



**THE DONKEY
SANCTUARY**

DONKEY CARE HANDBOOK

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW
FOR THE LIFELONG WELFARE OF
YOUR DONKEYS AND MULES

DONKEYS FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD...

EDITION 5

OUR MISSION

The Donkey Sanctuary has a mission: 'To transform the quality of life for donkeys, mules and people worldwide through greater understanding, collaboration and support, and by promoting lasting, mutually life-enhancing relationships.' We hope that this guide not only helps you to care for your donkeys in the best way possible but, through a deeper understanding of their needs, also allows you to enjoy caring for them as they enrich your life in a way that only donkeys can.

If you would like to support the work of The Donkey Sanctuary and learn more about our vision of a world where donkeys and mules live free from suffering and their contribution to humanity is valued, then visit our website and see how you can make a difference today.

In the UK, Ireland, Spain, Italy and Cyprus permanent sanctuary is provided for any donkey in need. In the rest of the world The Donkey Sanctuary provides veterinary care, education and support in over 30 countries.

The Donkey Sanctuary was founded by Dr Elisabeth Svendsen MBE in 1969 and is now the largest organisation providing sanctuary for donkeys and mules in the world.

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INTRODUCTION

CARING FOR DONKEYS CAN BE A LIFE-ENHANCING EXPERIENCE. WE HOPE WE CAN MAKE IT EASIER AND MORE ENJOYABLE FOR BOTH YOU AND YOUR DONKEYS BY SHARING THE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE WE HAVE GAINED IN OVER 40 YEARS OF RESCUING AND CARING FOR DONKEYS.

This guide contains all the most relevant information for new and experienced owners alike. It also contains details of where you can find even more detailed information on the topics covered in this in-depth guide. We very much hope you will not only read and use this guide, but that you will continue to expand your donkey knowledge by using these additional sources of information.

While some specific advice in this book is more relevant to Northern Europe, donkeys throughout the world have very similar requirements and the general concepts of care and welfare of donkeys can be adapted for all regions of the world.

In the United Kingdom and Ireland we can provide further help and support through our network of Donkey Welfare Advisers and our welfare advice line. We can also offer you specific information about donkey feeding and behaviour. Your vet may use the *Professional Handbook of the Donkey* or the veterinary online facility WIKIVET, or may contact our Veterinary Department for more help and support.

We have tried to present the information in the order that is most relevant to the new or novice donkey owner in terms of learning about donkeys' behaviour and their environmental requirements. Following this we provide information you need to ensure the best daily care of your donkeys to reduce health, behavioural or welfare problems.

You will also find details of the main health concerns that donkeys face, so you can be both vigilant and prepared should your donkeys ever show the early signs of being

unwell. As you are about to learn, donkeys are stoic creatures who hide their pain well, and understanding that they are not 'small horses with big ears' is the first step in providing the care they so richly deserve.

DONKEYS ARE DIFFERENT

THERE IS A TENDENCY TO TREAT DONKEYS AS IF THEY ARE SMALL HORSES WITH BIG EARS BUT DONKEYS ARE DIFFERENT! THEY DIFFER BOTH PHYSICALLY AND IN THEIR BEHAVIOUR. MILLIONS OF YEARS AGO DONKEYS AND HORSES HAD THE SAME ANCESTORS, BUT THEY EVOLVED TO BE VERY DIFFERENT SPECIES. UNDERSTANDING THESE DIFFERENCES IS OF VITAL IMPORTANCE TO THE CORRECT CARE AND WELFARE OF DONKEYS.

AN OVERVIEW OF DONKEYS

There are two distinct species of wild donkey. The Asiatic branch of the species (*Equus hemionus*) came from an area stretching from the Red Sea to Northern India and Tibet. The African branch of the species (*Equus africanus*) was found in North Africa between the Mediterranean coast and the Sahara Desert to the south of the Red Sea. The modern domesticated donkey is descended from African wild ass ancestors, of which there were two separate species: the Nubian wild ass (*Equus africanus africanus*) and the Somali wild ass (*Equus africanus somaliensis*).

Table 1: **Donkeys have physical chromosome differences**

Equine type	Chromosomes
Donkeys	62
Mules	63
Horses	64
Przewalski horse	66

Source: The Professional Handbook of the Donkey 4th Edition

Donkeys were first domesticated around 6,000 years ago in North Africa for meat and milk. Around 2,000 years ago donkeys were among the draught animals used to carry silk along the Silk Road from China and the Pacific Ocean to the Mediterranean in return for trade goods. The overland route was approximately 4,000 miles or 6,400 km, a journey of several

years. Unplanned matings en-route resulted in the mixing of breeds, giving us the beginnings of the diverse range of donkey breeds we now have. The journey ended in the Mediterranean ports of Greece, Italy, the Middle East and Alexandria in Egypt. In Greece donkeys were found to be ideal animals for working on the narrow paths between the vines. Their use in cultivation in vineyards spread through the Mediterranean countries to Spain.

From Africa donkeys have spread worldwide, with an estimated world population of over 44 million donkeys and 15 million mules and hinnies. Half the world's donkey population, almost all of which is used for work, is found in Asia, just over one quarter in Africa, and the rest mainly in Latin America (Fielding, D. and Pearson, R. A. *Donkeys, Mules and Horses in Tropical Agricultural*, 1991).

Donkeys today come in a variety of sizes and colours, with 186 separate breeds being recognised worldwide. The most common coat colour is grey, followed by brown and then black, roan and broken colour — a combination of brown-and-white or black-and-white markings. The rarest colour is pure white.

Donkeys vary in size, with height at the withers ranging from 7.3 hands (79 cm or 31 inches) in the miniature, to Poitou donkeys measuring up to 15.3 hands (160 cm or 63 inches). Adult donkeys can weigh from 80 to 480 kg (180 to 1,060 lbs).

There is an estimated world population of 44 million donkeys and 15 million mules and hinnies.

EXTERNAL FEATURES

Ears

The donkeys' long ears, which are well supplied with blood vessels, are a desert adaptation for cooling the body.

Donkeys' hooves must be trimmed every 6 to 10 weeks.

Donkeys need access to suitable shelter at all times.

Tail

The unusual tail resembles that of a cow because it is covered with short body hair, but it has a tuft on the end.

Chestnuts

Ergots or chestnuts are practically non-existent on the hind legs of donkeys.

Vertebral column

The donkey, like the Arabian horse, lacks the fifth lumbar vertebra in the spinal column normally found in other equine skeletons.

Hooves

Donkeys have hooves that are more upright (between 5° and 10° more), smaller, tougher, a different shape, and more elastic than those of horses. As an adaptation to their ancestors' original environment, donkeys' hooves grow differently to those of horses, and must consequently be trimmed differently by the farrier, every 6 to 10 weeks.

Coat

Donkeys' coats tend to be longer and coarser than those of horses, although texture can vary. It would appear that donkeys do not produce as much natural grease as horses and, therefore, donkeys may be more susceptible to climatic conditions such as rain, wind and snow. They therefore need access to suitable shelter at all times. Insulation from heat or cold is largely created by air pockets between the longer hairs.

Mane

The hair in the mane is short, seldom exceeding several inches in length.

Forelock

Donkeys do not have a true forelock.

Vestigial teats

Male donkeys usually have vestigial teats on the prepuce, unlike horses.

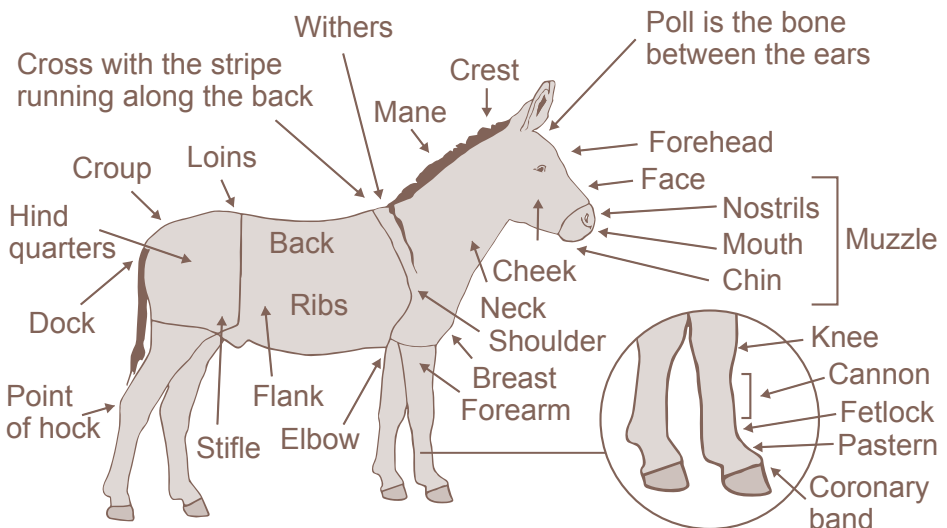
Donkeys prefer to browse a wide variety of rough vegetation.

OTHER DONKEY DIFFERENCES

Longevity

Looking back over records at The Donkey Sanctuary, we estimate that the average life expectancy of a donkey is just over 30 years. With this in mind, we suggest that any donkeys over the age of 20 are cared for as 'older donkeys' — see our specific guidelines in [Caring for an older donkey on page 143](#).

Figure 1: **Points of the donkey**



Source: The Donkey Sanctuary

Nutrition

In their natural habitat donkeys will graze and browse, eating highly fibrous plant material in small quantities throughout the day. There are subtle differences between the metabolism and physiology of donkeys and horses. We recommend feeding good quality barley straw to donkeys with good teeth, as it is high in fibre, low in sugar, and closely resembles what donkeys would eat in the wild.

Lungworm (*Dictyocaulus arnfieldi*)

Lungworm can be present in large numbers in donkeys without the animals showing any signs. However, donkeys can pass on the infection to horses, which might suffer from lung problems resulting in coughing and discharge from the nostrils. If donkeys and horses that are kept with them are regularly wormed, this should not be a problem. You should consult your vet about a suitable deworming product and programme.

Behaviour

Horses have a strong flight instinct and are easily startled. In contrast, donkeys are more stoical in their behaviour and tend to startle less readily. Donkeys will appear to show limited fear responses to novel situations compared to horses and this lack of overt physical signs of fear can be mistaken for stubbornness.

Donkeys may present different clinical signs to horses. For example, a donkey with abdominal pain may not behave like a horse with the same problem. For more information see [Colic on page 106](#).

Bonding

Donkeys can form lifelong friendships, and can bond very strongly with their companions. This can have implications for their management. We recommend that donkeys are kept with other donkeys. For more information see [Donkey behaviour on page 23](#).

**We recommend
that donkeys
are kept with a
companion.**

THE BRAY

The bray is one of six sounds a donkey makes. The others are the growl, grunt, squeal, whuffle and snort. The bray is the loudest, and can be heard over long distances. Each donkey's bray is individual to that donkey. In the wild the bray appears to be used mainly by male donkeys as a territorial display. In domestication both male and female donkeys bray for various reasons, including learned behaviour, where the donkey believes braying is effective at getting human attention and/or food.

MULES AND HINNIES

Mules

A mule is the result of breeding between a female horse and a male donkey.

A mule is said to have the body of a horse and the extremities of a donkey. A mule's ears are smaller than those of its donkey father, but larger than, although the same shape as, its horse mother. The mane and tail are not as thick as those of a horse. Its bray usually starts out with a horse's whinny and ends with a donkey's distinctive bray.

Mules can range in height from less than 8 hands up to 17 hands (81–173 cm or 31–88 inches), depending on the size of the

mare and stallion parents. In Britain larger mules are less common than in the USA, where they have been used as draught and riding animals since America was colonised. These larger mules from North America were extremely popular with the British army and were used in both World Wars and during campaigns in India and Asia.

A mule is said to have the body of a horse and the extremities of a donkey.



Hinnies

A hinny is the result of breeding between a female donkey and a male horse. A hinny is said to have the body of a donkey and the extremities of a horse. Their ears are shorter and mane and tail longer and thicker than those of a mule.

In Britain a donkey mare is smaller than most horses, so hinnies are generally smaller than mules. They are also less common than mules. It is extremely difficult to tell the difference between a mule and a hinny, so hinnies are often mistaken for mules and sometimes for small native-type ponies.

Male mules and male hinnies are anatomically normal and retain the drive

to breed with mares. They are extremely challenging to handle. To help regulate their temperament and make them safer to manage, they should always be castrated.

Mules and hinnies come in a wide range of colours depending on their parents, from plain solid colours to paint and appaloosa markings.

CARE OF THE MULE

In most aspects of their care, mules can be treated and cared for in a similar way to other equines. Our experience at The Donkey Sanctuary indicates that mules should be fed in the same way as donkeys: the majority of the diet should comprise straw, with limited hay and/or limited grazing. Feeding grain or cereal-based feeds to mules is not recommended.

Mules and hinnies, just like donkeys and horses, should have their feet trimmed every 6–10 weeks. Mules and hinnies need an understanding farrier as they can be nervous of having their feet trimmed if they have not been properly trained.

There are a few extra considerations. Their hybrid vigour means mules are often less prone to ailments than their parents. However, they can suffer from the same illnesses and are still prone to laminitis.

Mules are intelligent and sensitive and therefore do not settle well during long periods of being stabled. They need the companionship of other mules or equines. Generally mules choose other mules or horses as their companions, while hinnies prefer the company of donkeys. Mules and hinnies should have as much time as possible out in the paddock, where they can keep active and mentally stimulated.

Unless they are properly trained, mules and hinnies can be nervous when having their feet trimmed.

Mules are intelligent and sensitive and therefore don't like to be stabled for long periods.

THE POSITIVE BENEFITS OF MULES

Mules have many of the best traits of their parents. They can withstand extremes of climate, perhaps due to the African origins of the donkey. They have the calm, stoic nature of their donkey fathers and the more energetic, flighty reactions of their horse mothers. Faced with a frightening situation, mules will choose either to use a flight or a fight response, depending on individual circumstances, whilst a horse will normally prefer to run away. This tends to make a well trained mule very calm and steady — which is why they were so popular with the armed forces for carrying explosives and ammunition, and for use at tourist destinations such as the Grand Canyon. Mules are less likely than horses to panic in dangerous situations and can carry much more weight than donkeys. However, in common with their horse parent, mules and hinnies can be more 'flighty' than donkeys and, if not correctly trained, they can be extremely difficult to handle.

Depending on their size and conformation, mules can do anything a horse or donkey can do and, in some cases, do it better. Mules can be used for riding and events such as dressage, show jumping, endurance, driving and agility competitions. They are suitable for farms and smallholdings, where they can be used as pack animals or for draught work.

ARE MULES FOR YOU?

Despite the common conception, mules are not stubborn. The mule's instinct for

If someone says a mule is stubborn it is probable that they have just been outsmarted by one.

self-preservation means it will not put itself in danger, or be overworked, without extreme provocation — which has led to the misconception of stubbornness. Mules are intelligent and very trainable, but they are cautious and their increased sense of self-preservation means they prefer to think things through before acting and are unwilling to put themselves at risk.

As a consequence, mules require a sympathetic, patient trainer that understands them and their specific needs. Mules are very quick to learn and will learn from good or bad training equally, so trainers should be very clear what they are asking the mule for. As a mule trainer or owner you will need to enjoy the challenge of working with a thinking animal that needs to be negotiated with rather than forced to cooperate. Mules need to be trained calmly, patiently and with a great deal of understanding. A mule's long memory means that it will not forget frightening or painful training experiences; mules take a long time to forgive bad handling.

You need space and suitable fencing to keep your mule contained, as they have the ability to jump a standard fence from a standstill. They also need space to exercise at will.

It is important to understand and accept that mules are not like horses. They are much more of a challenge to understand and work with, and owning a mule is not for everyone.

Please note: Unless otherwise stated, throughout this handbook the term 'donkeys' should be taken to refer in general terms to donkeys and mules.

If you want more information on mules or are interested in rehoming a mule, please contact 01395 578222 and ask for the Welfare Department.

DONKEY BEHAVIOUR

DONKEYS HAVE A REASON FOR EVERYTHING THEY DO. THEIR BEHAVIOUR IS CONTROLLED AND INFLUENCED BY A WIDE RANGE OF FACTORS. MISUNDERSTANDING THE DONKEY'S TRUE NATURE AND BEHAVIOUR LEADS TO THE INCORRECT BUT COMMON BELIEF THAT DONKEYS ARE STUBBORN. IT IS HUMAN PERCEPTION THAT LABELS DONKEY BEHAVIOUR AS DIFFICULT OR INAPPROPRIATE; TO THE DONKEY, ITS BEHAVIOUR IS ALWAYS JUSTIFIABLE.

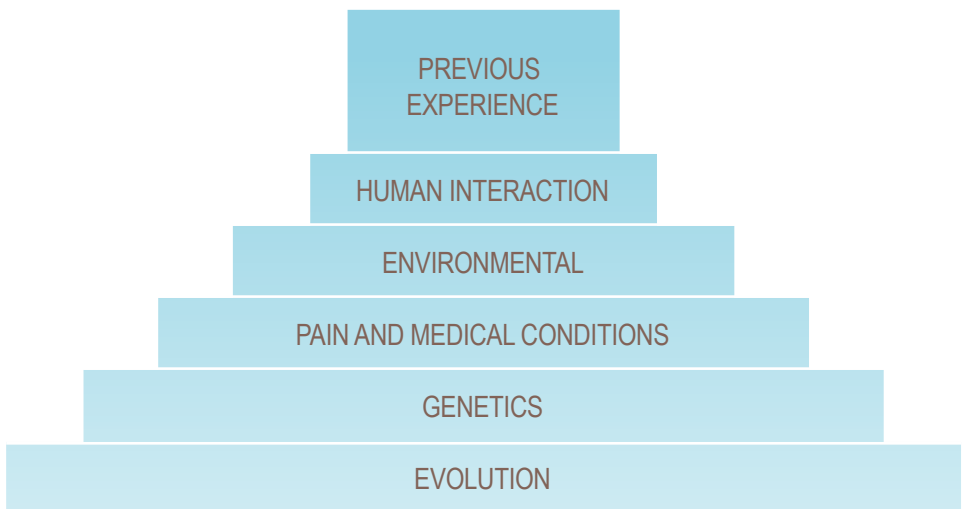
FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE DONKEY BEHAVIOUR

The term 'behaviour' is used to describe everything that an animal or human does. The science of behaviour is a vast subject, made more difficult because each animal is an individual and, therefore, all behaviour is unique in the way it is formed and the way the animal exhibits it. It is important to understand that a donkey who is standing still and being stroked is exhibiting as much behaviour as a donkey who kicks when its feet are picked up.

Evolution

For 60 million years horses and donkeys have been flight animals, surviving by running away from predators. Even today, after approximately

Figure 2: **The pyramid of equine influence**



Source: The Donkey Sanctuary

6,000 years of domestication, donkeys still try to escape from danger.

Horses evolved living in harem or bachelor bands, with stallions defending their band from other stallions. Each band has a home range which overlaps with other bands of horses. However, they do not defend these home ranges against other bands.

In areas with sufficient water and vegetation, wild donkeys live in bands similar to horses, although they are more transient, often breaking up in the non-breeding season. In contrast, the ancestors of our domesticated donkeys, who evolved in areas of sparse vegetation and limited water supply, lived more solitary lives: mares lived with the previous year's foals, and stallions defended their territory from other stallions in order to increase their chances of breeding with mares.

As a result of these differences in social behaviour, domesticated donkeys exhibit more territorial behaviour than horses. The donkeys' territorial instinct is so strong that in many countries donkeys are used to guard sheep and goats against dogs, foxes, coyotes and wolves. Unfortunately this territorial nature means that donkeys will occasionally chase and attack small animals such as sheep, goats, poultry, cats and dogs. However, not all donkeys display this behaviour and many donkeys live happily with these smaller companions.

Anything that a donkey considers scary might elicit its flight response. If a donkey is restricted in its ability to move away from fearful experiences, they use the fight response to save itself. A donkey's fight/defence mechanism seems to be more easily engaged than a horse's. This is because the

Domestication can cause donkeys many problems including overfeeding, boredom, and poor social interaction.

You will find more information on each of these areas in our *Understanding donkey behaviour* factsheet ([see page 157](#)).

domesticated donkey's wild ancestors often lived in groups of one or two animals where running away was not always such a successful method of survival, while the horse tended to live in larger herds.

Donkeys evolved to travel long distances in search of vegetation. This search for food, and the sparse environment in which the donkeys lived, kept them mentally stimulated, fit and lean. In temperate climates the domesticated donkey commonly lives in a restricted environment, food is readily available, and fencing restricts the distance it can travel. Domestication can cause donkeys many problems including overfeeding, boredom, lack of exercise, and poor social interaction. We must take these factors into account when managing our donkeys.

