

## Why have donkeys?

People usually keep donkeys for the benefits of their presence for the humans. Unfortunately this can lead to abuse in many different forms. The question arises: Why abuse something that should be beneficial to you?

Donkeys are often kept primarily for their benefits to reduce the work-load on their owners or on other animals deemed to be more valuable. The donkey is a cheap “work-horse”. Overloading, inappropriate and harmful harnessing, overwork, malnutrition and bad management practices are too familiar.

At the root of these practices lies the perceived benefit to the owner. Hobbling keeps the donkey accessible, a yoke transferred from an ox to a donkey saves time, effort and money for the owner, moving one huge load is more profitable than making two or more trips, and beating the animal to keep going is seen to have immediate results. Occasionally this satisfies a sadistic streak in the human but let us believe that this is the exception.

### Donkeys for entertainment

Donkeys suffer at the other end of the economic spectrum too. The tourism and entertainment industries use donkeys: cart rides and petting farms can be educational but too often disastrous for the animals. Concerned members of the public spot cases of abuse which can be addressed, but ignorance plays a big role.

A donkey was recently signed over by a petting farm after a complaint. Visitors, especially children, were encouraged to

rush up to the lone donkey and feed her inappropriate “treats” endlessly. There was little space for her to move, no grazing or donkey company and no other stimulation or interaction. It resulted in a severely depressed, grossly obese donkey.

**“The answer lies in acknowledging the intrinsic value of donkeys”**

Once she was moved to a knowledgeable foster home, the jenny relaxed and started to blossom in the company of her new donkey companions. Correct diet, farriery and veterinary supervision alleviate some of her immediate problems but she faces a future of painful joints, delicate

hooves and related health challenges that could lead to an earlier than necessary death.

### Human satisfaction

Do animal welfare workers perform their relentless tasks only for the good of the animals? There could be an element of human satisfaction, a form of philanthropy sourced from

animals, resulting in a glowing “feel good” emotion. At least the animals benefit.

### The solution

In all cases the answer lies in acknowledging the intrinsic value of donkeys. They perform work, are a source of income, provide companionship and can create positive characteristics in the humans that interact with them.

**Let every action that affects them, be to their benefit too.**



*This overweight donkey went into fatal hyperlipaemia. There is a huge amount of research demonstrating that adipose tissue produces chemicals that promote inflammation, hormones that alter metabolism, and fatty acids that can permanently damage the liver and other organs. Image:www.horsetalk.co.nz*

# Share your knowledge

We receive requests for information from our readers – please help if you can.

## Agroforestry and animal welfare

A request from Rebecca Doyle, Senior Lecturer, Animal Welfare Science Centre at the Faculty of Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences, The University of Melbourne, Australia:

“I’m particularly interested in how working equids are used as labour in agroforest systems – what work they do, how reliant the household is on them, what are the welfare challenges they face. Any information would be really helpful.

This arises from a project on agroforestry systems and animal welfare in Ethiopia. It is largely focused on production species, but we will be working in communities to understand welfare problems in all their animals (once our fieldwork can commence in this COVID situation).”

Please contact [rebecca.doyle@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:rebecca.doyle@unimelb.edu.au) if you can help, and share your inputs with us at [editor@donkeysforafrica.org](mailto:editor@donkeysforafrica.org).

## Donkeys and water

From Stephen Blakeway, who is well known to many of our readers, formerly of The Donkey Sanctuary:

Stephen requests direct observations or stories about donkeys and swimming (or not), in rivers, lakes, floods, or the sea, and also whether they did it for themselves or were made to do it by people.

His primary interest is about donkey behaviour - what they can do and choose to do. It might also give us a better insight into, for example:

- the spread of domestic, wild and feral donkeys (including in ancient times);
- different aspects of a donkey’s daily work;
- current movements of donkeys, used for transporting goods, being moved for sale or work, or being moved for slaughter (legally or illegally);
- the spread of donkeys in ancient human culture: the ability and preparedness of donkeys to swim across rivers may have affected the choice of animals for long-distance transport in different parts of the world; and
- disaster preparedness with floods becoming increasingly common.

We welcome the observations of people who work with donkeys to provide answers and insight. Please let us know your thoughts and we will forward them to Stephen.



