.org/2024/Conference_Report-8th_AAWC_Action_2024.pdf

Registration for the 9th Africa Animal Welfare Conference, Action 2025 is open and can be done at <https://www.aawconference.org/index.php/register>

Conference Theme: Strengthening Actions for Animal Welfare and Environment for a Sustainable Future and Resilient Planet.

Conference dates are 28 - 30 July. The conference venue is in Yaoundé, Cameroon and a Zoom platform will offer virtual attendance.

For more information about the conference, click on this link: <https://www.aawconference.org>



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