Donkeys have a reason for everything they do. When looking at problem behaviour it is important to consider what benefit the behaviour provides for the donkey. Essentially, by establishing the motivation for the behaviour, you can establish the cause, and by removing this cause there will be a change in the donkey's behaviour. When attempting to establish the causes of your donkeys' behaviour it is important to consider the possible effects of each of the six factors listed in the pyramid of equine influence ([see Figure 2 on page 24](#)).

The nature of donkeys is not to be aggressive, stubborn or difficult, but purely to learn and survive.

Genetics

There are certain behavioural traits which are normal for donkeys, and it is vitally important that you understand the differences in behaviour between horses, donkeys and mules before you start any handling or training.

Environment

Mental stimulation is one of the most important elements required of any environment in which donkeys are to thrive. Without this stimulation, problem behaviours might develop. These behaviours are often designed to relieve the boredom of domestication.

Pain

Pain is one of the most common causes of behavioural problems in donkeys. Pain should always be considered as a factor if a donkey is displaying difficult or abnormal behaviour.

Medical conditions

There are numerous medical conditions that might lead to changes in behaviour or the development of problem behaviours. Often these conditions are extremely difficult to identify and a vet should always be consulted to ensure an accurate diagnosis and programme of treatment.

Previous experience and learning

Your donkeys will learn something every time you interact with them. Situations that induce pain or fear will quickly teach them to fear people associated with such experiences.

Human interaction

A donkey's behaviour will be influenced by the ability, experience and confidence of its handler. A nervous handler will increase the nervousness of the donkey.

Previous experience

Donkeys easily learn things that are closest to their natural behaviours. How donkeys are trained and handled will determine their behaviour.

You will find more information in our *Understanding donkey behaviour* factsheet ([see page 157](#)).

Always think about the causes of your donkey's behaviour before commencing any training or behaviour modification. The key to working with donkeys is to accept that there is always a reason for a particular donkey behaviour. Try to look at things from the donkey's point of view and understand how the donkey feels.

BONDING BEHAVIOUR IN DONKEYS

Get to know how your donkeys are bonded and always keep this in mind when handling them.

Donkeys can form lifelong friendships and generally do not like being kept alone. For this reason we recommend that donkeys are kept with a companion, preferably another donkey. If a donkey has been reared without other donkeys, it might never form close bonds even when introduced to other donkeys. A lone donkey might bray as if it is hoping for a response from other local donkeys. Donkeys living alone might bond with other animals living nearby, such as sheep, ponies, cows, goats, geese and chickens.

The tendency for donkeys to bond strongly with their companions has implications for their management, and all donkey carers must take this into consideration. Bonded donkey friends might become distressed when they are separated. Some donkeys are bonded so strongly that even separating them over a stable door can cause them to become stressed. Other pairs might remain calm even if they are out of each other's sight for a few minutes. There also appears to be uneven bonding in pairs, where one donkey is very attached to another but the bond is not reciprocated. Donkeys kept in larger groups might bond to different donkeys, creating linked groups of three, four or even five donkeys.

While donkeys can bond to other equines, it is our experience at The Donkey Sanctuary that donkeys, mules and horses generally prefer the company of their own kind. It is therefore unwise to use a single donkey as a companion for a horse or pony you intend to ride, as the donkey might become distressed when the horse/pony is taken out of sight. A pair of donkeys of the same sex will be just as happy as a mare and gelding combination.

The danger of separating bonded donkey pairs is that it can create stress in either or both donkeys which might put them off their food, leading to a potentially fatal condition called hyperlipaemia. Bonded donkeys need to be kept together at all times unless a vet directs otherwise. If one of the pair is unwell and has to be transported to the vets, it must be accompanied by its friend to avoid stress and the possibility of hyperlipaemia.

Because of these strong bonds, if one of the donkeys dies, it is essential that the surviving donkey or donkeys are allowed to remain with the body of their friend until they have lost interest. Ignoring this advice can lead to significant distress and anxiety amongst surviving donkeys. They may show persistent wandering, pacing and braying behaviour as they look for the missing donkey. They may go into a hyperlipaemic crisis as a result of the stress. You should allow at least an hour before removing the body of the deceased donkey. Closely monitor the bereaved companion(s) for several weeks afterwards, as bereavement stress can manifest itself up to three weeks after the death, and might result in hyperlipaemia.

You will find more information in our [Hyperlipaemia in donkeys factsheet](#) (see page 157).

BEHAVIOUR OF STALLIONS AND GELDINGS

Stallions (Jacks)

Stallions can be very placid, friendly animals until, for whatever reason, their hormones kick in, which can cause a sudden change in behaviour. As stallions mature, their behaviour will generally become more challenging, especially if they live with other males or if there are females nearby. Young, entire male donkeys, known as colts, can be more difficult to handle as they mature sexually, just as they would in the wild, and as they reach two years of age they can start to cause owners problems. This is even more of a problem if the donkey has not been very well trained during the critical first two years of life.

Donkey stallions and some geldings will fight very aggressively with other donkeys, to the point of causing serious wounds on the neck and front legs of their opponents. Injuries can also occur to human handlers while stallions are fighting or trying to access female donkeys, either accidentally or as a result of direct aggression. However, completely isolating stallions from other animals is unacceptable in welfare terms and can lead to further behavioural problems caused by stress and frustration.

From around one year of age, the young donkey stallion has the potential to mate with females, including his mother or sisters, which can lead to unwanted foals or birth defects caused by inbreeding. In domestication, older stallions will also attempt to breed with their own female relatives if not kept separate, again leading to problems with inbreeding. Stallions can, in some cases, also be aggressive to foals,

Colts should be castrated between the ages of 6 and 18 months and preferably as young as possible within that range.

No one should keep a stallion unless they have the facilities and knowledge to do so.

especially if the foal is not their own offspring or if they have been separated from the mare and foal for a length of time.

There are exceptions, but donkey stallions do not generally make good pets, and no one should keep a stallion unless they have the facilities and knowledge to do so. If you want a donkey for a pet or to ride, drive or just take for walks, then a gelding or mare would be more suitable than a stallion.

Geldings (castrated male donkey)

Geldings tend to be more predictable in their behaviour than stallions, but this does depend on how old they were when castrated. If a two-year-old donkey stallion has learnt its own strength they might still display difficult behaviour even after castration. In time it might become less susceptible to the effects of their own hormones but their learnt behaviour might continue to make them difficult to handle.

Unsuspecting owners often buy six-month-old colts who appear calm and easy to handle, and sellers might advise they don't need to be castrated. As the animal matures their behaviour often changes and then the owner has the expense of getting the donkey castrated.

The Donkey Sanctuary recommends that colts are castrated between the ages of 6 and 18 months and, preferably, as young as possible within that range. However, surgery is best done in the colder months of the year to minimise the risk of flies causing infection to any surgical wounds. The younger the colt, the less traumatic the surgery and the greater its influence on behaviour.

Once castrated, individual animals will take differing lengths of time to settle into normal gelding behavioural patterns. This can range

Keep a daily diary of your mare's behaviour for at least three months, to find out what is normal for her. This will help you understand her behaviour more fully.

from between three months to a year. To avoid unwanted breeding it is advisable to keep older castrated males separate from mares for at least two months post castration.

BEHAVIOUR OF FEMALE DONKEYS (JENNYS)

You will find more information in our *Understanding the behaviour of stallions, mares and geldings — preparation, birth and beyond* factsheets ([see page 157](#)).

Female donkeys are generally less territorial than males but, again, there are always exceptions to the rule. Mares have their own set of behavioural issues often related to changing hormone levels during their oestrus cycle. Mares generally come into season every 18–24 days, depending on the individual. During the cycle they might have days when their behaviour is particularly challenging and days when their behaviour is normal or even very friendly. Each mare is different in her behaviour: some mares show no sign of being in season, and some display consistent behaviour throughout their cycle.

Mares require patient, sympathetic handling during hormonal fluctuations. To help predict these changes, we advise owners whose mares show monthly fluctuations in behaviour to keep a daily diary of their mare's behaviour for at least three months in order to confirm her normal cycle. This will allow the owner to plan activities such as farrier or veterinary visits, avoiding the most likely difficult days. Medical conditions affecting the female reproductive organs can also lead to difficult behaviour in female donkeys. A vet should always be consulted if such complications are suspected.

OWNING A DONKEY

OWNING OR CARING FOR A DONKEY IS A REWARDING EXPERIENCE. HOWEVER, IT IS IMPORTANT TO REALISE JUST HOW MUCH TIME, EFFORT AND EXPENSE GOES INTO THE CARE OF THESE WONDERFUL CREATURES. LOOKING BACK OVER RECORDS AT THE DONKEY SANCTUARY, THE AVERAGE LIFE EXPECTANCY IS JUST OVER 30 YEARS, SO OWNING A DONKEY IS A LONG-TERM COMMITMENT. BEFORE GETTING DONKEYS YOU SHOULD CAREFULLY CONSIDER THEIR CARE IN 10 OR 20 YEARS' TIME.

SELECTING YOUR DONKEYS

There are several points you need to consider before acquiring your donkeys:

- Why do you want donkeys? Donkeys are wanted for many reasons, as pets or companion animals, for riding or driving, for showing, working on smallholdings or for breeding purposes.
- Do you have the time and commitment needed to look after them? It will take at least an hour a day to provide care for your donkeys and their environment.
- Do you have approximately half an acre (2,000 square metres) of suitable and safe grazing and/or turnout land for each donkey, with a shelter with hardstanding, a fresh water supply, and electricity?
- Do you have a vet, farrier and equine dental technician who understand donkeys and are prepared to undertake their routine treatments?
- Do you have a supplier of hay and straw? Do you have storage space for hay and straw over the winter months? Hay and straw can be cheaper if you can buy in bulk before the winter.
- Can you remove your muck heap regularly? Is there a local farmer who will take it away?
- Can you afford the cost of caring for a donkey? We give a general average guide of £1,000 per donkey per year. You should also be aware of the need to maintain adequate contingency funds to meet unexpected veterinary bills or take out insurance that covers such costs, and we would advise the need for third-party insurance.

You will find more information in our *Costs of owning and keeping donkeys factsheet* ([see page 157](#)).

Donkeys are versatile animals and can have many uses: for children to ride, for driving and showing, to do light draught work around a property, or simply as pets. All these factors will determine the size and the character of the donkeys suitable for your individual needs. Donkeys for riding, driving or working should be between the ages of 4 and 25 and should have a veterinary examination to ensure they are physically fit to work.

An average donkey of approximately 11 hands (112 cm or 3 feet 7 inches) high or 160 kg should not carry more than 50 kg (8 stone) on its back. If the donkeys are required just as pets, then older donkeys or donkeys that could use a little bit of extra love and attention might fit the bill.

You'll see donkeys for sale in local papers, equine publications and on the internet, as well as at markets and through private dealers. Once you have decided that donkeys are for you, we always recommend that you take an experienced person with you when looking. If you are looking for a particular type of donkey, there are donkey breed organisations which might be your best option.

If you obtain your donkeys via The Donkey Sanctuary's Rehoming Scheme, they will have had a thorough medical examination and will have received all their vaccinations, undergone a deworming programme and had regular hoof trimming. If donkeys are purchased from a market or private home, this might not have been done. Please contact our Welfare Department for further details.

You will find more helpful information in our *A guide to buying a donkey* factsheet ([see page 157](#)).

You will find more information on rehoming a pair of donkeys on The Donkey Sanctuary website, or by calling the Welfare Department.

SETTLING YOUR DONKEYS INTO THEIR NEW HOME

It is important to take things slowly and not rush your donkeys, as transportation, change of environment and change of companions can be very stressful for them. It is very important that you do all you can to settle your new donkeys in as calmly and quietly as possible. It can take weeks and sometimes months for donkeys to really settle into new surroundings, and during this time they can be more prone to serious conditions such as hyperlipaemia.

Donkeys can be territorial and new arrivals should be carefully introduced to any existing donkeys or other equines. Ideally, keep the new and existing donkeys alongside each other but separated by a fence, either permanent or electric, for a week or two to monitor their behaviour towards each other. It is important to allow new donkeys time to explore their new home and settle in before allowing the new and old to mix. Observe their behaviour towards each other and, when you're sure that they are calm and relaxed in each other's company, allow them access to each other. If you have any doubts about their behaviour and acceptance of each other, then keep them living alongside each other, but not together, for a while longer.

When the new and existing donkeys first start mixing, ensure that they are supervised, that there is no competition for food, space or shelter, and that they have plenty of space to avoid each other if they wish. This will help avoid potential conflicts in the crucial early days.

It's also important to take special care of small pets such as dogs, cats, poultry, goats,

Getting to know your donkeys' behaviour in the first few weeks is very important. Spend some extra time watching and observing their behaviour. Any change in normal behaviour patterns can indicate that something is wrong.

sheep or lambs; donkeys are territorial by nature, and some donkeys will chase smaller animals. Supervise interactions between donkeys and small stock; if possible, avoid direct contact between them. Some donkeys do live happily with other livestock but it is difficult to know which donkeys will accept the presence of chickens, etc, and which donkeys will attack and chase them. If your donkeys do share their environment with small stock, make sure there are safe areas or an escape route where the smaller livestock can avoid unwanted attention from the donkeys.

For safety, an adult should always accompany young children into the donkeys' field.

In the first few weeks

Take time to get to know your donkeys. Spend time observing their behaviour so you can establish their behaviour patterns and will be able to spot subtle changes. Daily grooming and spending time with your donkeys will help them to feel more at home, and stimulate them mentally, as well. However, don't be tempted to try and do too much too soon. It may be better to wait a week or two before picking up their feet if they need time to get to know you. Don't be tempted to take them for a walk outside the safety of their field until you have done some leading training in their safe field and stable environment, and then only go for small, easy walks to help build their confidence and yours.

Don't be tempted to try and do too much too soon — take your time and really get to know your donkeys.

RIDING, DRIVING OR WORKING YOUR DONKEYS

Before riding, driving or working your donkeys, take into consideration their age (which should ideally be between four and 25 years), build,

An average donkey of approximately 11 hands high or 160 kg should not carry more than 50 kg (8 stone) on its back.

conformation, and temperament. If you are unsure of what you are looking for, ask the advice of a professional.

Here are some general guidelines:

- Always get a vet to check that your donkeys are physically fit to be ridden.
- Do not attempt to work your donkeys until they have reached the age of four. It is not until then that the bones are fully developed. Donkeys learn by gradual, progressive repetition.
- An average donkey of approximately 11 hands high or 160 kg should not carry more than 50 kg (8 stone) on its back, and the rider must always wear a well-fitted skull cap or riding hat which conforms to current safety standards, along with boots that have a flat sole and low heel.
- We recommend that a donkey pull no more than twice its body weight on flat, level ground, including the weight of a well-balanced and maintained vehicle.
- Always ensure both handler and donkeys have received adequate training before attempting to ride or drive.
- Ensure that an inexperienced rider always has an assistant walking beside, and never allow a child to ride on the road unaccompanied. If leading on the public highway, the handler should be between the donkey and the traffic and walk on the left-hand side of the road. Reflective clothing should be worn by the handler and the rider.

PASSPORTS

It is a legal requirement that an identification passport be kept for every donkey.

The donkey's passport must be available to any attending vet or local authority enforcement officer upon request — and, if you have joined our Rehoming Scheme, to our Donkey Welfare Adviser.

In the event of donkeys being moved for any reason, however temporary, from the place where they are normally kept, the owners and/or transporter must ensure that the passports are available for inspection either during the journey or at the new location.

The Donkey Sanctuary provides all of its rehomed donkeys with passports, which must accompany the donkeys at all times during their placement.

Passport application forms

If your donkey does not have a passport, you can obtain one from the Donkey Breed Society. An application form can be downloaded at www.donkeybreedsociety.co.uk and is also available from: The Passport Administrator, Bryncelyn, Llanfyllin, Powys SY22 5NE.

Since July 2009 it is a legal requirement that donkeys are microchipped, regardless of their age, before a new passport can be issued.

When completing your application form your vet will need to check if your donkey has a microchip. If one is not detected, your vet will need to implant a microchip.

Even if your donkey has a passport, having it microchipped means that it can be traced to you if it is lost or stolen. Always remember to inform your microchipping company if you change address.

Legally every equine must have its own passport which must accompany the animal whenever it travels.

It is an offence to sell a donkey without its passport.

Duplicate passport

If the passport is lost, a duplicate may be requested from the original passport issuing office.

For rehomed donkeys, please inform your Donkey Welfare Advisor as soon as possible so that a duplicate passport can be arranged.

Return of the passport

In the event of a donkey's death, the passport must be returned to the passport issuing office for cancellation within 30 days.

For rehomed donkeys, the passport must be returned to the Welfare Department of The Donkey Sanctuary within 30 days.

Owners are permitted to request the return of a passport following cancellation. Any such returned passport will be clearly stamped 'cancelled' and its identification pages invalidated.

It is an offence to sell a donkey without their passport. The buyer must notify the passport issuing office of the new ownership within 30 days.

INSURANCE

There are two types of insurance that you will need to consider for your donkeys: vet insurance and third-party liability.

Vet insurance

Should your donkeys become ill and need veterinary treatment, the cost can soon mount up. Complicated treatment and operations can soon add up to several thousand pounds. Search around the different companies offering equine insurance and talk to your vet about who they recommend. Make sure the insurance companies fully

understand that the insurance is for a donkey, and make sure you read the small print before signing up so that you are quite clear about what is and isn't covered.

Third-party liability

As the carer of donkeys, you are responsible for any accidents that your donkeys might cause. Accidents might include a kick or a bite, or a traffic accident if your donkeys escape onto the public highway. You will need to check what restrictions there are in the policy, and the extent of cover. It is also important to check you have insurance cover if you use your donkeys at public events such as a school nativity or the local village fete. If you receive payment for using your donkeys, your donkeys might be considered to be 'working', and you will need to ensure that you are covered for this.

If you need more help with insurance, please contact 01395 578222 and ask for the Welfare Department.

SAFETY

Staying safe around your donkeys is of paramount importance. It is easy to become complacent with these calm, stoic creatures and take for granted their willing nature. Here are a few tips to help you stay safe:

- Attend one of our *An introduction to donkey care* courses to learn safe handling techniques.
- Always observe your donkeys' behaviour before you begin work, as any changes in behaviour could indicate that a donkey has a problem that might cause it to act unexpectedly or defensively.
- Always wear safe, sensible footwear when you are around donkeys. When riding or driving, always follow the recommended standard for wearing a safety hat and body protector.

Never wrap the lead rope around your hand when handling or leading a donkey.

- Never wrap the lead rope around your hand when handling or leading donkeys.
- Establish a good routine with your donkeys and don't change things rapidly or unexpectedly.
- In the beginning, pick up the donkeys' feet in the same way and order every time, to avoid startling them.
- Do plenty of training with your donkeys to ensure they are used to being handled, and get advice if you are uncertain or have any problems with your donkeys' behaviour. Never walk so close behind a donkey that you could be kicked.
- Never leave donkeys unattended while they are tied up.
- Don't take your donkeys out on the road until you have done plenty of training in a safe environment.
- When you do go out on the road, be safe and be seen. Wear gloves to avoid rope burns should the donkey pull away, and high-visibility clothing so that drivers can see you.
- Remember the importance of third-party insurance.
- Never let young children handle donkeys unsupervised.

THE DONKEYS' ENVIRONMENT

**CREATING AND MANAGING THE
CORRECT ENVIRONMENT FOR
YOUR DONKEYS IS VITAL TO
ENSURE THEIR NEEDS ARE MET
AND THEY REMAIN HEALTHY
AND SAFE.**

SHELTER

Providing a suitable shelter is essential for the care and welfare of donkeys. While the function of the shelter might vary according to the prevailing weather and time of year, the donkeys' shelter is one of the most important aspects of their environment.

Donkeys' coats do not appear to be as waterproof as those of horses, so it's important that donkeys have access to shelter 24 hours a day, especially in countries with wetter climates. During warmer months or in countries with a hot climate, access to shelter throughout the day is important as it allows the donkeys to rest in the shade when they want to, and offers a refuge from annoying flies and midges.

The stable should have a floor that drains well, and some form of bedding so that the donkeys can lie down in comfort.

There may be times when donkeys need to be shut in, such as when they are ill, when the vet is expected, or while electric fencing is being moved, so there should be a door with a bolt or slip rails to contain the donkeys.