Man washing his donkey in the sea, Lamu, Kenya.  
Image: © Eric Lafforgue. [www.ericlafforgue.com](http://www.ericlafforgue.com)

## Liberia - learning to love all animals

The Liberia Animal Welfare & Conservation Society (LAWCS) provides animal welfare education in schools and communities, as well as free veterinary care and treatments for animals in need, especially in rural Liberia.



Educating about animals is important at LAWCS.

### Expansion into Guinea

In 2018, LAWCS received reports on the suffering and health needs of working donkeys in neighbouring Guinea. After trying unsuccessfully to identify an animal protection organization there that could help, LAWCS sent in their team to assess the situation and advise on how to improve conditions for the donkeys there.

At the beginning of 2019 they sent in another team to provide free veterinary care for the animals in critical need. That led to the establishment of a local registered presence in Guinea,

Watch a video about LAWCS:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=3DMxgY5ev2k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3DMxgY5ev2k)

**LIBERIA ANIMAL WELFARE  
& CONSERVATION SOCIETY  
(LAWCS)**

Winner of the World Animal Day Grant 2019



Veterinary care for donkeys is part of the service.

with a vet and an educator running the program under the direct supervision of LAWCS. The team members visit the villages daily and provide education on the welfare of the animals along with a free healthcare program. LAWCS has provided free veterinary care and treatments for over 5,000 working donkeys and cattle in Guinea and educated over 10,000 animal owners and children about the welfare and health of the working animals. The program is teaching the communities to value and love their donkeys.

See more at <https://liberiaanimalwelfaresociety.org>



## Tikobane Trust - building a sanctuary

<https://www.facebook.com/Tikobane>

Contact: [tikobanetrust@gmail.com](mailto:tikobanetrust@gmail.com)



**Tikobane Trust was formed in 2016 and formally registered in 2018. Tikobane covers communities in and around the largest wildlife park in Zimbabwe, Hwange National Park in southern Zimbabwe.**

The Trust employs a staff of three, including an animal welfare officer. Four fulltime volunteers assist with the day to day business of the organization. A further six part time volunteers are based in villages where they identify challenges involving working animals. This means that Tikobane can quickly respond to problems and that their advice will be accepted as trusted members of the community.

### Uses of donkeys

There are estimated 11 000 donkeys in the area. Donkeys are the main source of power in the rural communities, from pulling carts to ploughing fields, carrying water and transporting people and goods.

### Common problems

Donkeys are not appreciated and valued like other animals hence they are abused and ill-treated. Water shortages are a challenge facing donkeys as people choose to give water to their cattle and goats, the animals they value the most. Sharing borders with wildlife means donkeys are always at risk and an easy target for predators like lions and hyenas.

### Solutions

- Mobile donkey clinics treat donkeys suffering from wounds and diseases. In addition education of donkey owners is carried out.
- The Tikobane/Animal Aid Abroad Donkey and Animal Sanctuary is under construction. The sanctuary treats sick and wounded donkeys around Hwange, Lupane, Binga and

Tsholotsho districts.

- Humane harnessing is promoted with the support from Animal-Kind International. The target is to make and repair 500 humane harnesses in seven villages sharing borders with wildlife and also educate people who depend on donkeys.

### Youth education

Conservation clubs have been founded in four secondary schools and two primary schools. They focus on human and wildlife conflict mitigation and animal welfare.

### Influence of the Covid-19 crisis

“Travel restrictions have made travelling difficult. Because we do not have a vehicle of our own it is currently hard to hire the few vehicles around. Most people who were employed in the tourism industry are now unemployed and rely on firewood and charcoal trading using donkey pulled carts” says Ndlelende Ncube, Director. Meetings and gatherings have been restricted, bringing the childrens’ program and education programs to a stop.

### Looking to the future:

When asked about future plans and dreams, Ndlelende answered “Donkey welfare in Zimbabwe is new and the handful of organizations that are involved in animal welfare are in big towns. Our dream is to establish the Tikobane/Animal Aid Abroad Donkey and Animal Sanctuary as a Hub for working animal welfare. Our vision is to promote holistic working animal welfare that engages and educates people who rely on working animals. We also want to establish a library within our sanctuary, were children will be surrounded by donkeys as they read .We will also reach other children using a donkey pulled library: our idea is to promote and improve the value of donkeys.”



