

Africa reels under demand for donkey products

Farming with donkeys – a viable solution or not?



Disconcerting reports stream in from countries like Namibia, Kenya, Ethiopia, South Africa – there is no end to the cruelty to donkeys and the hardship for their owners through theft, driven by the escalating demand for donkey meat and skins, particularly for export.

Would the situation be addressed by encouraging donkey farming? Can donkeys be farmed commercially? If not, why not?

Alex Mayers of The Donkey Sanctuary explains that while it may seem possible to farm donkeys in acceptable welfare, the reality is fraught with welfare, logistical, financial, natural resource and other challenges. To supply the trade at the rates currently being demanded, an initial breeding stock of hundreds of thousands of donkeys is needed. It would take 20 to 30 years to establish this number and become profitable.

Stress-induced abortion is a significant problem and the survival of the foal often fails in poor welfare. Stress factors include travel, food or water scarcity, being in herds larger than a family group, and being in unhabituated groups. Any stress that causes the donkey to stop eating can result in hyperlipaemia. Because of the donkey's stoic nature, the initial clinical signs are easy to miss and even with nursing care, mortality rates of 60-95% can be expected.

Environmental challenges

In water-scarce communities, further challenges are posed by

the need to source fodder and water for donkey farms. To exist in good welfare, millions of litres would be needed every week just for the donkeys to drink, even in the smallest of farms.

This does not include the water needed to produce fodder, nor for the slaughter of donkeys which according to the Namibian Slaughter Association requires 2,500 litres per donkey. Where will this water come from?

Farming donkeys at scale is a paradox

Trying to grow the population increases the stressors, and the population folds in on itself. Alex Mayers points out that this could be the problem currently faced by the industry in China and indicates why they are sourcing donkeys from smaller communities that rely on them.

The explosion in demand for meat and skins will result in total decimation of donkey populations within a few decades, with serious implications for communities that rely on these hard-working animals for survival. As donkeys' numbers dwindle, their value will increase even further, fuelling the demand until the last donkey has been sacrificed to satisfy man's greed and vanity.

This article serves to open a debate.

Donkeys for Africa does not condone, endorse or promote donkey farming.

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Human / Wildlife conflict is a complex problem

On the edge of the Namib Desert in the north-west of Namibia stock farmers are battling severe drought conditions. An added hazard is posed by hungry predators such as desert lions, leopards and cheetahs. Goats and cattle are casualties, as well as donkeys ridden by the stock farmers when herding. Recently a herder became aware of a stalking lion. The herder leapt off his donkey and fled but the donkey fell prey to the lion. Farmers are encouraged to keep their donkeys and other animals in predator-proof kraals at night but the danger during the day persists.



Namibian herder with goats – credit: Eben Human

Global Strategy

The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)

This organisation has produced international standards on animal welfare which have been agreed by 181 member countries. The OIE has delegates and “Animal Welfare Focal Points” in each country who are responsible for implementing these standards.

World Animal Net has produced the resource ‘Guidance for Animal Protection Organisations: Engaging National Delegates and Animal Welfare Focal Points of the World Organisation for Animal Health.’

This helps animal protection organizations in engaging their country’s OIE appointees and working together for a better future for animals worldwide.



<http://worldanimal.net/world-animal-net-blog/item/448-animal-welfare-strategy-for-africa-endorsed>

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African Animal Welfare

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia - July 2017

An Animal Welfare Strategy (AWSA) was endorsed for Africa and an African Platform for Animal Welfare APWA was launched. AWSA is an advocacy tool that will help to provide extra pressure to address the animal welfare issues mentioned in the strategy – including education/awareness, good practice, programmes and legislation. Donkeys were represented by Brooke UK, Brooke East Africa, Brooke West Africa and World Horse Welfare. **It was recognised that donkeys need to be afforded a status similar to that of livestock** because of the crucial role they play on the African continent.

Nairobi, Kenya - October 2017

The African Animal Welfare Conference.

The theme of the conference was ‘The Nexus between Animal Welfare, Environment and Development: Safeguarding Our Common Destiny’. Factors such as pollution, food security, environmental health, animal welfare concerns, and the Sustainable Development Goals were on the agenda.

<https://www.aawconference.org/index.php/en/>

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We invite feedback on this conference via the DfA facebook page; www.facebook.com/donkeysforafrica/

The AWARE Trust

The only domestic and wildlife veterinary conservation trust in Zimbabwe managed by veterinarians.



AWARE has a strong partnership with SPANA, whose mission is to improve the welfare of working animals in the world's poorest communities.

This alliance runs ambulatory donkey clinics in every province throughout rural Zimbabwe.

Two full time vets are employed as well as a veterinary technician and a community development officer. The clinics are welcomed by the local villagers where donkeys are dipped, vaccinated against rabies and tetanus and have hoof and dental checks. Often, during this interaction, emergency veterinary donkey care is also attended to.

AWARE also offers courses and assists in the training for veterinary students via the Clinical Skills Laboratory at the University of Zimbabwe. Dr Keith Dutlow of AWARE says "Many of our community development projects aim to stop donkey abuse at its roots by changing attitudes to animal welfare."

In this regard, AWARE opened a new Education Centre in November 2016 which has already had over 11 000 children visit this educational facility.