GUIDE TO THE IDEAL SHELTER

If you don't already have a suitable shelter, or a shelter that can be made suitable with alterations, there is a wide range of stables and shelters available on the market. Here are some points to bear in mind when designing or buying your donkey shelter:

- A shelter should be accessible at all times. Additional fencing or an additional shelter might be needed to allow your donkeys access at all times of the day.

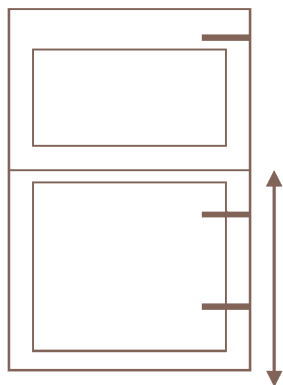
Because donkeys' coats are not as waterproof as those of horses, it's important that donkeys have access to shelter 24 hours a day.

- Position stables or field shelters on well-drained ground and avoid areas prone to fly nuisance. If mobile, move them once the ground starts to become muddy. If this is not practical, spread a good thick layer of bark chips around the shelter to prevent the donkeys standing in mud.
- A mobile or permanent shelter should always be positioned so that the back of the shelter faces the prevailing winds. Winter weather can be harsh; you need to be particularly wary of strong winds that can lift your shelter off the ground and throw it, quite dangerously, across your field. It is not uncommon for shelters to get thrown over 30 feet, posing a risk to your property, field, shelter, and the safety of your animals and other people. Flexible ground-anchor bolts and brackets can be used to secure the corners of the shelter to keep it in place but still allow it to be moved when required.
- Allow approximately 4.5 square metres (50 square feet) of covered area per donkey, approximately 9 square metres (100 square feet) for a pair.
- A well-drained, non-slip, hardstanding floor is essential, preferably made of concrete or stable brick.
- Because of the structure and attributes of their feet, it is essential that donkeys can get off wet and muddy areas for at least part of their day. In wetter climates, provide a drained hardstanding area, ideally made of concrete, as a run-out yard. You could consider using materials such as paving slabs to make a movable hardstanding area. The provision of a safely fenced run-out yard also allows the donkeys more freedom

It is essential that donkeys have access to hard-standing so they can get off wet or muddy areas for part of the day.

and prevents the need to shut them in stables for long periods of time.

- Avoid construction materials which allow condensation to develop — especially roofing.
- Ensure adequate ventilation with good air circulation, but avoid excessive draughts at donkey level. Consider the prevailing winds when designing your stable and face the back into the wind.
- Ensure your donkeys can easily see over the top of stable doors. Doors for horses are normally too high.
- Protect glazed windows with wire mesh.
- Provide a floor-level feed bin or corner floor-feeder situated so that feed is not soiled. We do not recommend the use of hay nets: it is better for donkeys to eat from the floor, and empty hay nets can become dangerous for donkeys. However, hay nets might be used when dieting donkeys or trying to slow down their food consumption, to increase mental stimulation, provided the nets are safely secured and tied at the correct height.
- It is important to fit tying-up rings at your donkeys' eye level.
- A covered, well-lit area with hardstanding is a great help to the farrier.



For standard donkeys the ideal bottom door height is 107 cm (42 inches), and the ideal width is 122 cm (48 inches).

Some useful measurements for your stable or shelter

- **Door height:** The stable door should be low enough for your donkeys to lean over but high enough to prevent them from jumping out. Stable doors made for horses, at 132 cm (4 feet 6 inches), are too high for standard donkeys, but might be suitable if you have a large donkey breed.

- **Bolts:** It is advisable to have a bottom bolt, as some donkeys can learn to undo the top one. A bottom bolt will also prevent donkeys from getting their feet caught in the door should they kick it partially open. Kick bolts are the easiest to use as they can be operated with your foot.
- **Bottom door height:** This should be 107 cm (42 inches) for standard donkeys.
- **Door width:** Ideally this should be 122 cm (38 inches).



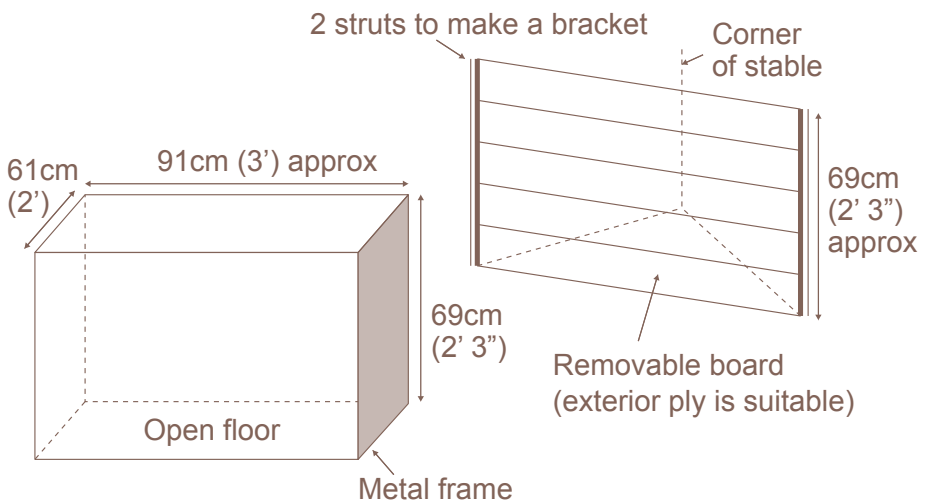
Doors should allow donkeys to see over with ease.

Floor-level feeder

In the wild donkeys graze with their heads down. It is not natural for them to eat from a net or rack. If they reach up for their food from a net or rack, particles of hay or straw could fall into their ears or eyes and cause or exacerbate respiratory problems.

Figure 3: **Construction of a straw feeder**

False bottoms should be fitted to floor feeders.



Source: The Donkey Sanctuary

Therefore we advise providing a floor-level feeder with no sharp edges. Place enough straw in the feeder that the donkeys can browse through it. There will be no waste, as the remainder can be used for bedding the following day. However, take care to fill floor feeders no higher than the donkeys' shoulders as over-filling also brings risks to the donkeys' ears and eyes. False bottoms should be fitted to floor feeders so that donkeys do not have to reach inside, down to the floor, which can cause damage to their windpipe. If possible, position the feeder so that the donkeys' feet are not on the bedding while they are eating. For more information [see Figure 3 on page 47](#).

To ensure good welfare of your donkeys, they must have access to clean, fresh water.

Water

Donkeys are very fussy about what they drink, and should always have access to a clean water supply. A securely supported bucket or a self-filling trough should be constantly available and should be cleaned out daily. The use of buckets allows the accurate monitoring of water intake but a self-filling water trough does mean that the donkeys' water will not run out during the day or night. As a rough guide, the trough needs to be approximately 76 cm (30 inches) from the floor to the top edge of the trough.

To help prevent troughs from freezing over during winter months, place a small floating football into the trough to keep the surface water moving, or purchase a float heater or another more sophisticated antifreeze device. You can use plywood to cover and insulate part of the trough, leaving a smaller space for the donkeys to drink from. If the trough is mobile, position it to catch the winter sun

during the day, so that the water is less likely to freeze. If you are not at home during the day, consider placing a bucket of water in the stable, where it is unlikely to freeze.

In cold weather donkeys often prefer warmer water, and if warm water can be provided even just a couple of times a day, the increased water intake might reduce the risk of colic for your donkey.

Mineral lick

Hang an equine mineral block inside the stable or shelter so that the donkeys can supplement their diet as they wish. We do not recommend molasses treat licks, because molasses can cause the onset of laminitis.

Electricity supply

Electric lights are highly desirable in the winter months and the facility for a heat lamp is useful, especially for old or unwell donkeys. All wiring should be encased in rat-proof tubing and all switches should be donkey-proof and positioned outside the stable. Lights should have plastic covers and wire-mesh guards.

Bedding

Bedding on the floor of the stable keeps the stable clean and fresh and ensures the donkeys have a warm, dry place to lie down. Factors that will influence your choice of bedding include your storage facilities, cost, and facilities for the disposal of manure.

Straw

There are three main types of straw that could be used for bedding — barley, oat and wheat — plus a range of alternatives.

**Barley straw
is The Donkey
Sanctuary's
preferred choice
of bedding for fit,
healthy donkeys.**

Barley straw is the preferred bedding for healthy donkeys. Barley straw is lower in feed value than oat straw, but higher than wheat straw, it is comfortable for donkeys to lie on, and it drains reasonably well. If barley straw is not available, it is acceptable to use oat or wheat straw. Straw is the cheapest form of bedding. You will need to purchase barley straw for the donkeys to eat, so it is convenient to also use it for bedding. If your donkeys have respiratory problems, you should consider dust-free alternatives.

Oat straw is higher in feed value than barley and wheat straw, and more palatable. Donkeys tend to eat more of it and might gain weight, so it is not recommended as bedding for donkeys unless they are underweight.

Donkeys on
shredded wood
bedding.



Wheat straw is the lowest in feed value and, because of its prickly ears, is not so comfortable to lie on. It does not drain very well and can be dusty. Good quality wheat straw might be suitable for fit, healthy donkeys that are on a diet for weight loss.

Shredded wood fibre is a dust-free bedding. It is specifically manufactured from finely shredded recycled white wood such as pallets. It is made to a very high quality standard and it is rigorously tested for cleanliness and consistency. Shredded wood fibre is sold in sealed bales so it can be stored outside. It is free-draining yet absorbent, which keeps the surface of the bed dry, and because of its consistency is less likely to move when the donkeys move around or get up and lie down, thus helping to prevent injury.

Dust-extracted shavings should be of white/soft wood. Red/hard woods can be poisonous and cause respiratory problems. Shavings can make an alternative bed for a sick or lame donkey that has problems moving around in deep straw. The shavings absorb urine, creating wet patches that should be removed daily.

Shredded paper bedding is not recommended because it can cause colic if donkeys eat it.

Shredded cardboard bedding is not recommended because it can cause colic if donkeys eat it.

Rubber matting provides a comfortable, insulated area for donkeys to lie down. However, a shallow layer of shavings or straw must be used on top to absorb urine. Regular cleaning out is required and the slope of the shelter floor must be correct to allow good drainage under the mats. Rubber matting can be expensive to install but might help make a more comfortable environment for an older donkey or one with a painful limb condition.

Shredded paper or cardboard is no longer recommended as a bedding for donkeys.

STABLE MANAGEMENT

Mucking out

A fork, broom, shovel, wheelbarrow, disinfectant and 'pooper scooper' are required to maintain and clean the shelter.

You should either remove wet patches and dung on the donkeys' bed on a daily basis, or use a deep-litter system. Daily mucking out is the best way to monitor your donkeys' environment and observe any changes in behaviour during your absence. We recommend daily mucking out of the donkeys' bed.

Deep litter is when dung is removed from the bed and, once a day, a layer of fresh bedding is scattered over to keep the surface dry. The base becomes packed and any urine drains through to the bottom. Deep-litter bases should be removed every four to six weeks. Problems with deep-litter beds include the smell and the build-up of bacteria.

Daily mucking out of stables and shelters

Daily mucking out is the preferred method, as all dung and wet areas are removed on a daily basis.

Move the clean, dry bedding to one side as you remove the dung and urine patches. Sweep the floor area clean and disinfect the floor, if necessary. Leave the bedding up until the floor is dry. The bed can be left up during the day and put down later in the afternoon. When putting the bed down, spread all the piled-up bedding level across the floor. Add any straw from in the manger that was not eaten the previous day, and fresh straw if needed.

When opening a fresh bale of straw, take care to remove the baler twine as this could lead to injury.



Barley straw is the preferred bedding for fit, healthy donkeys.

Build some banks of straw around the walls of the stable to the height of about 40 cm (16 inches), then lay a level bed of about 20 cm (8 inches). Banks will provide a cushion to prevent the donkeys lying too close to the wall and becoming 'cast' (stuck on their backs) if they roll over. Banks will also prevent draughts.

By routinely creating a tidy bed for your donkeys, you will be able to tell if one of them has been rolling more than usual, as the bed will be disturbed. This could be an indication of a health problem. When you muck out, make a mental note of the number and consistency of droppings, as a change could also be an indication of a health problem.

If donkeys have to stay in the stable for a period of time, it is a good idea, if space allows, to leave an area of floor space without bedding as this may help keep their feet healthy.

Muck heap

Management of your muck heap is an important issue for donkeys, owners, keepers and neighbours. Here are some guidelines:

Site muck heaps well away from stables to reduce the nuisance caused by flies.

- You can use local agricultural contractors or farmers to dispose of your muck heap, or you can leave it to compost for a year and then use it on your flower beds or give it to gardening friends or family. If you're not using straw bedding, a contractor or farmer would be a good option as other bedding takes a lot longer to rot down.
- The donkeys should not be able to get to the muck heap.
- It must be sited where it will not contaminate water courses, rivers, streams and ground water. Your muck heap should have a solid base and sides to enclose it, so that any liquid can be contained. Any temporary muck heap (for example, one which your local farmer or allotment owner takes away weekly) should be located at least 10 metres (33 feet) from any water course and at least 50 metres (164 feet) from a well, borehole or spring that supplies water for human consumption or dairy use.
- It must also be sited where it will not cause a nuisance to houses and users of public rights of way.
- Your muck heap must have easy access from both your stables and the road if it is to be collected for disposal.
- It should not be too close to the stables as it might increase the nuisance to your donkeys from flies or create a fire hazard (muck heaps can become very hot).

FIELD ENVIRONMENT

Fencing

There are many types of fencing, or combinations of fencing, that can be used to contain donkeys. We recommend

approximately 2,000 square metres (0.5 acres) of suitable and safe grazing and/or turnout land for each donkey, so two donkeys will require a field and stable area of approximately 4,000 square metres (one acre). The area required will vary slightly according to the quality of the pasture.

Where possible, the field should be divided into two or three paddocks, as this will allow greater control of donkey grazing and ease of pasture management. Fences should be arranged so that the donkeys have free access to the stable or shelter and fresh water at all times.

Hedges

Donkeys like the roughage provided by the brambles and hawthorn found in hedges. Donkeys are great escape artists and can eat their way through a hedge before you realise what has happened. You should therefore always have additional perimeter fencing. Hedging provides natural shelter and is a natural windbreak. Remember that hedges can harbour poisonous plants that need to be removed. For a list of poisonous plants see [Poisonous plants on page 65](#).

Wooden post and rail

Although expensive, post-and-rail fencing with four rails is ideal; standard post-and-rail fencing usually only has three bars. The extra fourth rail should be positioned 23 cm (9 inches) from the ground as some donkeys will wriggle between the third bar and the ground. Wooden fences need to be treated periodically with an animal-friendly preservative.

- The posts should be 213 cm (7 feet) long and 15 cm (6 inches) x 7.5 cm (3 inches) thick.



Example of post and rail fencing.



Example of pig-netting fencing.

- The post should be no less than 45 to 62 cm (18 to 24 inches) into the ground.
- The top of the post should be angled at 45 degrees away from the rails.

Donkeys might chew wooden fences, either because they lack the fibre and roughage they need in their diet or because they are bored. If you provide a mentally stimulating environment, including some non-toxic bark-covered logs for them to chew, and ensure access to feeding straw, they are less likely to chew your fences.

Pig netting

Wooden posts with pig/sheep netting tensioned between them is a less expensive fencing option. It is important to make sure that the netting is tensioned correctly and maintained regularly. If the bottom of the wire is allowed to become slack and pull away from the fence, the donkeys could put their hooves through the wire and get caught up. To avoid this problem, standard 8-strand pig netting can be fitted upside down so the smallest holes are at the top of the fence. A single wooden rail or two strands of well-tensioned plain wire should be positioned above the netting to prevent the donkeys from engaging in the dangerous activity of leaning over to reach the grass or hedging on the other side.



Example of an electric fence system.

Barbed wire

Wherever possible, you should avoid using barbed wire. If barbed wire is used in your pastures as a top strand for pig netting against a boundary hedge, the wire should be well tensioned and regularly inspected. It is not safe to use barbed wire as a dividing

fence between paddocks, as donkeys could run into it.

Electric fencing

This is a versatile and effective method of managing pasture. Electric fencing can be used to create paddocks within an existing field system or to create strip grazing. Strip grazing involves running the electric fence across the paddock and moving the fence a set distance each day to control the amount of grass accessible to the donkeys. Electric-fencing systems that use electric tape are preferable to those using wire, as they are more visible to the donkey. Always follow the manufacturer's guidelines. Keep your fence neat and well maintained and check it every morning and evening with an electric-fence tester.

Setting up an electric fence involves setting out fencing posts, threading tape through, and linking it up to a battery-powered fencing unit. It is important to measure the length of the electric tape required so that the correct power unit can be purchased. If the power unit is incorrect, the fence will be ineffective. Carefully follow all instructions supplied with the fencing unit.

Gateways

During winter months gateway areas or access points can become wet and boggy. The obvious way to prevent this is to keep the donkeys off the land, shutting them in a covered area with hardstanding. They can then be turned out when conditions allow. However, if you put down hardwood chippings during the winter months, the donkeys will have access to grazing all year round.



Example of a strip-grazing fence.



Example of bark chip gateway.

Use a chain and clip as well as a gate fastening to make sure your gate is secure and to prevent donkeys from escaping.

Here are some points to consider:

- Always keep water troughs or feed containers away from gateways and trees.
- If you can use another access, then do so, to prevent areas from becoming too boggy and wet.
- Design gateways to allow easy access both into and out of the field. All gateways should have good hinges and must be fastened securely to prevent the donkeys from escaping.

MENTAL STIMULATION

If your donkeys need to be kept off their pasture for any length of time during the winter, it is likely that they will become bored and need extra mental stimulation.

It is therefore a good idea to provide your donkeys with something to chew and play with, particularly if you do not want your post and rail fencing to fall victim to their idle minds.

Donkeys and mules are naturally browsers as well as grazers. They appreciate access to hedgerows and tree branches and will readily consume safe trees and shrubs. Safe branches, twigs and logs will provide enrichment for donkeys experiencing restricted access to grazing. Safe shrubs and trees include hazel, ash, hawthorn, apple, limited willow, lime, poplar and gorse. Providing such materials will help to ensure that fencing and stabling are not regarded as food items, but you will need to regularly replace the branches as donkeys chew the bark off. Planting and encouraging a variety of donkey-safe shrubs and trees that can be coppiced will provide shelter as well as food and enrichment for your donkeys. Branches can be cut and offered to donkeys

If you are not sure what is safe for your donkeys to eat, you will find more information in our *Safe trees and shrubs for donkeys factsheet* (see page 157).

or, if this is not possible, you can purchase cut logs from known trees. Your donkeys will benefit greatly from being taken out for a daily walk, too.



Safe branches, twigs and logs will provide enrichment for donkeys experiencing restricted access to grazing.

You should also consider snack-balls in which you can hide feed, inflatable rubber equine toys, and equine footballs to keep your donkeys entertained. However, with any type of toy which involves feeding, the donkeys' intake should be carefully monitored and there should be sufficient numbers of toys to minimise conflict or aggression between donkeys. Finely chopped apples or carrots make a tasty natural and low-calorie treat, and can be added to a snack ball or hidden around the donkeys' environment for them to find. Giving them something succulent will have the added benefit of replacing some of the moisture lost in their diet due to the temporary lack of grazing imposed by bad weather.

GRAZING DONKEYS

**ADEQUATE SUITABLE PASTURE
FOR GRAZING AND EXERCISE IS
ESSENTIAL TO THE LONG-TERM
HEALTH AND WELFARE OF
YOUR DONKEYS.**

GRAZING MANAGEMENT

Depending on the type of land and quality of grass, we recommend approximately 2,000 square metres (0.5 acres) of suitable and safe grazing and/or turnout land for each donkey.

Due to their efficient digestive system, most donkeys will become obese on unrestricted grazing. The sensible use of electric/moveable fencing will enable you to control your donkeys' intake and maintain an area for haymaking if desired. There are two ways to restrict your donkeys' grass intake using electric fencing.