*Shelters for donkeys are being built.*



*Mobile Clinic in action.*



*Improper harnessing is a huge challenge.*



**from Animal-Kind International:** “Although small and young, they have a very positive reputation in Zimbabwe and we believe they have a bright future as a voice for donkeys in Zimbabwe.”

## Funding for African projects?

Dr Peta Jones is well-known to many donkey welfare workers in Africa and elsewhere. Peta poses a pertinent question: maybe, instead of depending on unreliable international funding, it is time to set up a fund to help African projects which have particular needs. International bodies would of course be welcome to contribute.

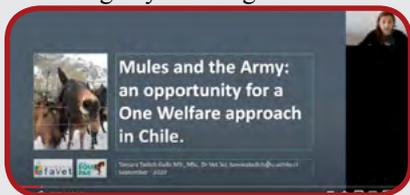
Any ideas of how, where, who would administer? Perhaps such funding organisations based in Africa already exist? We look forward to your responses to editor@donkeysforafrica.org

### Research summary

Is there an annual summary of the subjects covered in published donkey research? It would be useful to know how many papers are published per year or in which journals. Please contact editor@donkeysforafrica.org if you can point us to a reputable source.

### The role of working animals in disaster relief

The Donkey Sanctuary together with World Horse Welfare, hosted the side event during New York Climate week: “Working Animals and Climate Change – in Disaster Preparation and Relief while leaving no one behind”. The role of donkeys in disaster management particularly in mountain areas, was presented. Ian Cawsey, Director of Policy, Advocacy and Campaigns, emphasised the importance of partnerships and a holistic approach in addressing any challenges.



The webinar can be watched at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=coK8nEomLvM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=coK8nEomLvM)

## Donkey Welfare Symposium for the love and health of donkeys everywhere



The 2020 Donkey Welfare Symposium presented by the University of California, Davis from October 29th - October 30th will be via Webinar.

The theme is “Donkeys in the Wild”. Wildlife biologists, behaviourists, range management scientists, and advocates from all over the world will address the status of free living Equus asinus. Examples of speakers from Africa are: Dr Bojia Endebu Duguma from Donkey Sanctuary Ethiopia, will be talking on “Working with diverse stakeholders: academia, researcher, development actors, equine charities and the ministry.” The presentation on “Donkeys and cattle cooperating in Kenya” by Wilfred Odadi, Ph.D, Ecologist at Egerton University, Kenya, will be of great practical interest.

View the schedule at <http://www.donkeywelfaresymposium.org/Schedule.aspx>

### Harness Help

Remember to follow the regular Facebook posts by Chris Garrett of The Donkey Sanctuary, giving valuable guidance on correct harnessing, at [www.facebook.com/donkeysforafrica](http://www.facebook.com/donkeysforafrica)



## Donkey Lament



Linda Baker recently shared a poem about donkeys she recorded in Namibia.

In the video from left: Paul Bees, Stella Goramus and Erwin Nawebe. They recite the poem in Damara and Afrikaans. Here is the English as translated by Nina Maritz:

*“Lazy, they say,  
sly, do they moan.  
Shamed every day, fearing to roam.*

*Harnessed, I go  
Beaten, I run.  
Never to ask what wrong have I done.”*



<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1MG7kMY7SLFahYwxJi721t2zBDycwOZT/view>

Also, the Gondwana Collection Namibia has produced a wonderful donkey video aimed at saving Namibian donkeys:



[www.youtube.com/watch?v=0NAIDjvsvMU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0NAIDjvsvMU)

### A lighter side: Donkey pedicure



## From the editor

Our December 2019 newsletter carried a prophetic headline: “2020 is going to be a significant year for donkeys in Africa” – Simon Pope of The Donkey Sanctuary. Little did we know what lay ahead, not only for donkeys but for the world at large. Resilience and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances determine sustainability and survival. But some things seem never to change and one of these is challenges to donkey welfare. What has changed is the availability of funding, and support by travelling professionals. Never before has the promotion of donkey welfare in remote rural regions – where it is most crucial – been a more lonely occupation.

We applaud efforts to make funding accessible to small organisations and individuals who have the will to make a difference, and who channel all their resources into achieving this. Don't lose belief in what you are doing!

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[www.donkeysforafrica.org](http://www.donkeysforafrica.org)

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