



HARNESSING HELP from MARES in Zimbabwe:



MATABELELAND ANIMAL RESCUE & EQUINE SANCTUARY (MARES)

EMAIL: info@mareszim.org

WEB: www.mareszim.org

FEBRUARY 2021

MARES Donkey Sanctuary conducted successful outreach programs in Bela Bela, South Africa in conjunction with Network for Animals as well as in Victoria Falls for education on correct harnessing.

Ideally, we would like all scotch carts to be four wheel, not two wheel, which would alleviate the weight of the cart and load on the donkeys' necks. However, this is impossible so we are working with what the owners have, two wheel scotch carts.

In Zimbabwe, every scotch cart we see has four donkeys across. Part of our education is to inform the owners that only two of the donkeys are carrying not only the pulling weight but also the downward load. Four donkeys will only increase the pulling weight, you cannot add extra downward load. Therefore the two donkeys holding the load on their necks by means of the yoke can only carry 40% of their weight.

We also educate the owners of two wheel donkey carts that the donkeys must be hitched to the cart by means of a swingle tree and straps (normally they use chains) that must be a minimum of 1.5m long. Each swingle tree must have 2 x 1.5m chains.

Many of the donkeys' back legs are severely injured, sometimes even fractured, due to them being attached too close to the cart. It is imperative that the donkeys are attached to the front of the dusselboom (dusselboom must be 2m from front of the cart) which will allow a 50cm gap between the back of the donkey and the cart. This way, when the cart is stopped it cannot go into the donkeys as the donkeys cannot step backwards as they are attached to the end of the dusselboom.

Our most important part of our education is about the harness. 80% of all wounds found on the donkeys are from ill-fitting harnesses and of course wrongly hitched to the cart. Our harnesses can be adjusted to the size of the donkeys by means of a buckle on each strap. The positions of the straps are very important, the front strap is over the wither of the donkey and the second strap is on the strong part of the donkey's back. Our harnesses are also padded so that the material which is normally used, conveyor belting, does not chafe or cut into the donkey. This padding is fastened to the chest plate and the two straps with Velcro, allowing the padding to be removed for washing, drying and even replacing when worn.