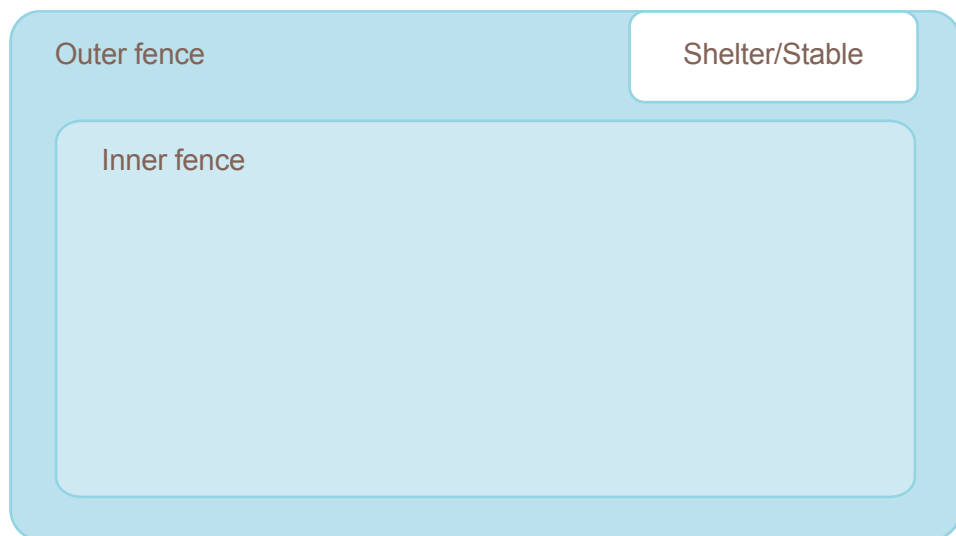
- **Strip grazing:** This involves using an electric fence to restrict the donkeys' access to grass, either by fencing off the field from one side to the other or by forming a square of electric fence within the existing paddock. This electric fence can then be moved to allow limited, controlled access to fresh grass as required. When using strip grazing, to limit the donkeys' access to fresh regrowth and prevent overfeeding, it is important to also use a 'back fence' to fence off recently grazed areas behind the donkeys as the front fence progresses. How much you need to move your electric fence will depend on a number of factors such as time of year, amount and quality of grass, number of donkeys, length of fence, and the condition of the donkeys. As a rough guide, your donkeys should be eating the available grass within about 45 minutes.
- **Track system:** This involves the use of fencing to create a track 3 to 4 metres (10 to 13 feet) wide through the donkeys' environment ([see Figure 4 on page 63](#)). Donkeys are free to move and graze only within the track. Donkeys move much further using the track system, which both

helps control their weight and provides much-needed mental stimulation.

The condition score and weight of your donkeys will determine how much grass they need. Weigh your donkeys monthly using the heart girth measurement or livestock scales if available, and keep a record so that you can see if they are gaining or losing weight. This will help you determine when, and by how much, to move your fences.

Limiting your donkeys' grazing time is not effective in reducing their overall intake of grass, as they are likely to gorge themselves during their restricted grazing periods, and then be bored when they are confined to stables, causing them to eat more straw or chew fences. In our experience, grazing masks are not suitable for donkeys.

Figure 4: **Track-grazing system**



Source: The Donkey Sanctuary



Example of electric fence tester.

You will find more information in our *Poisonous plants and trees* and *Poisonous plants — ragwort kills* factsheet ([see page 157](#)).

Grazing donkeys on frosty grass can increase the risk of laminitis.

Here are some further considerations for good pasture management:

- Check perimeter fences regularly to ensure they are donkey-proof and well maintained.
- Ideally, remove dung from the paddock daily, to prevent the spread of worms and help to improve the quality of pasture. Where this is not possible, pick up dung at least twice a week. Donkeys do not like to graze areas spoiled by faeces. The rotation of grazed areas can also be very useful in helping to control parasitic worms.
- Check regularly for poisonous plants and rubbish, both in the pasture and through the hedge/perimeter fence. Ragwort, oak and acorns are the most common problem plants. Yew is also very toxic to donkeys. Bracken is potentially toxic and some donkeys might develop a taste for acorns, which can cause problems when eaten in quantity. Remember that poisonous plants are more likely to be eaten if other feed is in short supply. In the autumn the area around oak trees should be fenced off to prevent donkeys from eating acorns.
- Be very aware of grass cuttings dumped in pasture; grass cuttings can cause fatal colic in donkeys. Also be careful if donkeys are allowed in gardens, as many contain exotic plants which could be poisonous.
- Be aware of the risks of laminitis from excessive consumption of grass. Freshly cut grass can also be a problem. Donkeys turned out in the spring after winter housing are particularly susceptible. We advise feeding donkeys hay/straw prior to

grazing, for a limited time only, when they are first turned out. Fields which have been previously fertilised might pose a greater threat. Spring, however, is not the only 'risk period' for laminitis. Whenever grass is growing well it is a potential problem. Frosty conditions can also increase the threat of laminitic attack.

- Avoid grazing recently fertilised fields until the fertiliser has been absorbed into the soil by sufficient rain.
- Check water supplies daily and clean troughs regularly.

POISONOUS PLANTS

Plant poisoning is avoidable. Here are some guidelines to help keep your donkeys safe.

Before your donkeys graze any new pasture, check it thoroughly for the presence of toxic plants. The list of common poisonous plants below is by no means exhaustive. Use websites or photographic guides to identify unknown plants and establish their level of toxicity.

The most common and well-known causes of plant poisoning in equines are ragwort, yew, laburnum, oak and bracken. However, there are many plants that can be toxic. If you suspect that your donkeys have ingested toxic herbage, seek veterinary advice immediately. Mild toxic effects include non-specific allergies, weight-loss, lethargy, and mild digestive problems, but the ingestion of some plants can be fatal.

Poor pasture management and overgrazing can lead to the predominance of poisonous plants such as ragwort and bracken.

Some poisonous plants are bitter in the

Before your donkeys graze any new pasture, check the pasture thoroughly for the presence of toxic plants.

green (fresh) state but become sweeter if dried out — for example, if sprayed with weed killer, pulled and left in the field or baled in hay. If you are pulling up plants, always remove them from the paddock immediately. Always check each section of hay and remove any dried herbage that is unfamiliar to you.

Common poisonous plants growing in the UK:

- Black Bryony
- Black Nightshade
- Bracken
- Buttercup
- Celandine
- Charlock
- Columbine
- Cowbane
- Deadly Nightshade
- Foxglove
- Ground Ivy
- Hellebore
- Hemlock
- Water-dropwort
- Holly Berries
- Horsetail (Mare's tail)
- Ivy
- Larkspur
- Lily of the Valley
- Linseed
- Meadow Saffron
- Monkshood
- Potato
- Privet
- Ragwort
- Rhododendron
- St John's Wort
- Spurge
- White Bryony
- Woody Nightshade.

Trees to avoid:

- Black Walnut
- Elder
- Horse Chestnut
- Laburnum
- Laurel
- Laurel Cherry
- Leylandii
- Oak
- Plum
- Peach
- Red Maple
- Sycamore
- Wild Cherry
- Yew.

Common ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*)

Ragwort is a poisonous weed that is becoming increasingly common throughout Britain and Ireland. There are several types of ragwort, the most prevalent being common ragwort, also known as benweed, staggerweed and tansiweed.

Ragwort normally takes two years to grow to maturity and then flowers every second year. However, if the stem is cut or mown, ragwort often becomes an annually flowering plant. Each plant can produce up to 150,000 seeds which have a 70% germination rate and can lie dormant in the soil for up to 20 years.

Ragwort is frequently seen on wasteland, verges and railway land, from where it spreads onto pasture land.

It is one of the injurious weeds specified in the *Weeds Act 1959*. This act was amended in 2003 by the *Ragwort Control Act*, giving added protection to animals at risk of ragwort poisoning. The act ensures that landowners have a legal responsibility to remove harmful plants.

**For more details
see our *Poisonous
plants — ragwort
kills factsheet* ([see
page 157](#)).**



Ragwort: Rosette stage (April, May).



Ragwort: Flowering stage (August).

- **Young plant:** From autumn to early June young plants of common ragwort are evident as low rosettes in pasture and on bare ground. The leaves of these young plants are extremely variable, either undivided or simply divided into terminal oval and smaller lateral lobes. These are usually a deep bottle-green, tinged purple, and slightly glossy on the upper surface.
- **Adult plant:** In their second or subsequent years the rosettes mature and produce flowering stems from late June onwards. These are between 30 and 100 cm tall, carrying dense, flat-topped clusters of bright yellow, daisy-like flower heads each 1.5 to 2.5 cm across. The leaves on mature plants are strongly divided into narrow lobes, with the bases clasping the non-woody main stem. The flowering stems die back after producing seeds.
- **How does ragwort affect livestock?** Equines (horses, ponies, donkeys, mules) and bovines (cattle) are more susceptible to ragwort poisoning than other livestock. Poisoning can occur at any time of the year, generally having a cumulative effect; a very small intake over a long period of time can be just as damaging as a large intake over a short period. The toxins in the plant damage the liver by affecting its ability to function properly, eventually causing liver failure. Liver failure occurs when approximately 80% of the liver is damaged.
- **How to control and dispose of ragwort** If you have a problem with ragwort or are concerned about how to control and dispose of it safely, you should read our *Poisonous plants — ragwort kills* factsheet ([see page 157](#)).

Oak and acorn

Oak trees should be fenced off such that donkeys cannot reach any branches or falling acorns. Oak poisoning is usually seasonal, being most common in spring when the young buds or leaves are eaten, and in autumn when the acorns are eaten. Oak leaves and acorns contain tannic acid which is poisonous to horses and donkeys. Eating a small number of leaves or acorns is almost certainly harmless, but they can be addictive, and a donkey might actively seek them out once it has acquired a taste for them. Some donkeys seem to be more susceptible to oak poisoning than others, with individual donkeys having different levels of tolerance. Oak poisoning will cause gastroenteritis and kidney damage. There is no antidote, only drugs to reduce the pain and control the diarrhoea.



Example of oak leaves and an acorn.

Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*)

Bracken is poisonous while green and remains so if cut in the green state and dried. The roots (rhizomes) are five times more poisonous than the fronds and you must remember this if ploughing or digging land on which bracken is growing.

Yew (*Taxus baccata*)

The yew is the most poisonous tree in Britain. Every part of it is poisonous and the poison is not reduced by wilting or drying; clippings and fallen leaves are as toxic as the fresh plant. The poison is the alkaloid taxine, which affects the heart. In many cases the symptoms of yew poisoning are never seen, as the donkey dies a few hours after eating it. One mouthful is enough to kill. There is



Example of yew.

If you suspect your donkeys have eaten parts of poisonous plants or trees, or they show any unusual symptoms, call your vet immediately.

no treatment. Yew trees growing on or near land on which you are keeping or intend to keep donkeys should be fenced off or, preferably, cut down.

Box elder (*Acer negundo*) found in the USA and sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) found in the UK

Both of these types of acer are implicated in a frequently fatal condition known as Atypical Myopathy (AM). This condition leads to massive muscle loss and most fatalities occur within one or two days of symptoms appearing. Research is pending but it is thought that the 'helicopter' sycamore seeds contain a toxin leading to severe metabolic damage. The best way to prevent this happening is to fence off sycamore trees when seeds are present and ensure adequate provision of food so that donkeys do not search out unusual foodstuffs.

DONKEY CARE ACTIVITY CALENDAR

Daily

Observe your donkeys for normal behaviour. Muck out stables and poo-pick fields and yards. Clean water buckets or drinkers. Provide fresh barley straw for feeding. Groom donkeys and pick out their feet. Provide mental stimulation in the form of non-poisonous bark-covered logs and toys, and exercise such as walking. Move strip-grazing if appropriate. Apply insect protection as recommended by manufacturers. In the evening remove any dung from the stable and check again for normal behaviour.

Weekly

Clean field water troughs. Check all perimeter fences for damage and ensure fencing is well maintained and secure. Keep a constant look-out for poisonous plants and remove whenever found. Disinfect stable floors. Dust stables to remove any cobwebs.



A yearly examination by your vet when they do the donkeys' annual vaccinations is very important.

Monthly

Arrange farrier visits every 6 to 10 weeks. Record your donkeys' heart girth measurement and weight. Condition score the donkeys according to weight gain/loss and heart girth measurement. For further information see [Monitoring your donkeys' weight and condition on page 133](#).

Yearly (6 to 12 months)

Arrange for an equine dental technician or vet to check your donkeys' teeth at least once a year or as required. Arrange an annual veterinary check and equine flu vaccination, and a tetanus vaccination when

this is due. Paint stable walls or use animal-friendly wood preservative.

Have dung samples analysed for worm eggs, and seek veterinary advice about a deworming program.

You will find more information in our *Insect protection for donkeys* factsheet (see page 157).

Spring

Begin a fly protection program. Introduce your donkeys slowly and carefully to spring grazing. Have muck heaps removed to minimise flies during spring and summer.

Summer

Continue with daily fly and insect prevention measures, as per the manufacturer's instructions. Order barley straw and any hay or haylage that you might need for winter use. If you have older donkeys that wear rugs in winter, ensure the rugs are cleaned and repaired/reproofed if necessary. Give your donkeys extra grooming to help remove their winter coat.

Autumn

If donkeys have access to grazing during winter, get bark chip or suitable sand to keep gateways clean and dry. Monitor any flush of autumn grass and restrict grazing as required. Put up fences around oak trees to prevent donkeys getting access to fallen acorns. Treat wooden fencing and field shelters with animal-friendly wood preservative.

Winter

Monitor your donkeys' water intake and offer warm water if required to ensure adequate intake. Ensure access to hardstanding to help minimise foot

You will find more information in our *Care of your donkeys through the winter* factsheet (see page 157).

problems and mud fever. If fitted, remove rugs daily to check for rubbing and sores.



If your donkey is old, sick, underweight or cold it might need a rug in winter.

HANDLING DONKEYS

**A DONKEY'S BODY LANGUAGE
WILL REVEAL ITS EMOTIONS
AND FEELINGS, SO GET USED
TO WATCHING YOUR DONKEYS'
BODY LANGUAGE AND
IDENTIFYING WHAT IS NORMAL
FOR EACH DONKEY.**

GENERAL HANDLING

Do not assume all donkeys will want to be stroked and handled.

Donkeys need to learn how to be handled all over their body and down their legs, and training might be required to get them used to this. Once your donkeys are happy to be handled, you can progress to the use of a soft brush to groom them.

Donkeys use body language as their main method of communication, relying on it as much as we humans rely on speech. A donkey's body language will reveal its emotions and feelings, so get used to watching your donkeys' body language and identifying what is normal for each donkey.

Always be conscious of safety. Donkeys might threaten to kick out by lifting their back leg as a warning when worried, startled or in pain. If very frightened they might even kick. For this reason, never stand directly behind a donkey, even a donkey you are very familiar with.

Donkeys that are nervous or have had bad experiences might give a warning kick or bite when they feel threatened, are in pain or lack experience of being handled. Donkeys will generally give a warning so watch their body language carefully for signs of tension. Signals include flattening back their ears, tail swishing, tightness of the mouth and muzzle area or foot stamping and general muscle tension and unease. Try not to react to this behaviour but remain calm and wait until the swishing or stamping stops for a moment, and then move away from the area that prompted the donkey's reaction. This teaches the donkey patience and tolerance, and shows it that standing still stops anything uncomfortable.

For advice with behavioural problems, please ring 01395 578222 and ask for the Welfare Department.

Never try to force donkeys to cooperate. This can lead to accidents, distrust of humans and a worsening of the behaviour. When your donkeys behave well, let them know by giving them a scratch on the withers and then giving them a break from the training session. The lesson for the donkeys to learn is that standing still when being handled brings positive rewards.

Domesticated donkeys generally have to deal with many situations they would not encounter in the wild, including the farrier, the vet, traffic, loading into a lorry, and carrying out a variety of tasks. Normal, safe, domesticated behaviour is a product of training and you should bear this in mind whenever you handle donkeys.

Here are some guidelines to help you when you are training your donkeys:

- Always accept that the donkey is scared or frightened rather than 'naughty' or 'bad'.
- Training should take place in a safe environment.
- The lesson should always be small enough to allow the donkey to succeed.
- Follow a written training plan containing small, safe steps.
- Never rush; always allow sufficient time to complete the lesson.
- Use positive reinforcement to reward good behaviour.
- Use your imagination. If a particular method is not working, then try something else.
- Always choose a positive moment to finish your session, as the donkey will remember that part most clearly.
- Avoid using punishment as a training method.
- If you are unsure how to proceed, seek professional help.

Never try to force donkeys to cooperate. This can lead to accidents, distrust of humans and a worsening of the behaviour.

You can learn more about these guidelines by attending an introduction to donkey behaviour course provided by The Donkey Sanctuary.



Practise catching your donkeys until they calmly accept the head collar.

CATCHING

Donkeys need to be caught daily for routine grooming and hoof care, which gives you an added opportunity to check them over for signs of poor health and get them used to being handled by you. If a donkey is shy, it might not be happy to be approached to start with. It is best not to try to bribe donkeys with food, as this might encourage them to snatch the treat and run away or in future to bite you in the hope of getting a treat. The use of bribery often leads to donkeys not trusting their handler.

If your donkeys enjoy your company they are more likely to want to be caught, so ensure you spend quality time with them so that they relax and learn the value of human contact. Make contact time as positive as possible, using a soft voice tone to speak to your donkeys, moving smoothly and staying relaxed. If possible, scratch the withers, ears or back. This investment in quality time will pay dividends in your long-term relationship with your donkeys.

If your donkeys are reluctant to be caught, it is important to remain calm. Don't rush or try to 'trap' them, as this might result in the donkeys becoming more stressed and less likely to be caught. It is often helpful to allow a donkey to come up to you of its own choice. If the donkey steps forwards, stand still and wait for it. If the donkey walks away when approached, continue to walk toward it, slowly and confidently. This will teach the donkey that walking off does not mean it can avoid being caught. If the donkey then stands still, stop following and relax for 5 to 10 seconds before continuing to approach it. Repeat this

procedure until you reach your donkey. Once the donkey is reached, do not pounce with the head collar. Take time to reward the donkey with scratches or rubs on the withers and back.



It can be helpful if possible to allow the donkey to come to the handler of its own choice.

Talking to your donkeys might help calm the situation and relax you, provided you use a soft, calm, tone. Any nervousness on your part will be picked up by the donkeys and might make it more difficult for them to relax and be caught, so think positively whenever handling donkeys. Taking your time and having a plan will help you to stay relaxed and not be nervous.

Allow donkeys to sniff the head collar. Do not attempt to put it on until the donkeys are happy to have the head collar all around them. Short lessons of a few minutes at a time tend to work best. Always end a lesson at a calm positive point in training.

The time you take early on to train your donkeys to be caught will save you large amounts of time in the future and prevent the recurrence of stressful situations for both you and the donkeys.



Allow the donkey to sniff the head collar before proceeding.

Purchase a head collar that buckles up under the nose, as donkeys have quite angular noses compared with those of horses, and are therefore more prone to being rubbed by the buckle if it sits on the noseband.



Example of a donkey wearing a correctly fitting head collar.

When fitting a head collar, it is important that the noseband is neither too high nor too low. Too low and it will interfere with the donkey's breathing; too high and it could cause rubbing along the cheek bones. As a rough guide, the noseband should sit halfway between the top edge of the nostril and the corner of the eye. The headband should sit just behind the donkey's ears and it should be possible to fit two fingers under the strap. The strap which passes under the donkey's throat should, again, be neither too tight nor too loose.

Having fitted the head collar, making sure that it fits comfortably, attach the lead rope to the centre ring under the chin, ensuring the hook faces backwards to prevent pinching the donkey's skin. Stand quietly with the donkey and do not tie it up at this stage. Hold the slack end of the lead rope and reward the donkey with scratches on the neck and withers.

We would strongly advise that a head collar is never left on continuously as the donkey might get caught up on something or catch a foot in it when scratching, and a nylon one would not break in an emergency. However, should it be necessary to leave a head collar on, it is safer to use a cheap leather head collar or a 'field safe' head collar, which is designed to break in an emergency and prevent field injuries. You can purchase a field safe head collar from most equine tack shops.

LEADING

The aim is for the donkey to walk alongside the handler with a slack rope. For safety, you should be positioned level with or just in front of the donkey's shoulder.



Walk alongside the donkey at shoulder.

Never wrap the end of the lead rope around your hands, as this could cause you injury if the donkey pulls away.

Initially work from the near side (left), but eventually the donkey should learn to lead from either side. If leading on the public highway, you should be between the donkey and the traffic and face towards the oncoming traffic. You should wear reflective clothing.

A donkey's natural instinct is to pull against any pressure on its head caused by the head collar when you pull on the lead rope. Therefore the aim of the lesson is to teach the donkey to step forward into this pressure. To achieve this, pull gently on the lead rope while watching for a very small amount of movement forward. As soon as the donkey

Never drag or pull donkeys as this is more likely to cause them to stop.

Remember: Avoid wrapping the lead rope around your hand, as it can lead to injuries if the donkey pulls.

begins to take one step forward, release the pressure on the rope. You can repeat this process as the donkey begins to move forward more. Once the donkey realises that the pressure is released when it moves forward, then it becomes easy to increase the number of steps the donkey takes. When the donkey is moving forward, always have a relaxed rope and never drag or pull the donkey as this is more likely to cause it to stop.