Major problems faced by donkeys in Zimbabwe

Problems faced by donkeys in this African country include wounds, tetanus, lameness, dental problems, habronemiasis, ocular diseases, respiratory infections and sarcoids. "Wounds often arise from bad harnesses that cause friction when donkeys are used as cart animals. The materials used for the harnesses contribute to wound formation. Often old rubber materials are used which cause a lot of friction if they are not padded properly" said Dr. Erick Mutizhe



of AWARE Trust.

Additionally, wild animal bites as from Hyenas, (*Yes!*), the use of yokes, whipping and road traffic accidents also cause many such wounds. With such a propensity to wounding, tetanus is a big problem affecting donkeys in this area. To add to this, cutaneous habronemiasis (a skin disease caused in part by the larvae of the spirurid stomach worms) is another problem. These skin lesions and ulcerations cause intense itching and

formation of exuberant granulomatous tissues caused by aberrant nematode larva deposited on the skin. Sarcoids are an integumentary problem affecting donkeys. They are a nodular skin disease which can become extensive and aggressive and may affect the working capacity of donkeys by compromising harnessing or eye sight. These, in turn, often cause substantial welfare problems.



AWARE treated over 41 000 donkeys in 2016 and will treat more than 50 000 during 2017.

Many cases of lameness also occur. This is another welfare issue and leads to loss of productivity to owners. Major causes include hoof abscess/sole injury, fractures, dislocation, and foreign body penetration.

"Dental problems such as hooks and sharp enamel points causing soft tissue damage can lead to pain, problems in eating and weight loss. We use motorised equipment to reduce such large overgrowths" said Dr. Mutizhe.

Eye problems can vary from mild eye pathology to irreversible end-stage ocular disease. Respiratory diseases are also encountered. Quite critical, they tend to compromise the donkey's working ability. Signs of respiratory infections include nasal discharges, coughing, and labored breathing.

"A problem we face is that owners of donkeys often do not recognise the need to rest sick donkeys" concluded Dr Mutizhe.



Dr Erick Mutizhe and Dr Eugene Mabika attending to a fractured donkey limb.

Donkey visibility initiative by AWARE

A donkey harness and collar making cooperative was established with over 1 000 reflective collars for donkeys handed out to donkey owners operating on the busy Beitbridge highway where vehicles kill many donkeys.



CLICK www.youtube.com/watch?v=6w8VIEj35Go

Outreach in Tankwa, South Africa

The Tankwa, west of Sutherland and near the border of the Northern and Western Cape, is one of the most arid regions of South Africa with very sparse shrubland. The population is thinly spread and donkey carts are a common means of transport. Support systems in this area are erratic. Additionally, water is very scarce and the closest windmill can be a two hour donkey cart drive away.

The Cart Horse Protection Association of Cape Town (CHPA) undertakes outreach actions to this area, establishing relationships with the animals and their owners, fitting new harnesses in exchange for the old, disinfecting and treating wounds and tick infestations, repairing carts, passing on skills and educating the youth on animal welfare.



The lives of many donkeys and their owners are improved through these ongoing visits – thank you to CHPA and their sponsors, Afrikaburn Outreach.

Did you know?

AfrikaBurn is a community of participants who come together to create art, performances, theme camps, music, mutant vehicles and more. This is created through the volunteer culture of the citizens of Tankwa Town in the Karoo once a year.



A lighter moment...



Mother and foals tended by Hans Jacobs

A rare event! In the Karoo region of South Africa a rescued jenny gave birth to healthy donkey twins, a male and female. Both suckled from their mother from the first hour and no support or intervention was necessary. Only about 1.7% of donkey pregnancies result in twins and both foals survive in only about 14% of those. **Welcome to the world, little ones!**

Welfare Assessment

In our July 2017 newsletter we referred to the welfare framework 'The Hand', developed by The Donkey Sanctuary.

www.thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk/blog/handy-welfare-tool

MALAWI

The Hand assessment is used by the Lilongwe SPCA in their donkey clinics. The 12 lead donkey owners (representing 36 villages) and the LSPCA project coordinator visit and monitor 2 398 donkeys around Lilongwe and Dedza and deliver veterinary treatment at monthly intervals. The donkey owners have all been trained to use 'The Hand' assessment to monitor the health and well being of their donkeys. Improvement in the welfare of donkeys in this area is noticeable.



MEXICO

This guide has been applied to working equids in Tuliman, Mexico, with sound statistical analysis to detect welfare issues. The practical outcome will be to implement local welfare strategies according to its results.

We hope to see similar studies published in Africa.

For a Pdf copy of this study go to the resources section of our library

Kenya: Plastic bags banned

Donkeys are the main means of transport in Lamu, a small town on Lamu Island, which in turn is a part of the Lamu Archipelago in Kenya. Donkey owners there have welcomed the ban on plastic bags, saying that many donkeys die from eating the bags when scavenging for food.



From the editor

For Donkeys for Africa to be an effective source of networking, we post contact details of organisations on our webpage. Please send us your organisations' details to ensure better interaction to improve donkey welfare.

Much happens in the three months between the publication of our newsletters. Please also visit our facebook page regularly for updates.

Thank you to all the wonderful people working tirelessly to be a voice for the voiceless – the donkeys of Africa.

The Donkey Sanctuary
made this
communication
possible



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