To stop the donkey, take a couple of slower steps to let the donkey know it is about to be asked to stop. As the donkey feels the pressure of the head collar on its nose and begins to stop, release the pressure on the rope. Then stand still and relax your body, keeping the rope slack. Once the donkey stops consistently well, introduce voice commands. This will assist in the future if the donkey is to show, drive or be ridden, as it will know the commands 'walk on', 'stand' and 'trot on'.

TYING UP

Once the head collar is on, do not assume that your donkey will be happy to be tied up; this is a separate lesson for the donkey. Initially it might be easier to groom it while holding the end of the lead rope, or with an assistant holding the rope, as, once tied up, it might feel restricted and could panic. If the donkey is tied up, stay with it at all times.

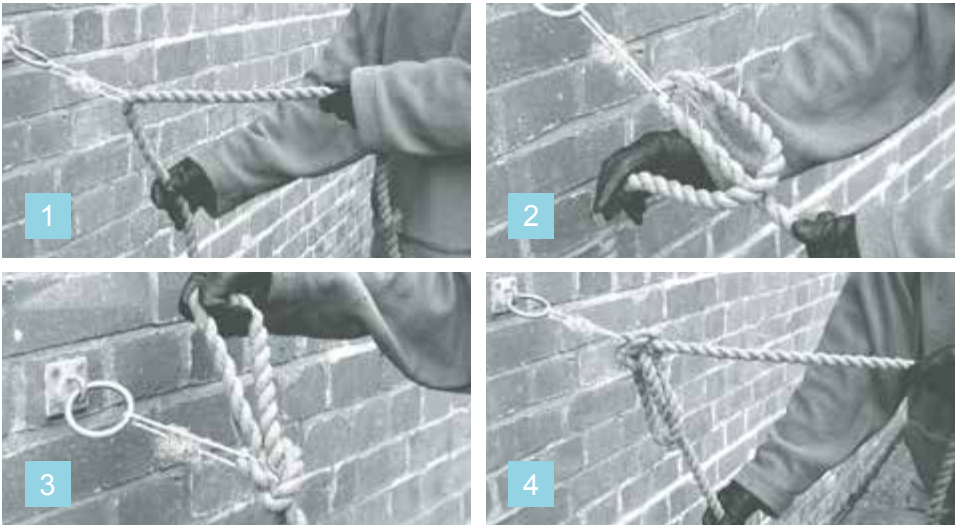
To make a safe tying-up point, tie a piece of string or twine to form a loop to a secure holding ring, and tie the lead rope to this. If the donkey panics, the string will break and save the donkey from hurting itself. Gardening string or spliced baling twine should be used, as new baling twine will rarely break in an

emergency. Specially designed elasticated ties are available, that pull apart if the donkey pulls back. Do not tie your donkey up to anything that can move or be dragged should the donkey panic and pull back.

When you tie up your donkey always use a quick-release knot ([see Figure 5 on page 84](#)). This will allow you to release your donkey from its tie point in the event of an emergency. To tie a quick-release knot:

1. Pass the lead rope through a breakable string loop of twine, allowing 60 cm (2 feet) of rope from the donkey's head collar to the twine loop. This will ensure the donkey cannot become tangled in the rope.
2. Cross the free end of the rope back over the rope from the donkey's head collar, thereby creating a loop.
3. Carefully reach through the loop and pull a small loop of rope up into the first loop.
4. Holding the loop in place, pull on the end of the rope attached to the head collar to tighten the quick-release knot, and thread the free end through the remaining loop to stop the donkey being able to free itself.

Figure 5: **The quick-release knot**



Source: The Donkey Sanctuary

DONKEY GROOMING

GROOMING YOUR DONKEYS IS A REWARDING AND FUN EXPERIENCE. IT IS ALSO A VITAL PART OF THE CARE AND ATTENTION YOU PROVIDE FOR YOUR DONKEYS.

THE BENEFITS OF GROOMING

Do not assume that your donkey will be happy to be tied up.

Regular grooming has three benefits for donkeys:

- It ensures that their coats stay healthy and free from matted areas.
- It provides a chance to examine your donkeys for any lumps and wounds or any skin complaints.
- It helps to build up the bond between you.

Do not brush donkeys when their coat is wet, as this will allow water or dirt to reach the skin, which increases the chances of skin infections such as rain scald.

In the winter donkeys in the UK grow thick coats which provide protection from the weather. Unless donkeys are doing a lot of work, they don't need to have their coats clipped. The exception to this rule is the old donkey that, as a result of hormonal disturbance, may have grown an excessively hairy coat, which a vet might advise requires clipping in summer and winter. Your vet might also require a donkey to be clipped to aid treatment of certain skin conditions. Bathing, if required, should only be done in warm weather.

While moving donkeys around during grooming, keep a hand in contact with their body so they are not startled. It is preferable to walk around the front of donkeys whenever possible. If it is not possible to walk around the front, then allow enough space while walking around the rear to avoid being kicked, talking to let them know where you are.

GROOMING EQUIPMENT

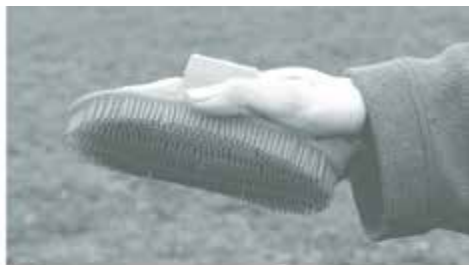
The equipment used to groom donkeys is designed for horses, and can be purchased from any good tack shop or saddlers. The grooming kit should include the following:

- **Dandy brush:** Use this brush first to remove caked mud and dirt from the main part of the donkey's body. Do not use it on tender parts of the body (ie the face, legs and ears) as the hard bristles might irritate. Soft-bristle dandy brushes are available and are ideal for donkeys when they have moulted out their coats in the summer.

Grooming kits should be regularly cleaned using warm water and a mild detergent.



Dandy brush



Plastic currycomb



Rubber currycomb



Body brush

- **Plastic currycomb:** Use this on the long, dirty coat in the same way as the dandy brush, or in conjunction with the body brush to clean the dirt out of the brush during grooming.

- **Rubber currycomb:** Use this when the donkey is moulting. Use circular motions on the shoulders, neck, back and hindquarters to loosen all the dead hair. Donkeys often seem to enjoy having this done.
- **Body brush** (with soft bristles): The body brush lifts the dirt and grease out of the coat and if the coat is short and fine it will help make it shine. As donkeys do not produce much natural grease in their coats and need to retain the grease for protection, use the body brush sparingly on the body in the winter months. Use the body brush on the sensitive areas such as the face, ears, tail, belly and lower legs where the dandy brush is not suitable.



Hoof pick



Metal cattle-comb

- **Hoof pick for cleaning feet:** Try to get one that has a brush on the reverse side to aid cleaning the feet more thoroughly.
- **Metal cattle-comb:** Use this with care on non-bony parts of the back, to aid the removal of excess hair from the donkeys' coat when they shed in the spring and summer months.
- **Cotton gauze swabs:** Use these to clean eyes, nostrils and dock. We no longer advise the use of cotton wool, as even when damp it can leave behind tiny fibres which might cause irritation.

- **Metal currycomb:** Use this only for cleaning brushes and never for donkey grooming.

GROOMING YOUR DONKEY

Start with the dandy brush on the left side of the donkey at the top of its neck. Work backwards towards the rear of the donkey, following the direction of hair growth. The object is to remove caked dirt and sweat marks. Use your hands to check the donkey all over, even when the coat is wet and cannot be brushed. This is the most effective way of detecting lumps, bumps, cuts, etc.

As you progress down the side of your donkey, keep facing towards its rear, to avoid standing behind your donkey as you groom the hind legs.

Once the body has been groomed, brush the donkey's face, ears, legs and mane with the body brush, keeping it clean with the plastic currycomb. Other areas, such as the belly, between the front legs, and body can also be brushed with the body brush.

Any discharge from the eyes, nose and dock areas can be wiped with damp cotton swabs. To prevent the risk of cross-infection, use a separate swab for each eye and each nostril and the tail area. Dispose of all soiled swabs carefully.

Top tip: Use your hands to check your donkeys all over their body for lumps and bumps that might need attention — check their sheath and udder areas at least once a week.

PICKING OUT THE FEET

You should pick out the hooves every day during your grooming routine. Feel the legs to check for any signs of injury or swelling before you start.

Donkeys always have a reason for their behaviour and might kick out if they are in pain, nervous or lack experience of correct hoof care, or if the handler is nervous.

Donkeys have to be trained to lift and hold their feet up. If this has not been done, your donkey will need more training before you can do this safely. Donkeys that kick out when their feet are handled are often labelled as naughty, difficult or stubborn, but in our experience this is never the case. Donkeys always have a reason for their behaviour and might kick out if they are in pain, nervous or lack experience of correct hoof care, or if the handler is nervous.

Handlers commonly make the mistake of lifting donkeys' feet too high and pulling them too far out to the side, which can cause donkeys to be unsteady or reluctant to lift their feet. To help your donkeys remain comfortable, it is important to lift their feet no higher than 30 cm (11.5 inches) from the ground, and lift feet directly under the body. If you have problems picking out your donkeys' feet, you can contact our Welfare Department for more help and advice, or visit our website for more information on behaviour and training.

The front feet

To pick out the front feet ([see Figure 6 on page 91](#)), approach your donkey calmly and follow these steps:

1. Start at the donkey's withers and run a hand down the front left shoulder.
2. Pass onto the leg and then down the back of the front leg to the fetlock joint.
3. Tug gently to encourage the donkey to pick the foot up.
4. Using the hoof pick, working from heel to toe, pick out any mud and stones. Check the frog and white-line areas for stones or damage.

Figure 6: **Picking out the front feet**



Source: The Donkey Sanctuary

Top tip: When picking up the feet always ensure that you keep the donkey's hooves very low to the ground and don't pull them out to the side, as this will cause the donkey to kick.

If your donkey is not keen to lift its leg, ensure it is balanced evenly on all four feet and then, by gently leaning against its shoulder with your hip, displace its weight onto the opposite leg before asking the donkey to lift the leg again. Take care not to hold the hoof too far from the ground (particularly in older donkeys that might have arthritis or other painful limb conditions). Keep the leg at right angles to the floor to help the donkey balance, and avoid undue pressure on the knee. Avoid bringing the leg out to the side as this will be uncomfortable and the donkey might want to pull its leg away. Once you have finished picking out the foot, lower it gently to the ground.

It is important to be gently persistent when picking up feet; don't give up too early or your donkey will learn to resist you picking up its feet in future. Gently and calmly keep asking the donkey to lift its foot by putting a little pressure on the back of its knee with your forearm, as this will help bend the knee and make picking up the feet easier. Never get into a fight or try to force the donkey to pick up its feet; this can lead to accidents and make for worse behaviour in future. Even a normally willing donkey can have a bad day and not want to pick up its feet. A change in behaviour like this can be a sign something is wrong, so observe your donkey closely for signs of pain or discomfort.

If your donkey does not want to pick up a foot when it is normally willing to, try the following:

- Move the donkey to a different spot.
- Make sure the donkey is balanced on all four feet.
- Make sure the donkey's companion is nearby.
- Make sure the donkey is not worried or distracted by something else.

- Try a different leg.
- Finish and come back later to try again.

The hind feet

When picking up a back leg you should use the hand nearest the donkey and run it along the donkey's body. This ensures that any sudden movement does not startle the donkey. To pick out the hind feet ([see Figure 7 on page 94](#)) approach your donkey calmly and follow these steps:

1. From the donkey's hip, run your hand down over the hip and down the leg, then at the hock switch your hand to the inside of the donkey's leg.
2. With your fingers pointing towards the donkey's tail, continue down the inside of the hind leg, from the hock to the hoof. If you put your hand inside the leg at the stifle, it may cause the donkey to kick. Keeping your hand in this inside position prevents your arm straying across the donkey's back leg, which could be dangerous if it kicks backwards.
3. With your fingers wrapped around the back of the fetlock joint, tug gently to encourage the donkey to pick the foot up. Keep your hip alongside the donkey to prevent you from straying too far behind the donkey and into the kick zone. If you use this method, you will stay safe should the donkey kick out.
4. Remember to cup the foot in your hand, with your thumb alongside the hoof and not across the bulb of the heel, to avoid damaging your thumb should the donkey kick out. Using the hoof pick, working from heel to toe, pick out any mud and stones. Check the frog and white-line areas for stones or damage.

Place your thumb alongside the hoof and not across the bulb of the heel.

Figure 7: **Picking out the hind feet**



Source: The Donkey Sanctuary

Use the same sequence when picking out the hooves, starting with the near fore hoof, then the near hind, then off fore, then off hind. The donkey will quickly learn to anticipate and will have the next foot ready for you to clean out.

Hoof oil or hoof grease is not needed for donkeys, unless used for cosmetic purposes during showing or for events.

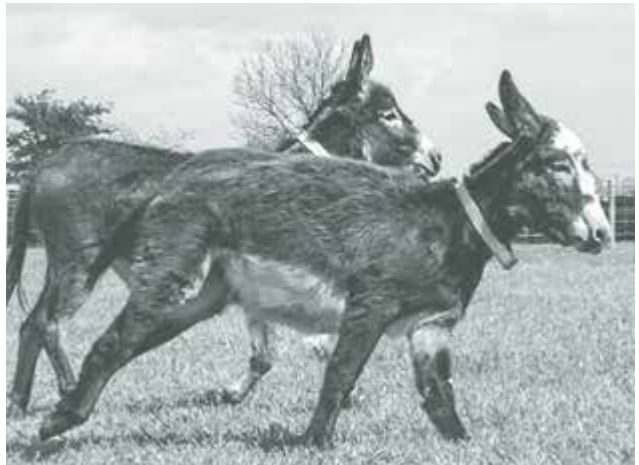
DONKEY HEALTH

EVERY OWNER WILL, AT SOME TIME, BE CONCERNED THAT ALL IS NOT WELL WITH THEIR DONKEY. BY UNDERSTANDING THE SIGNS TO LOOK FOR, IT SHOULD BE EASIER TO SPOT EARLY WARNINGS OF A DEVELOPING PROBLEM.

CHECKING YOUR DONKEYS ARE HEALTHY

It is our experience that donkeys are stoical by nature. They generally do not show obvious or dramatic signs of illness or lameness until the problem is well advanced. Therefore, familiarity with routine health checks and the behaviour of your donkeys is the key to recognising problems early.

Example of a healthy donkey: ears pricked, looking alert.



Ensure your donkeys are vaccinated against Equine Influenza, which requires an annual booster. Even if your donkeys never leave the paddock they are still at risk.

Your donkeys will require the following routine treatments to help maintain their health:

- Parasite tests and treatment in accordance with guidelines from the attending vet.
- Hoof trimming every 6–10 weeks as advised by your farrier or vet.
- Vaccinations against flu (annually) and tetanus (every other year).
- Annual dental checks; older donkeys and donkeys with teeth problems might require more regular checks.



Example of an unwell donkey: dull, depressed and lacking interest.

For both the new and experienced donkey owner, we advise using the following six-point checklist on at least a daily basis:

1. behaviour
2. appetite and thirst
3. faeces and urine
4. eyes, nose and resting respiration (breathing)
5. coat and skin
6. movement.

Behaviour

When monitoring your donkeys' health, observing their behaviour is the single most important check. Each donkey will have its own characteristics — eg a particular companion, grazing pattern, daily routine and behaviour. Sometimes the slightest change indicates a potential problem. Healthy donkeys should be alert and aware, interested in what is going on around them, with their ears pricked. No donkey should spend prolonged periods lying down. Healthy donkeys should be able to get up and down easily, and move freely without limping, taking their weight equally on all four

legs. Small changes in normal behaviour are often the first signs of illness, so get to know your donkeys' behaviour as soon as possible.

Appetite

Donkeys would naturally graze for long periods of time. It is therefore important to control their diet to prevent obesity. Healthy donkeys should be looking to eat throughout the day and have no problem chewing or swallowing. You should, however, be aware that sick donkeys can appear to eat without actually consuming any food. This is known as 'sham eating'. Observe your donkeys carefully to establish whether they are eating normally.

Provide several sources of clean, fresh water.

Water

The amount donkeys drink varies according to air temperature, moisture content of food, workload, etc. Routinely check your donkeys' water trough for evidence of their normal intake.

Sufficient water intake is vital to health and digestion, especially for older, less active donkeys. Therefore, ensuring good water intake is one of the most important elements to keeping your donkey healthy. To ensure good water intake, provide several sources of clean, fresh water at the appropriate height, using, for example, buckets, water troughs or automatic drinkers. In cooler weather donkeys often reduce their intake of cold water, so offer your donkey warmed water (just with the chill taken off is fine). If you can't use a warm tap, add some warm water from a kettle to a bucket of water. It might take time for your donkeys to realise warm water is available, so persevere for a week or two and monitor your donkeys' preferences.

Faeces and urine

Check fresh faeces, as its consistency might alter with diet. There should be a regular output of normal, moist faeces formed into balls which break up easily.

Male and female donkeys each adopt a different characteristic stance when urinating. Normal urine is yellow and watery, and may on occasion be cloudy. It should be passed freely, without straining. You should keep a close eye on any donkey that repeatedly attempts to pass urine, or passes urine which is obviously discoloured or bloody. Mares in season might be seen to attempt to pass urine more frequently.

Eyes, nose and resting respiration (breathing)

Eyes should be open, clean, bright and free from discharge. The nostrils should also be clean and discharge-free. At rest there should be minimal movement of the nostrils as the donkey breathes. It is often difficult to make out the movements of the chest at rest; the movements of the flanks are often the easiest to observe. Causes for further investigation are a flaring of the nostrils, a marked rise and fall of the ribs and flanks, or any noise associated with a donkey's breathing.

Exercise, stress, excitement and fever will increase the rate and depth of respiration.

Coat and skin

A healthy donkey should have a flat, clean coat with no signs of itching, bald areas, sores or abnormal lumps and bumps. It is a good idea to get your donkey used to you routinely running your hands over all areas of the body, legs, head, and sheath or udder area. A donkey's coat can often hide developing problems.

You will find more information in our *Treatment of wounds* factsheet ([see page 157](#)).

WOUNDS

If your donkey has a wound, the first step you should take is to prevent further injury. Catch the donkey and calm it. If your donkey is frightened, ensure your own safety when handling it. Always take care when examining wounds, especially those on the limbs. Seek veterinary advice for any of the following issues:

- Excessive bleeding (haemorrhage).
Wounds on the lower legs can bleed profusely. Apply a pressure bandage before calling the vet — for example, bandage firmly with gauze pads to stem the flow of blood.
- Penetration or puncture through the entire skin thickness.
- A wound close to a joint.
- A severe wound.
- A wound contaminated by dirt or other material.
- Bruises, lumps, swelling and inflammation. In the absence of an obvious wound, these might be the result of an underlying problem.

If your donkeys are not up to date with their tetanus vaccinations, they might require a tetanus antitoxin injection and booster vaccination, so you should contact your vet.

If you are concerned that all is not well, there are a number of simple tests and checks that you can do yourself. These will certainly help in giving your vet a full picture of the problem should you feel it necessary to seek further advice.

ADDITIONAL HEALTH CHECKS

- Temperature, pulse, respiration rate (TPR).
- Gut sounds.
- Feed test.
- Condition score and weight.

Temperature

- Adult range normal values: 36.5 to 37.7°C (97.2 to 100°F). Average 37.1°C (98.8°F).
- Young donkey, up to two years old, normal values: 36.6 to 38.9°C (97.8 to 102.1°F).

Donkeys are individuals and their normal temperature will vary. We recommend taking your donkeys' temperature five or six times over the course of a week at different times of day, and recording the results. This way you will get both yourself and your donkeys used to this procedure, and you'll have a record of your donkeys' normal temperature range should a problem arise.

Pulse rate

- Normal range: 31 to 53 beats/min.
- Average: 41 beats/min.

With a little practice anyone can learn to count the pulse in the artery that runs under and across the donkey's lower jaw. Put a hand above the muzzle to keep the donkey's head still. Use the fingertips of your other hand to locate the artery (about 4 mm in diameter). By varying the pressure you will soon be aware of the pulsations corresponding to each heartbeat. Count the number of pulses felt in 15 seconds and multiply by 4 to get the final rate. Getting to know what is normal for your donkey is very important so that you can recognise and compare any changes.

The average temperature, pulse and respiration for a donkey are: 37.1°C; 41 beats/min; and 20 breaths/min.

You will find more information in our *Respiratory disease in the donkey factsheet* ([see page 157](#)).

You will find more information in our *An introduction to donkey health care DVD*.

Be aware that sick donkeys can appear to be eating without actually consuming any food, an action known as ‘sham eating’.

Respiratory rate

- Normal range: 13 to 31 inspirations/min.
- Average: 20 inspirations/min.

It is best to measure your donkey's respiratory rate before you take the temperature or pulse. Stand back to one side and either watch the rise and fall of the flank or, on a cold day, watch the breaths coming out of the nostrils. Count the number of breaths in 15 seconds and multiply by 4 (one rise and fall of the flank = one breath). As with the temperature and pulse, it is important that you get to know what is normal for your donkey so that you can recognise and compare any changes.

Gut sounds

A normal donkey's digestive system is generally a noisy affair, with many squeaks, gurgles and rumbles. These are particularly evident when the grazing is good but are also audible on winter rations (hay and straw). Your vet will use a stethoscope to hear these sounds but you should pick up some of them by placing your ear against the skin of the flanks (between the last rib and the hind leg). However, take great care because the donkey might kick, particularly if it is in pain. Get used to the normal sounds of a healthy donkey's digestive system as any changes are a good indication of colic (abdominal pain).

Feed test

A favourite test at The Donkey Sanctuary is the ‘ginger biscuit test’; a lack of interest is a definite cause for concern. However, many poorly donkeys may still take a biscuit, particularly if they are used to this treat.

Weight loss

Measure your donkeys' weight monthly using either livestock scales or the heart girth measurement, and keep a record. Sudden unexpected changes in weight can indicate a problem. As a donkey ages it might naturally lose weight but this needs to be carefully monitored and feeding and veterinary advice sought before the donkey becomes underweight.

WHEN TO CALL THE VET

If you see changes in behaviour or suspect that your donkey is unwell, call your vet immediately. Give the vet any information that you have, together with the symptoms the donkey is showing. Monitor the donkey's condition and behaviour while you are waiting. It will be really helpful if you can tell the vet if the donkey produces any dung and whether it looks normal.

Do not attempt to treat the donkey yourself or give any drugs. Treatment depends on your vet's diagnosis.

Top tip: If you see changes in your donkeys' behaviour or suspect that a donkey is unwell, call your vet immediately.

DAILY CHECKS

The following points should be incorporated into the day to help identify problems early:

- Observe your donkeys, watching for changes in normal behaviour.
- Check your donkeys morning and evening for injuries.
- Ensure that fresh feed and water are always available.
- Muck out the stable, and check that droppings and urine are normal.

Ensure your donkeys are vaccinated against Equine Influenza, which requires an annual booster. Even if your donkeys never leave the paddock they are still at risk.

If you suspect that your donkey is unwell, call your vet immediately.

- Check grazing and fencing for damage and poisonous plants.
- Groom your donkeys: pick out feet, clean eyes, nose and dock areas.

COMMON DONKEY AILMENTS

Colic

Colic is a symptom rather than a disease, and is defined as abdominal pain.

Signs that a donkey has colic

Donkeys with colic might only become dull and unwilling to eat. Our research indicates that a significant percentage of donkeys reported to our Veterinary Department as being 'dull' are subsequently diagnosed with colic. The stoic nature of donkeys is such that signs of colic are usually less dramatic than those seen in horses, such as rolling, sweating, and pawing the ground. Just because the signs can be less dramatic, it does not mean the donkey is feeling any less pain. Any of the following signs should cause concern:

- change in normal behaviour
- dullness; this is most commonly the first sign
- lack of appetite or refusing to eat
- unusual repeated patterns of lying down and getting up
- fast breathing, raised heart rate
- excessive sweating
- changed colour of gums or inside eyelid; a brick red colour is a poor sign
- lack of or fewer than normal droppings
- rolling and pawing at the ground; this is rare in donkeys and should be taken to indicate a very serious problem.

It is essential that you are familiar with how your donkeys look when they are in normal health. Observe your donkeys daily, looking for any changes in behaviour. Know what normal dung looks like. Be aware of the average number of piles of droppings your donkeys pass each day, as well as the consistency. Persistently very loose or very dry droppings could be indicative of colic, particularly if other symptoms appear. Check the donkeys' breathing patterns for any changes.

For more information about normal respiratory rates see [Respiratory rate on page 104](#).

**The old adage
'prevention is
better than cure'
definitely applies.**

Treatment for colic

If you see signs of colic, or suspect that your donkey is unwell, call your vet immediately. Give the vet any information that you have observed. Monitor the donkey's condition and behaviour while you are waiting. It will be really helpful if you can tell the vet if the donkey produces any dung and whether it looks normal.

Whilst waiting for the vet keep your donkey comfortable. Allow it to lie down and rest if it wants to and keep it with its companion.

Causes and prevention of colic

There are many causes of colic, such as:

- feed — eg sudden changes to diet, poor quality feed, too much grass, feeding cereals
- inadequate/dirty water supply
- eating non-food items such as plastic bags, rope and bedding
- ingestion of poisonous plants
- sandy soil
- dental disease
- worms
- stomach ulcers.

**You will find
more information
in our *Colic in
donkeys factsheet*
(see [page 157](#)).**

Colic is potentially dangerous because, by the time donkeys let you know they have colic, it might be too late to save them.

HYPERLIPAEMIA

HYPER (too much) LIP(id) (fat) AEMIA
(in the blood).

All donkey owners should be aware of this condition as it carries a high risk of death, even when recognised and treated promptly. Donkeys (as well as some native pony breeds) are particularly susceptible to this devastating condition.

Because the initial signs are so vague, donkey owners must act upon even minor signs.

The disease process

When donkeys stop eating enough, they go into a state of 'negative energy balance', which means that more energy is used up than is taken in. However, the essential organs still require a food supply, so the body tries to use energy that is stored as fat deposits. The result is that free fatty acids are circulated to the liver to be converted to glucose for use by the body. This system is controlled by complex hormonal events, which should shut down the amount of fat released from fat stores as the liver produces the glucose for the body.

However, donkeys and small ponies are not able to efficiently turn off this fat release, and the blood soon carries excess fat in circulation. Large amounts of fat cause the liver and kidneys to degenerate and fail, and eventually all the organs in the body fail. The result is irreversible organ damage and death.

Causes of hyperlipaemia

Donkeys are more at risk if they:

- have any underlying disease such as

dental problems, colic, a heavy worm burden or choke

- are female
- are pregnant or lactating mares
- have lost significant weight in the preceding weeks
- are overweight
- are stressed, which causes them to reduce their feed intake. Stress can be brought on by pain, loss of a companion, sudden dietary change, transport, social mixing, bad weather, or sudden weight loss.

Signs of hyperlipaemia

Because donkeys are stoic by nature, this illness, like others, might only manifest as a general dullness in the donkey, along with a reduced appetite. Subtle changes in behaviour are very important early indicators of possible disease. It is important to know how your donkey normally looks and behaves so you can spot any subtle changes. Halitosis (bad breath) might be evident and there might be reduced production of dung, or production of mucous-covered dung.

Owners should investigate any suspicion that their donkeys might be unwell because a delay in treatment can reduce the chances of a successful outcome.

If you are concerned, ask your vet to visit. The key to dealing with hyperlipaemia is to reverse the 'negative energy balance' before the fat released into the bloodstream has time to cause organ failure. If the donkey will eat, then encourage it to do so. Try fresh grass, or taking the donkey to a hedgerow where it can be allowed access to non-poisonous plants, or offering grated apple/carrot and ginger biscuits or any other

**A dull donkey
is a veterinary
emergency.**

You will find more information in our *Hyperlipaemia in donkeys* factsheet ([see page 157](#)) — prevention is better than cure.

Vaccination against equine influenza and tetanus are essential for the health and wellbeing of your donkeys.

foodstuff you know your donkey enjoys. Offer some warm, clean water to drink.

If a donkey has to be hospitalised, their companion must go too.

Reducing the risk after losing a companion

The death of a companion is very stressful and requires careful management. To reduce the risk of hyperlipaemia, always allow the bereaved donkey to remain with the body of its companion until interest appears to have been lost. Observe the surviving donkey very closely for at least three weeks after the loss of its friend, as it is our experience that hyperlipaemia might not occur for some time after the stressful event. Lots of extra attention will help, but do not feed extra treats as this will lead to weight problems and is a habit that a donkey will relish.

RESPIRATORY DISEASE

Donkeys are susceptible to the same respiratory diseases as horses. However, as donkeys are stoic and tend not to be athletic, it is easy to miss the signs and disease might progress significantly before it is noticed.

Causes of disease:

- infections
- allergies
- fibrosis
- tumours
- tracheal narrowing/collapse.

Signs of respiratory disease:

- nostrils flaring with each inspiration
- excessive abdominal movements
- an outstretched neck or very noisy respiration
- persistent coughing

- any nasal discharge, whether thick or thin
- abnormal swellings, especially between the bones of the lower jaw and throat area, which could indicate swollen lymph glands as a result of infection
- reduced appetite and/or high temperature.

It is essential that you know what is normal for your donkeys. Get used to checking their respiration rate. Donkeys generally breathe in and out between 13 and 31 times per minute (average 20 times per minute). For more information on taking the respiration see [Respiratory rate on page 104](#).

What to do

Call your vet without delay. Any information regarding breathing characteristics, body temperature, discharges, confirmation and date of vaccination against equine influenza, worming and any change of bedding material may be relevant. It is essential that you let your vet know if your donkey has travelled recently and whether there has been contact with other equines.

Treatment

This will depend upon the vet's findings. Many respiratory diseases are highly infectious. Seek your vet's advice about what to do if an infectious cause is diagnosed, but always remember never to separate your donkey from its companion.

Reducing the risk

Ensure your donkeys are vaccinated against equine influenza — this requires an annual booster. Even if your donkeys never leave the paddock, they are still at risk. Other equines

You will find more information about the causes and prevention of respiratory infection in our *Respiratory disease in the donkey* factsheet ([see page 157](#)).

might be in the vicinity and could spread infection on the wind. You could even bring infection in yourself.

DENTAL CARE

Background

Donkeys evolved to roam over long distances in very arid climates across rugged terrain in search of sparse and coarse grasses as well as other fibrous plant materials. In order to cope with long-duration feeding on highly abrasive matter, donkeys have developed teeth that are designed to wear constantly. As the chewing surface wears, the long crown held in reserve, below the gum, erupts slowly towards the point at which the upper and lower teeth meet. Donkeys have a finite amount of tooth available, so as they age their teeth begin to literally wear out.

Picture of young donkey's teeth.



Donkeys may have anywhere between 16 and 44 teeth, depending on age, gender, and the presence of small, non-functional wolf teeth.

During adolescence donkeys shed their temporary 'milk' teeth to allow for the permanent teeth to take their place. This shedding takes place at regular intervals, starting with the central incisors from around the age of 2.5 years. The mouth is not dentally complete until around five years of age. It is important that the milk teeth or 'caps' are shed at the correct time: if they are retained they are likely to cause infection, pain and trauma; if they shed too soon, the underlying permanent tooth might not have had sufficient time to develop fully — even if the tooth looks normal, it will be at much greater risk of increased wear and cavities.

Regular dental checks are vital to maintain the welfare of your donkeys and prevent often fatal conditions arising.



Using a humane gag to allow visual check of the cheek teeth.

Dental care as part of donkey management

All donkeys should have their teeth regularly checked by an appropriate professional. It is important they are checked soon after birth to identify any serious problems. From then on it is recommended that all donkeys are checked twice annually, as their teeth shed, erupt and wear at a rapid rate whilst young. Your vet or EDT (equine dental technician) will

Twenty percent of our donkeys die every year due to dental or dental-related disease.

advise you of appropriate appointments specific to your donkey. Geriatric donkeys are likely to need more frequent dental check-ups.

If treatment is inadequate or of inappropriate quality it takes less than five years for dental health to decline to concerning levels.

Prevention is key to maintaining good oral health

There is no need to wait until your donkeys' teeth are razor-sharp or you notice any of the typical warning signs before booking an appointment with your vet/EDT. Dental treatments are much more effective when carried out at regular intervals.

A donkey with poor teeth — overgrowths and sharp edges.



Do not wait until your donkeys lose weight, have difficulty or stop eating, or develop malodorous breath; dental problems are likely to be severe in these cases.

It is your responsibility to employ an appropriate person to complete dental assessments and procedures. It is highly recommended that you consult either a qualified EDT or vet who has gained the BEVA/BAEDT qualifications. A comprehensive examination will always involve the use of a humane gag to allow viewing of the back teeth.

Signs of dental problems

The following signs indicate dental problems in your donkeys:

- difficulty chewing
- dropping food out of mouth
- excessive salivation
- behavioural changes
- difficulty nipping at grass
- strong-smelling mouth
- food packing — retention of partly chewed food in cheek pouches
- whole grains or long fibre in the faeces
- nasal discharge
- colic episodes
- inability to eat or no desire to eat
- weight loss.

Remember: there might be no signs at all

Donkeys are famed for stoicism, but could it be that we just do not notice the signs?

Donkeys that appear very healthy or even obese might have significant dental problems.

Useful links

For finding a registered equine dental technician:

- British Association of Equine Dental Technicians — www.baedt.com
- British Equine Veterinary Association — www.beva.org.uk.

You will find more information in our *Dental care factsheet* ([see page 157](#)).

COMMON SKIN CONDITIONS

There are many causes of skin problems in donkeys and it is very important to receive a correct diagnosis from your vet and to follow their recommendations for treatment. Do not be tempted to treat donkeys yourself as this can delay correct

treatment and potentially make the condition worse — always consult your vet.

Flies

There are many types of fly including the common housefly, the stable fly, horse fly, and the bot fly. The first signs of irritation by flies include excessive tail swishing, rubbing, stamping feet, and head tossing or shaking. In some donkeys fly bites cause raised lumps and spots of blood.

In the summer flies can cause great distress and irritation:

- They can spread infection, especially around the eyes.
- They can lay eggs in wounds.
- Some donkeys suffer large swellings when bitten.

Here are some practical ways to prevent flies from bothering your donkeys:

- Remove manure frequently from grazing paddocks and the stable.
- Keep the stable environment clean; wash and disinfect the stable walls on a weekly basis, remove unwanted feed stuff, and clean water troughs.
- Provide a field shelter. This will offer protection whilst the donkeys are in a paddock — they can rest and take refuge from the sun.
- Try to locate shelters in a shady and breezy location.
- Position muck heaps as far away from stables as possible.
- Use fly strips or traps in the stable and shelter, and remember to hang them well out of reach of the donkeys.

You will find more information on the chemical prevention of flies in our *Insect protection for donkeys factsheet* ([see page 157](#)).

- Use summer sheets or fly rugs to help alleviate irritation by preventing flies from landing on the donkeys.
- Use fly fringes or masks that can be worn whilst the donkeys are grazing. The masks are also a useful way to prevent sunburn in pale-skinned donkeys.

Midges

Culicoides midges cause the condition 'sweet-itch' in hypersensitive (or allergic) donkeys. The midges are very active at dawn and dusk and their bites cause intense irritation to donkeys, leading to excess rubbing, especially on the mane and tail areas. The sore areas often bleed, attracting more insects.

Prevention is most effective but can be difficult. Use the methods listed above for flies to prevent the midges from bothering your donkeys. In addition, it is important to:

- stable donkeys at dawn and dusk
- use fly repellents several times a day
- keep donkeys away from water courses and wet areas where midges congregate.

If your donkey is affected by sweet-itch, seek the advice of your vet.

Mites

There are a number of mites that cause intense irritation. Some types live on donkeys, while others live in hay and straw. They cause irritation by biting, usually on the lower legs or around the head and neck. Your vet might be able to find these on skin samples. Various insecticide preparations are available.

Top tip: Do not be tempted to treat donkeys yourself as this can delay correct treatment and potentially make the condition worse — get veterinary advice.

Lice

Lice are parasites that live and lay eggs on their equine host. There are two types of lice found commonly in donkeys: chewing lice which eat scurf and dead skin in the coat, and sucking lice which feed on the blood of their host. Both types of lice can cause itching, rubbing, hair loss, depression and, in the case of sucking lice, anaemia. Lice are more common in the winter months and tend to prefer animals with long coats and those with lowered immunity (eg the very young or old, or donkeys who are sick). Lice live within the donkey coat and are commonly seen in the armpits and above the eye socket. Eggs, immature 'nymphs' and adults might all be seen and should be included in treatment programmes. Thankfully, lice are host-specific, so lice on your donkeys cannot pass to humans or non-equine animals.

Treatment of lice can be difficult and might require more than one application. We recommend that you seek advice from a vet, as many of the traditional 'anti-lice' preparations have disappointing success rates in the thick donkey coat.

The lice spray Equine NitNat, developed by the University of Bristol in collaboration with The Donkey Sanctuary, is now available. Currently the only place to source the spray is through a website: www.agrientlimited.com.

Ticks

Ticks are parasites that bite and feed on the blood of a mammalian host before falling off to complete their lifecycle. Ticks tend to be common in areas with long grass and bracken, such as the New Forest, and moorland. Although the tick bite itself rarely causes more than local irritation, ticks are a problem due

to their ability to pass on infectious disease to equines and other mammals. The most well known of these is Lyme Disease, which can cause severe illness in mammals including donkeys, horses and humans.

It is important to be vigilant and check your donkeys over for ticks in spring, summer and autumn, particularly when they are grazing in high-risk areas with long grass. Common areas for attachment are inbetween the back legs, under the tail, and in the ears. If ticks are found, they must be carefully removed so that the tick mouth part is not left in the donkey. Special 'tick removers' are perfect for the job and available from any veterinary practice. Avoid traditional methods of tick removal, including burning, squeezing or smothering in Vaseline, as they increase the risk of the tick regurgitating its stomach contents into the animal, thus increasing the risk of infection.

Remember that early detection is important and can influence the success of the treatment.

Rain scald and mud fever

Both of these conditions occur when a donkey's skin/hair is wet for a long time, so they mainly occur in winter. Rain scald affects the shoulders, back and rump, while mud fever affects the lower limbs. The organism responsible is dermatophilus, which causes crusting and matting of the hair coat. When the hair is pulled out, there is pus beneath the scabs. Treatment involves antiseptic washes, good hygiene and dry conditions. A course of antibiotics is often required, so you will need to call a vet to see the donkey.

Ringworm

This is a fungal skin condition. It can take different forms, including lesions that appear as circles and hair loss. Ringworm is contagious

and can easily become widespread. Although it will generally resolve in 6 to 12 weeks, call your vet for advice and treatment to limit the spread of the disease. Treatment includes using washes on the donkeys and disinfecting the environment. Ringworm can be transmitted to humans so take precautions when handling a donkey with ringworm; wear gloves and wash hands and equipment thoroughly after handling the donkey.

Aggressive sarcoid on a donkey.



Sarcoids

A sarcoid is a type of skin tumour found quite commonly in equine species and is not to be confused with sarcoidosis that affects humans. The tumours often appear suddenly and, depending on the type, can grow quickly. In some cases they can affect the ability of a donkey to wear its tack or harness, affecting its ability to work. Treatment can be expensive and time-consuming and a complete cure is not always achieved.

Sarcoids vary in appearance. Sometimes they can be confused with other types of skin growths such as warts. They might appear dry

and scaly and might easily bleed or ulcerate. Some types of sarcoid are very aggressive locally, which means they tend to invade and spread in the tissue surrounding them. However, they are strictly limited to the skin and the tissue directly under it; they do not spread from the skin to internal organs.

Sarcoids can also be fleshy masses, sometimes with a thin stalk or a wide flat base. This type often develops quickly from a milder form following damage, and might develop at the site of skin injuries on the limbs. Another type of sarcoid ('verruucose') is grey, scabby or warty in appearance, occasionally with small shot-like, solid lumps within them. Sarcoids might also appear as grey, hairless, often circular areas. 'Malevolent' sarcoids are the most aggressive type: the tumours spread extensively through the skin. It is a rare form that is usually encountered in the elbow, face and genital areas.

Any suspicious lumps should be checked by your vet without delay as early treatment is more likely to be successful. Do not attempt to treat the sarcoid yourself. The most appropriate treatment will depend on the type of sarcoid present and this decision must be made by a vet.

Sunburn/photosensitisation

Donkeys with pink, unpigmented skin may burn in summer and require a mesh mask with detachable nose flap and/or daily high-factor sun-block application. Some donkeys will also develop sensitivity to the sun if they have liver disease or have eaten certain plants, including St John's Wort. Your vet might take a blood sample to narrow down the cause.

There are many other skin problems, which are less common and will need veterinary advice to diagnose and treat.

FOOTCARE

Donkeys' feet differ considerably from those of horses and it is important to know these differences in order to provide correct care.

Background

Donkeys are adapted to a dry environment. They thrive in semi-arid parts of the world, where the ground is dry and stony and where, for most of the year, the vegetation is of poor nutritional value and very fibrous. Their feet are more efficient at absorbing water than horses' hooves are: this is probably an adaptation to the dry environment in which they evolved.

When donkeys are kept in the UK, on lush, wet pasture, their feet easily become soft and more crumbly. They quite frequently get foot diseases associated with this, such as:

- infection of the sole and frog (thrush)
- infected, penetrating wounds (abscesses)
- seedy toe/white-line disease.

For more information on seedy toe/white-line disease see [Seedy toe on page 125](#).

Structure of the donkey's foot and differences from the horse

There are a number of differences between horse and donkey feet:

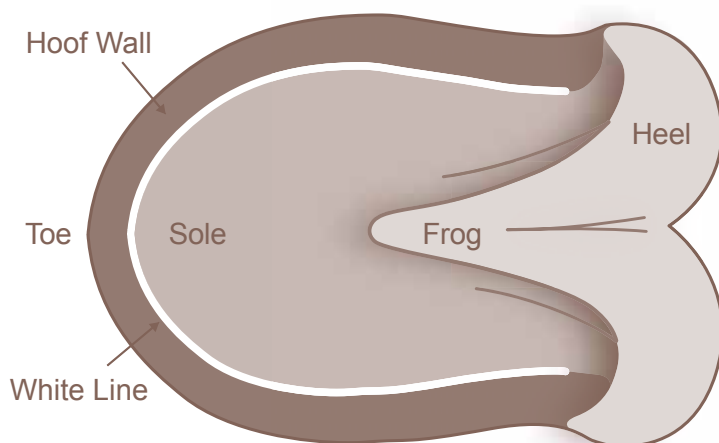
- The donkey foot is between 5° and 10° more upright than the horse foot.
- The donkey foot is 'boxier' than the horse foot; the horse foot is more conical.
- The sole of a donkey foot is more U-shaped; the sole of a horse foot is more round.

Diseases and problems of the feet are all too common in donkeys. Proper daily care and attention is essential if problems are to be avoided or minimised in those donkeys already suffering from ongoing conditions.

Here is our checklist for keeping your donkeys' feet healthy:

- Get to know their feet ([see Figure 8 on page 123](#)). Pick them up and remove all the muck and stones daily.
- Keep bedding clean and dry. A well-maintained wood-shavings bed would appear to be very useful, especially for donkeys with chronic foot problems.
- Provide a well-drained, clean exercise area. Avoid grazing in muddy fields.
- Monitor your donkeys' weight
Overweight donkeys are more prone to foot problems.

Figure 8: **Structures underneath the donkey foot**



Source: The Donkey Sanctuary

You will find more information in our factsheet and DVD for farriers (see page 157).

- Encourage regular exercise, particularly if donkeys are housed during the winter. If safe, a daily walk on head collar and lead rope will be good for everyone.
- Find a farrier who regularly trims donkeys' feet and ask him to visit every 6 to 10 weeks. Donkeys with specific problems might need more frequent visits.

The following checklist will help your farrier to provide the best foot care possible:

- Train your donkeys so they are relaxed when having their feet trimmed.
- Catch the donkeys for your farrier and be there to hold them while the farrier works.
- Ensure the donkeys' legs and feet are dry and mud-free.
- Provide a clean, well-lit, preferably concreted area, which is protected from the elements.
- Ensure regular trimming in line with your farrier's recommendations.
- Hoof oil/grease is not normally required; however, occasional use for shows should not be harmful.
- Seek veterinary help without delay if you suspect lameness or laminitis.
- Only use supplements to encourage hoof growth on the advice of a vet.

Avoid grazing donkeys during frosty periods, particularly late frosts followed by bright, sunny weather.

Laminitis

This is a crippling painful disease, often with irreversible consequences. There are several causes, including too much rich food, infection, and pregnancy. The end result is a destruction of the support mechanism of the toe bone within the hoof such that the toe bone can rotate or move downwards. It is a veterinary emergency. If your donkey is

unwilling to walk, is lying down more than usual, and has easily-felt pulses in the blood vessels around the fetlock, contact your vet immediately. Do not make the donkey walk; put it in a well-bedded stable with easy access to food and water until the vet arrives.

To avoid laminitis, restrict access to new or fast-growing grass by using a moveable electric fence or by creating a track-grazing system. Feeding with hay or straw prior to turning out might help reduce consumption of too much rich grass. Grazing frosty grass has also been implicated in an increased occurrence of laminitis, so avoid grazing donkeys during frosty periods, particularly late frosts followed by bright, sunny weather. Avoid obesity as additional weight increases the load on donkeys' feet and might lead to more problems. Feeding cereal-based 'horse mixes' is also a very common cause of laminitis in donkeys.

Seedy toe

All or part of the white-line area becomes weak and crumbly. Often little stones and dirt get stuck in the white line. Eventually it can extend quite far up the hoof, towards the coronary band. It is treated by cutting out the affected part of the hoof wall and allowing new, healthy horn to grow down. The donkey must also be kept on clean, dry ground.

Thrush

Thrush is an infection of the ground surface of the foot, particularly affecting the frog. It has a distinctive, unpleasant smell. It is often associated with keeping the donkey in wet conditions.

Thrush is prevented by keeping the feet clean and dry as much as possible.

You will find more information in our *Donkey foot care* factsheet ([see page 157](#)).

Foot abscess (pus in the foot)

An abscess is usually the result of a wound that penetrates the sole or white line and becomes infected, with a build-up of pus. Such wounds can be a cause of tetanus. Ensure that your donkeys are protected by vaccination.

If you suspect an abscess, you should seek veterinary advice. The vet might recommend a poultice to help draw the infection out of the foot, and/or cut away the abscess with a hoof knife to help the infection to drain out. An abscess in the foot is intensely painful and requires urgent attention.

FEEDING ADVICE

Donkeys have evolved to survive in some of the most inhospitable parts of the world, and are adapted to live in areas with very poor, sparse vegetation. They are extremely efficient at digesting fibrous, poor-quality plant material and have evolved as browsers, eating woody shrubs and trees, as well as grazers. Donkeys and their hybrid offspring, mules, are able to thrive on rations that horses could not survive on. In their natural habitat donkeys will graze and browse, eating highly fibrous plant material in small quantities throughout the day and often walking considerable distances, so a well-balanced, high-fibre diet is ideal for maintaining a healthy donkey in the correct body condition.

Fit, healthy donkeys at The Donkey Sanctuary always have access to barley straw to ensure they are getting plenty of fibre. During the spring and summer they also have access to restricted grazing. The amount of grass donkeys have access to is controlled either by strip grazing using electric fencing

or by co-grazing with other species to prevent the donkeys getting too fat.

During the winter months they are housed in large, airy barns with concrete run-out yards. They have free access to barley straw and are fed a controlled amount of hay or haylage according to body condition. If the weather is good we try to get the donkeys out to grass for short periods as it is good for their wellbeing. Old or sick donkeys might be fed additional high-fibre feeds and supplements in special circumstances, to maintain their body weight. We might also rug donkeys that are struggling to maintain weight or suffer from stiffness. Grazing should always be considered as supplementary to straw, which should make up the majority of a healthy donkey's diet. If your donkeys have access to grazing all year round then very little hay will be required, even during the winter months. Controlling the amount of grass and hay they have each day is essential to maintaining ideal body condition.

Regular worming and dental checks are necessary to enable the donkey to make efficient use of its feed. For more information see [Dental care on page 112](#).

Feeding

Weigh your donkeys at least once a month to identify any gradual changes in weight, using livestock scales. Where these are not available, the heart girth and height measurement method should be used. For more information on heart girth measurement see [Monitoring your donkeys' weight and condition on page 133](#). It is important to learn to body score your donkeys as well, as this will support your weight measurements and allow feed to be reduced or increased accordingly.

You will find more information in our feeding factsheets ([see page 157](#)).

Note the following points in relation to feeding your donkeys:

- Excessive grazing and overfeeding with insufficient exercise is all too common in donkeys kept in the UK. Obesity is associated with a number of serious problems and diseases and is therefore a serious welfare issue. Prevention is better than cure; dieting an overweight donkey is not an easy task.
- Most donkeys, even those undertaking limited exercise, only require a maintenance ration. Only underweight, old or sick individuals usually need any form of additional feeding. Restricted grass, hay and straw, with an equine mineral salt lick or recommended vitamin balancer and water, will be all that most healthy donkeys require.
- Any change in your donkeys' diet should be made gradually. If extra feeds are required, they are better fed in small, frequent feeds rather than simply once a day. If a donkey is underweight or old, then a veterinary and dental examination is likely to be necessary.
- Barley straw should be provided ad-lib for fit, healthy donkeys. However, underweight or old donkeys with worn or missing teeth might be unable to chew straw adequately, so short-chop forage products might be required as a replacement for barley straw. Where barley straw is not available, other long-fibre forage that is high in fibre and low in sugar and starch is required.
- If the climate of your country or region means lush grass is a rarity, this is an advantage when caring for donkeys. The donkey is very well adapted to make the most of poor-value grasses and browse, so avoid over-feeding with hay, haylage or concentrate feeds. As with all donkeys, monitor weight and

You will find more information in our *Feeding donkeys* factsheet ([see page 157](#)).

We recommend that barley straw be provided ad-lib for fit, healthy donkeys.

condition score as a guide to correct levels of feed and adjust if required.

- All feed, whether hay, straw or purchased feed, should be of good quality and never spoiled, dusty or mouldy. Particular care should be taken with the feeding and bedding of donkeys with respiratory diseases, particularly diseases caused by allergy (eg to fungal spores).
- Never feed grass clippings, and ensure that your neighbours also know not to, as this can lead to colic.

Basic rules of feeding

- Feed little and often, and keep feeding times regular.
- Any change in the feeding regime must always be carried out gradually — over two or three weeks.
- Always feed according to the donkeys' age, weight and temperament.
- Avoid dusty or mouldy feeds.
- Always have clean water available.
- Access to an equine salt or mineral lick is advisable.

The amount of feed a donkey requires can be judged according to experience, commonsense, and information obtained from research carried out at The Donkey Sanctuary. This research shows that a healthy, fully grown donkey requires dry matter equal to 1.3% to 1.8% of its bodyweight per day (1.3% for summer maintenance and 1.8% in the winter). Therefore a healthy donkey weighing 180 kg would require between 2.3 kg and 3.2 kg of dry matter per day. Consider the specific needs of animals under five years or with poor dentition.

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All feed, whether hay, straw or purchased feed, should be of good quality and never spoiled, dusty or mouldy.

During the winter donkeys should not require more than 25% to 50% of their forage by weight to be composed of hay or haylage, meaning that 50% to 75% of their fibre should still come from straw. Pregnant or lactating donkeys should be provided with ad-lib hay or haylage during the last trimester of pregnancy and the first three months of lactation.

Straw

For most donkeys and mules living in temperate climates like the UK, straw should form the majority of the diet. Straw should ideally be fed at floor level, but small-hole hay nets can be used if tied at the appropriate height and if they do not pose a risk to the donkey becoming caught up. Straw should be freely available at all times for animals with good dentition. Straw provides fibre and limited nutrients to the diet but might need supplementation to optimise protein and vitamin and mineral levels within the diet.

We recommend feeding good quality barley straw to donkeys with good teeth as it is high in fibre and low in sugar, and closely resembles what a donkey would eat in the wild. Constant access to straw will allow a donkey to eat to appetite without consuming too many calories and therefore risking putting on excess weight; excess weight carries associated risks such as laminitis, Equine Metabolic Syndrome and hyperlipaemia.

Oat straw might be useful for old or underweight donkeys with good teeth as this usually has a slightly higher nutritional value than barley straw. Wheat straw is very fibrous and has lower energy values, but may be fed to young, healthy donkeys with good teeth.

Very little hay will be required, even during the winter months.

Hay and haylage

Donkeys might require dietary supplementation with hay or haylage during the winter or when pregnant, lactating or growing, in order to supply extra energy. Hay or haylage for donkeys must be selected carefully as forage made for horses or other livestock is often too rich and might lead to dietary upset or laminitis. Hay or haylage should be late-cut, high in fibre and low in sugar, and will be visibly coarse. Second-cut hay, usually made at the end of July, is normally lower in energy value and suitable for most donkeys. High-fibre haylage might be appropriate for donkeys when late-cut hay is not readily available, as sugar levels are reduced through partial fermentation. Donkeys are able to thrive on hay or haylage with low-energy and high-fibre levels, but physical quality should not be compromised on. Commercially produced high-fibre haylage is generally better for donkeys than farmers' haylage as it will be produced to a regular standard.

Remember that late-cut hay will have lower energy values, which might suit your donkeys if they are overweight. If the hay is cut later in the year, a lot of the goodness will have gone out of the grass and some of the grass will have gone to seed. This type of hay is much lower in energy than early-cut hay, and for that reason it is ideal for feeding to donkeys provided they are not elderly or underweight.

Some hay can be high in sugars, which has been implicated in the development of laminitis in equines. If you are concerned, it is always best to have hay tested. This can be arranged at a reasonable cost through many feed suppliers. Well-made high-fibre haylage

Ragwort in hay and haylage is very poisonous to donkeys but, unfortunately, quite hard to distinguish once it has dried — this is why it is important to know and trust your hay supplier.

certified suitable for laminitics should have a lower sugar content than hay and might be a more suitable forage for some donkeys.

Freshly cut hay should be stored in a dry barn for at least three months before feeding. Do not suddenly introduce freshly cut hay as it could cause colic and laminitis. Reduce the risk by mixing the new hay with the previous year's hay, or mix it with straw over a few days so there is a gradual changeover. If hay is in short supply in your area (or if it is very expensive), you could look at the alternatives mentioned in this chapter. Plan ahead to avoid a shortage, maybe getting together with other local donkey owners to order and store in bulk.

Haylage

Haylage is semi-wilted grass that has been allowed to dry to only 55% to 65% dry matter (as compared to 85% to 95% in hay). The grass is baled, compressed and sealed in tough plastic and the resultant forage is virtually dust-free, highly palatable and nutritious. Once the plastic wrapping is broken (deliberately or accidentally), fungal spores start to grow so, once opened, the haylage must be used within three to five days (less in warm weather) or discarded. If there are any signs of mould or yeast growth on a bale once opened, it should be discarded, as should any uneaten haylage.

Haylage can be very variable in terms of nutritional levels. Some haylage might be too high in energy to feed to donkeys. If you are unsure about the suitability of locally available haylage, we recommend having it analysed (most of the large horse-feed companies provide this service for a small fee) or feeding a commercially available equine haylage marketed as 'laminitic safe'.

You will find more information on ragwort control and identification in our *Poisonous plants — ragwort kills* factsheet (see [page 157](#)).

Silage

Silage is not suitable for feeding to donkeys because the moisture level is usually too high and it has a low pH and low fibre and high protein levels.

MONITORING YOUR DONKEYS' WEIGHT AND CONDITION

Keeping a regular record of your donkeys' body condition score and estimated weight measurement is essential for every donkey owner.

You can estimate the weight of donkeys over two years of age using The Donkey Sanctuary's weight estimator. In order to estimate the weight, you will need to know the donkey's height and heart girth measurements (in centimetres).



Measuring a donkey's height.

To measure a donkey's height, stand it on a hard, level surface and measure from the ground up to the highest point of the withers. A height-measuring stick is ideal, but a broom handle marked at

“There is nothing good about being an overweight donkey.”

Anna Harrison,
Donkey Sanctuary
Welfare Vet.

the height of the donkey's withers can be measured to give an accurate reading. Once a donkey is over four years of age this measurement will only be required once, and it can then be used in future weight estimations.

You can use an ordinary tailor's tape measure to take the heart girth measurement. Pass the tape measure around the bottom of the donkey's chest as far forward as possible and as close to the front legs as possible. The tape measure should cross the top of the donkey's back approximately 10 cm (a hand's width) back from the withers. (The front of the cross can be quite a good guide to the position of the withers.) Pull the tape firmly but carefully around the donkey and take the reading in centimetres.

Measuring a donkey's heart girth.



The heart girth measurement should always be taken in the same location and preferably by the same person to ensure a consistency of measurements. Both height and heart girth measurements can then be

marked on the Weight Estimation Chart and the donkey's weight read off the centre scale by drawing a line between the two measurements. The Weight Estimation Chart is contained in our *Condition scoring and weight estimation* factsheet.

For donkeys less than two years of age, height cannot be used to help estimate weight.

Body condition scoring

Another way to monitor the weight of your donkey is to condition score their body on a monthly basis. Body condition scoring is a hands-on process for feeling the amount of muscle and fat that is covering the donkey's bones. It can be used in conjunction with the heart girth measurement to monitor changes in body weight and condition. Using the *Condition scoring and weight estimation* factsheet as a guide, you can feel the coverage over the bones in five specific areas: neck and crest, shoulders and withers, back and ribs, loins, and the dock and tail areas. Take and record the measurements each month and you will be able to detect changes in body condition and adjust your feeding regime accordingly. The body condition score ranges from 1 to 5:

1. poor
2. moderate
3. ideal
4. overweight
5. obese.

To aid accurate measurement, half points can be used. For example, a donkey with a body condition score higher than 3 but lower than a full 4 can be termed 3.5.

When deciding on the correct course

You will find more information in our *Condition scoring and weight estimation* factsheet ([see page 157](#)).

You will find more information in our *Feeding and managing the underweight donkey* factsheet ([see page 157](#)).

You will find more information on dieting your donkey in our *Feeding and managing the overweight donkey* factsheet ([see page 157](#)).

Dieting very overweight donkeys is to be strongly encouraged but it is by no means an easy matter. It can be frustratingly difficult and take much longer than might be expected. But keep going: it will be worth it knowing your donkey is fitter and healthier as a result.

of action following your condition scoring, you might have to take into consideration the age of your donkey and any veterinary conditions they have. If in doubt, get advice from your vet or contact The Donkey Sanctuary.

To best manage your donkeys' weight we recommend that you weigh and body condition score them at least once a month.

FEEDING AND MANAGING THE UNDERWEIGHT DONKEY

When dealing with an underweight donkey (body condition score 1.5 to 2), be sure to try and establish the reason behind any weight loss before making nutritional alterations. Weight loss can occur for a number of reasons and might be related to previous neglect, age, dental problems, disease, loss of a companion, time of year, or the quality of feed.

Before making any changes to a donkey's diet it would be beneficial to get the donkey checked over by a vet to rule out any underlying health issues. It is also advisable to get a BAEDT/BEVA-qualified equine dental technician (EDT) to see the donkey to check for any dental problems which might be contributing to weight loss and which might affect the types of feeds that the donkey will be able to manage. We advise that donkeys are routinely checked at least once a year by an EDT, regardless of whether or not the donkeys have any dental issues.

DIETING YOUR DONKEY

Being overweight is always going to be a risk for donkeys kept in the UK and similar

countries. It is a serious risk to health, putting excess strain on the limbs and hooves, affecting internal organs such as the liver, and increasing the risk of potentially fatal diseases such as laminitis and hyperlipaemia (a disease of excessive fat metabolism).

Newly acquired donkeys and elderly donkeys must be carefully assessed before starting any diet. Always allow recently arrived donkeys time to settle down, preferably managed and fed as they were in their previous home. Only start the diet when donkeys are content and have adapted to the new environment. Elderly donkeys may benefit from a full veterinary examination, including a thorough dental check, before dieting. They must be able to eat, chew and digest effectively.

Weight loss should be gradual and is achieved by choosing appropriate feeds, such as barley straw, that are low in energy but high enough in fibre to allow donkeys to eat to appetite. Successful weight loss involves dietary changes plus management changes to increase activity levels. Donkeys who have been obese for a long period of time might never lose calcified fat pads on the neck and trunk. This should be accounted for when condition scoring.

It is important to make changes slowly over several weeks and not to starve the donkeys, as this will cause unnecessary stress and hyperlipaemia. Allow donkeys to 'trickle feed' on barley straw, as they would in the wild. Provide mental stimulation to help keep the donkeys moving and prevent boredom. Don't forget to check straw for retained grain; shake it over a tarpaulin before feeding to the donkeys, if necessary.

Make sure you keep a close eye on your

Don't expect overnight results. Weight loss should be gradual, at between 2 kg and 5 kg a month.

donkeys for any signs of ill-health or developing problems. Work out a plan and make sure everyone sticks to it.

If you need help and support dieting your donkey, talk to your vet or call **01395 578222** and ask to speak to the Welfare Department.

WORMING

It might be necessary to worm your donkeys, although it is important to understand that the use of chemical worming products forms only a part of effective worm control. Always speak to your vet to work out a suitable worming programme according to factors such as the type of pasture management and number of donkeys.

Rotating paddocks will give the land a rest. Ideally, although rarely possible, pasture should be rested for at least 12 months, especially if the land has become badly cut up or damaged. Using cattle or sheep to graze the donkeys' pasture will also help to minimise any worm burden, as the majority of equine worms do not survive a ruminant's digestive system.

Does my donkey need worming?

To avoid the unnecessary use of worming products and help prevent the build-up of chemical resistance in worms, The Donkey Sanctuary's recommended strategy is for owners to take a sample of fresh dung from the ground, from the centre of the pile so it is not contaminated, and arrange for a faecal worm egg count (FWEC). Your vet can then advise if worming is required and, if so, with what. The dung sample can only give an idea of what the egg count is on the day it is taken, and the regular test does not give results for

Samples need to be packaged and sent in accordance with Post Office regulations regarding the posting of hazardous materials.

tapeworm, lungworm or encysted or developing redworms. However, it does help in devising a suitable worming programme. The Donkey Sanctuary Guardians who have rehomed one or more of our donkeys can talk to their Welfare Adviser to make arrangements for testing dung samples. Private owners can arrange a faecal count through their own vet, or buy a low-price kit from a saddler or online. Ideally faecal worm egg counts should be done four times a year.

No one particular wormer will control all types of equine worms. There are only a few types of drug but many different brands and this can make things very complicated — another reason to discuss worming with your vet.

Ensure you use the Weight Measurement Chart to ascertain the donkey's weight in order to give the correct dosage, as under-dosing can influence the effectiveness of the drug over a period of time. At the Sanctuary we round up to the nearest 25 kg. Special care must be taken with very young donkeys.

Equine wormers can be extremely dangerous to dogs. Ensure that, as with any drug or medication, they are kept out of the reach of children and animals. When worming donkeys it is advisable to keep children and dogs away from the area. Take great care when disposing of the containers.

THE DONKEY DE-WORMING DIARY FOR OWNERS

January to April

Some immature worms burrow into the lining of the gut and do not lay eggs. The faecal worm egg count does not reflect the number of these worms.

Ask your vet to recommend a treatment

for Encysted Cyathostomin Larvae. We will be pleased to advise your vet which product we use for our donkeys.

May to July

Early grazing season: take a fresh dung sample to your vet for analysis. If your donkey is young and healthy, a redworm (roundworm) check might be sufficient, but check with your vet.

If you have any concerns about the health of your donkeys, ask for a full profile which will include a check for liver fluke and tapeworm.

August to October

Late grazing season: take a fresh dung sample to your vet for analysis. For young, healthy donkeys, a redworm (roundworm) check might be sufficient, but check with your vet.

If you have any concerns about the health of your donkeys, ask for a full profile which will include a check for liver fluke and tapeworm.

November

Dung sample tests for tapeworm are not very accurate. Tapeworm treatment might be necessary, so check with your vet. We can discuss treatment options with your vet.

Please remember: different rules apply to sick donkeys, pregnant and lactating mares, and foals. We are always happy to offer advice to your vet.

MANAGEMENT OF RUGS

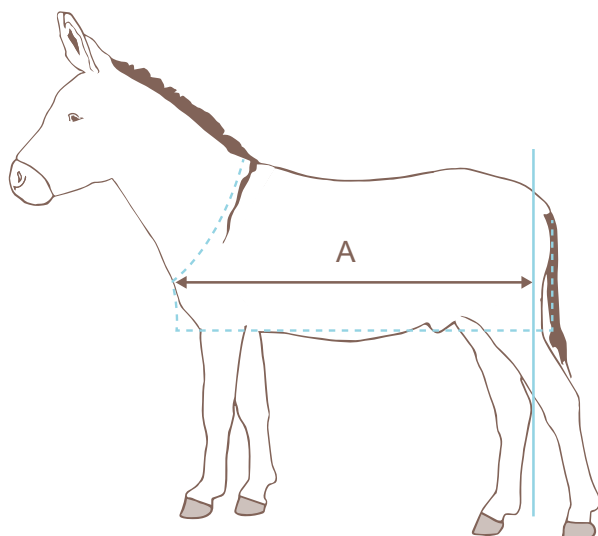
Young, healthy donkeys are extremely unlikely to need a rug but, because of the donkey's lack of a waterproof coat, they should always have access to a field shelter

or stable. However, donkeys that are old, sick, underweight or clipped will be more susceptible to the cold and might need a rug at certain times of year. Well-rugged old donkeys will need to eat less to maintain their body weight and temperature than if they were left un-rugged. To help keep them warm you can use heat lamps in the stable or a rug. Modern materials for rugs include a waterproof, rip-stop nylon that allows the donkeys' coat to breathe and wicks away moisture. Alternative designs have lightweight cotton linings or padded duvet-type linings. All rugs should be seam-free and lightweight so they are comfortable for the donkeys. The belly straps mean that there is no need for leg straps, which tend to rub. The rugs have an optional fillet string (a string that goes under the tail to prevent the rug flapping up



A modern donkey rug.

Figure 9: **Measuring your donkey for a rug**



Source: The Donkey Sanctuary



Fold the rug up before fitting, to avoid scaring the donkey.

over the hindquarters). There is often a tail flap to allow any rainwater to run off away from the back legs of the donkey.

Outdoor (turnout) rugs can also be made of a waterproofed canvas that has a blanket lining. This is known as a New Zealand rug. This type of rug takes a long time to dry out and has seams that can rub and leak. They need to be waterproofed often. Most New Zealand rugs have leg straps that can cause sores.

Rugs should be removed daily and the donkey's coat brushed before the rug is replaced. On warm, dry winter days it is nice to leave rugs off for an hour or two, but ensure the donkeys do not become wet or cold. At the end of the season, or more frequently if necessary, rugs should be cleaned and re-proofed if required.

To measure your donkey for a rug, ([see Figure 9 on page 141](#)) measure from the centre of the chest along the donkey's side to the end of its rump (not to the centre of the tail).

If the rug is the correct size for the donkey, it should fit snugly but not restrict or prevent movement. The cross-over belly straps should cross over under the centre of the donkey's belly and should not touch the donkey's hind legs. Belly straps should fit closely to the donkey's belly as this prevents the donkey from catching a leg in the straps when it scratches or plays.



Fasten the chest straps before pulling the rug back.

Fitting a rug

When fitting the rug to the donkey, work slowly and confidently. First fold the rug in half to help prevent scaring the donkey. Do not lift the rug high and throw it on the back of the

donkey, as this is likely to frighten the donkey. Keep the rug low and slide it gently over the donkey's back. Position the rug further forward than required, fasten the front straps and then unfold the rug, sliding it backwards into position. This ensures the donkey's hair lies flat under the rug.

Fasten the neck of the rug first and then secure the belly straps, which need to fit close enough to the donkey's belly to reduce the risk of the donkey getting a leg caught when lying down, but not so tight that it is uncomfortable for the donkey. A hand's width is a good guide to the correct tension.

When taking the rug off, undo the belly straps first and then the neck straps. This method reduces the risk of accidents if the donkey moves and the rug slips before it is unfastened.

Don't put a rug on a wet donkey — wait until the donkey is dry. However, you can use a wicking rug to draw moisture away from the donkey and help the donkey to dry before its usual rug is fitted.

Don't put a rug on a wet donkey — wait until the donkey is dry.

CARING FOR AN OLDER DONKEY

It is commonly believed that the natural lifespan of a donkey in the UK is over 40 years of age. Certainly some individuals do live to 40 and beyond, but many donkeys are showing signs of old age in their early twenties. In fact, looking back over our records, the average life expectancy is just over 30 years. With this in mind, we suggest that any donkey over the age of 20 is cared for as an older donkey, according to the advice given in this section.

Looking after older donkeys can be very rewarding. Developing a calm, quiet attitude and



Monitoring the eyesight of your older donkeys is important.



Regular dental visits are vital.

You will find more information in our *Feeding the elderly donkey factsheet* ([see page 157](#)).

thinking of their needs is essential to prolonging the health and happiness of your older donkey. Leading older donkeys at their own pace and allowing more time for grooming will keep them more comfortable and will be far more enjoyable for you both. As they age, donkeys' behaviour changes, so it is important to be familiar with their normal behavioural patterns in order to spot any changes that might indicate a problem and call in a vet to give appropriate treatment.

As donkeys age it is important to monitor their eyesight. Discolouration or changes to the eye or changes in behaviour can be early signs of failing sight. If you suspect your donkey is losing sight, talk to your vet. Generally donkeys cope well with blindness so, if they start to lose their sight, a familiar environment to live in and a consistent routine that they can predict can help them adjust to becoming blind. The use of padding on their head collar, to prevent bumps and knocks as eyesight fades, will further help donkeys cope with blindness.

It is important that your older donkeys maintain a good quality of life. Any concerns over this should be discussed with your vet. It is important to prepare for the tough decision you might have to make to put an older donkey to sleep to prevent suffering.

Regular professional care

Older donkeys might need more regular professional care to maintain a good quality of life and help them stay comfortable as their teeth and feet continue to wear. Such care might include more regular visits from a farrier, equine vet or equine dental technician.

Feeding older donkeys can require specialist advice, as there are a number of factors which must be taken into account, including certain

medical conditions. Donkeys with liver or kidney disease require specialist feeding which should be discussed with your vet. Donkeys with poor teeth will also require adaptations to their diet, as outlined in our *Feeding the donkey with dental problems* factsheet. One of the most common issues with feeding elderly donkeys is helping them maintain condition and preventing undue weight loss.

The environment

It is important to anticipate the needs of ageing donkeys before they arise. Providing suitable shelter allows them to get out of the rain or the heat as well as avoid flies. Leave doors open to give them the choice of where they feel most comfortable. Access to a sunny spot will allow your donkeys to sunbathe and warm any stiff joints or aching muscles if they wish. If possible, provide a heat lamp in the colder months and allow your donkeys to choose whether to stand under it.

A flat or gently sloping field is best for older donkeys as it will help keep them mobile. Access to hardstanding is good for all donkeys' feet. To minimise the risk of slipping over, ensure you have some road salt in stock for colder winter months, to prevent ice forming on the yard.

Arthritis of the neck and spine, as well as arthritis of the limb joints, is not uncommon. Donkeys affected with arthritis may find eating and drinking easier if water and feed are offered at the most appropriate height. Raising or lowering feed and water buckets as required may make them more comfortable.

Quality of life

Donkeys are stoical by nature and, as old age ensues, painful conditions become



The height of feed and water can be important for older donkeys.

You will find more information in our *Caring for the older donkey* factsheet ([see page 157](#)), and our DVD *Growing old gracefully* ([see page 158](#)).

Donkeys can sometimes live into their 50s.

more common. Such conditions include arthritis, dental disease, foot problems and compromised breathing. A donkey's quality of life might gradually deteriorate and requires very careful and objective monitoring. You might find it helpful to ask your vet's opinion and start to keep a diary of your donkey's behaviour. Our Donkey Welfare Advisers can also offer advice and support on the care of your older donkeys.

Serious illness can affect a donkey of any age and might seriously compromise quality of life such that euthanasia is the best and kindest option. Euthanasia is an important final act in the care of your donkeys. It is always a painful decision but one that must be taken when their quality of life deteriorates. Assessing quality of life can be difficult, especially if you see the donkeys every day, which makes it difficult to notice gradual changes in their health and wellbeing. Although each donkey will be different, the following points should be considered when assessing quality of life:

- Is the donkey able to move around freely and comfortably, particularly when turned out?
- Is the donkey being bullied by other animals in the herd?
- Is the donkey able to lie down and get up again unaided and without any difficulty?
- Is the donkey able to roll without any difficulty?
- Is the donkey able to eat and chew comfortably and maintain a healthy body condition?
- Is the donkey displaying its normal behaviour?
- Is the donkey generally healthy? Or is it suffering from any conditions that are affecting its physical or mental wellbeing?

- Has the donkey's breathing deteriorated to the point where it is persistently uncomfortable?
- Does the donkey seem 'happy'?

The death of a treasured animal friend is always sad but euthanasia should never be regarded as a failure of your care in any way. It might well be the last very good thing you can do for your donkey.



An example of an older donkey.

Donkeys form strong bonds with their companions and it is essential that surviving donkeys are allowed to remain with the body of their friend until they have lost interest. Ignoring this advice can lead to significant distress and anxiety amongst surviving donkeys. They might show persistent wandering, pacing and braying as they look for the missing donkey. They might go into a hyperlipaemic crisis as a result of the stress. Please allow at least an hour before the body of the donkey is removed. Closely monitor the bereaved companion(s) for several weeks afterwards as bereavement stress can manifest

You will find more information to help support and prepare you for this sensitive issue in our *Dealing with death* factsheet ([see page 157](#)).

itself up to three weeks after the death of a friend and result in hyperlipaemia. Extra attention and time spent with your donkeys will help.

Planning ahead and being organised are so important, to minimise stress to both you and your donkeys.

WE ARE HERE TO HELP

**WE HOPE THAT THE INFORMATION
IN THIS GUIDE HAS PROVIDED YOU
WITH THE KNOWLEDGE TO START
CARING FOR DONKEYS.**

**BUT REMEMBER, WE EXIST TO
HELP DONKEYS AND THEIR
OWNERS EVERYWHERE.**

SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE DONKEY SANCTUARY

Factsheets

The Donkey Sanctuary produces a series of factsheets on a range of donkey-related subjects. These factsheets are available online at www.thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk/donkey-health-and-welfare. A list of our factsheets appears at the end of this publication.

A downloadable version of this book is also available.

Referral service

The Donkey Sanctuary offers a referral service at its fully equipped donkey hospital in Devon. Facilities include operating theatres and diagnostic equipment including endoscopy, x-ray and ultrasound. The Sanctuary also undertakes remedial and surgical farriery. Veterinary surgeons may send blood and faecal samples to be analysed free of charge at the Sanctuary's laboratory.

Vet to vet

Through our experience we have gained considerable knowledge about donkey care, and our veterinary staff are happy to liaise with vets in the UK and abroad, and give advice as required. We apologise to owners but our vets can only speak to other practising vets. Owners who require any advice should please call **01395 578222** and ask for the Welfare Department.

Training centre

To meet the Sanctuary's aims of improving donkey welfare, we provide specialised training courses on donkey care, donkey

health care and donkey behaviour, to help increase your knowledge of looking after and understanding donkeys. Details on courses, including dates, are on our website or you can contact the Training Centre. Just down the road from the main Sanctuary, the Training Centre offers courses to the general public, potential Donkey Guardians, charities and welfare organisations, as well as the Sanctuary's own staff. In addition to courses at the Training Centre, regular training courses are held across the UK. For information on the types of courses and locations, contact the Training Centre by telephone on **01395 597644**, or e-mail: pacombe.training@thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk.

The two DVDs that support these donkey-care courses ([see page 158](#)) are available for purchase from The Donkey Sanctuary shop, Donkey World. These videos provide a great deal of information on caring for and managing your donkeys to avoid problems.

Rehoming

Rehoming enriches the lives of donkeys and mules through the provision of individual care in high-quality, loving homes. In return, Donkey Guardians have the opportunity to care for donkeys. Further details on our Rehoming Scheme can be found [on page 152](#), on The Donkey Sanctuary website, or by calling The Donkey Sanctuary on **01395 578222**.

Welfare advice

Advice, help and support in caring for your donkeys is provided by our Welfare Department. The welfare advice line is open 8.30am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday. Please

call the main switchboard on **01395 578222** and ask for the Welfare Department. Further contact details can be found on our website.

The Donkey Sanctuary has a network of Donkey Welfare Advisers throughout the UK and Europe to provide local donkey support and advice. Please call the Welfare Department or visit The Donkey Sanctuary website to request assistance from your local Welfare Adviser.

REHOMING DONKEYS

Our Rehoming Scheme offers people and donkeys the opportunity to form long-lasting, life-enhancing relationships, whilst providing a meaningful contribution to the charity and making way for donkeys in desperate need. The scheme rehomes donkeys in our care who would benefit from the kind of loving, one-on-one attention private homes can provide. Donkeys are carefully matched with prospective homes to ensure a happy future for both the donkeys and their new Donkey Guardians.

Rehoming donkeys is one of the most amazing things you can do to help us, both financially and in terms of freeing up our staff and space to provide more specialist care to donkeys that need it most.

Our Donkey Guardians often tell us how much fun it is to give a loving home to these fantastic animals. The great thing is that our donkeys and mules love it, too. We generally ask our homes to provide:

- approximately 2,000 square metres (0.5 acres) of suitable and safe grazing and/or turnout land for each donkey
- an area of hardstanding; donkeys' feet are more porous than those of horses,

so donkeys need to be able to get off the grass when it's wet

- 24-hour-a-day access to a shelter or stable, because donkeys don't have waterproof coats like horses; this will also provide shade from the sun on summer days
- robust fencing; donkeys can be great escape artists.

Don't worry if you haven't got any or all of these in place yet — our Donkey Welfare Advisers will be able to advise you.

If you feel you would like to know more about our Rehoming Scheme, please visit our website where you can find more details on terms and conditions and an online application form, or call the main switchboard on **01395 578222** and ask for the Welfare Department.

**Rehoming
enriches the lives
of donkeys and
mules through
the provision of
individual care
in high-quality,
loving homes.**

APPENDIX

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Ass/donkey/burro: Interchangeable terms that mean the same thing: donkey.

BAEDT: British Association of Equine Dental Technicians.

BEVA: British Equine Veterinary Association.

Colt: Stallion under three years old.

Gelding: Castrated male donkey.

Grooming: The cleaning and brushing of the animal's coat, which helps to keep the animal healthy and prevent skin problems.

Hand: A height-measuring unit equal to approximately 10.2 cm (4 inches).

Hinny: The offspring of a female donkey and a male horse/pony.

Hyperlipaemia: A condition affecting levels of fat in blood circulation.

Jack: Male donkey.

Jack foal: Male foal.

Jennet foal: Female foal.

Jennet/Jenny: Female donkey.

John: Male mule.

Molly: Female mule.

Mule: The offspring of a male donkey and a female horse/pony.

Near side: The left side of the donkey.

Off side: The right side of the donkey.

Pouching/food packing: The packing of partially chewed food between the cheek and the teeth, causing the cheek to bulge.

Quidding: The dropping of partially chewed food from the mouth.

Seedy toe: A condition that affects the white-line area of the hoof.

Sham eating: The appearance of eating when no food is being consumed.

Shaping: A programme that breaks training down into a series of small steps towards the desired goal.

Stallion: Entire male donkey — ie not castrated.

Tack: The equipment used on the animal so that it can be ridden (saddlery is used) or driven (harness is used).

Vestigial teats: Small teats that sit just behind the sheath area in male donkeys.

FURTHER READING

Factsheets are available that cover specific areas of donkey care and welfare.

Visit www.thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk/donkey-health-and-welfare

Factsheets available:

- *A guide to bathing your donkey*
- *A guide to buying a donkey*
- *Care of your donkeys through the winter*
- *Care of the orphan foal*
- *Caring for the older donkey*
- *Clipping your donkey*
- *Colic in donkeys*
- *Condition scoring and weight estimation*
- *Costs of owning and keeping donkeys*
- *Dealing with death*
- *Dental care*
- *Donkey care calendar*
- *Donkey foot care*
- *Donkey foot care — notes for farriers*
- *Endocrine disorders (Cushing's disease and equine metabolic syndrome)*
- *Feeding and managing the overweight donkey*
- *Feeding and managing the underweight donkey*
- *Feeding donkeys*

- *Feeding the donkey with dental problems*
- *Feeding the donkey with endocrine disorders*
- *Feeding the elderly donkey*
- *Feeding the laminitic donkey*
- *Feeding youngsters and brood mares*
- *Foaling — preparation, birth and beyond*
- *Guide to worming your donkey*
- *Hyperlipaemia in donkeys*
- *Insect protection for donkeys*
- *Mules and hinnies*
- *Poisonous plants and trees*
- *Poisonous plants — ragwort kills*
- *Respiratory disease in the donkey*
- *Sarcoids in donkeys*
- *Safe trees and shrubs for donkeys*
- *Sycamore related atypical myopathy*
- *Transport notes for donkey owners*
- *Treatment of wounds*
- *Understanding donkey behaviour*
- *Understanding the behaviour of stallions, mares and geldings*
- *Useful measurements for your stable*
- *Worms and resistance*

DVDs available

There are a number of DVD titles available from The Donkey Sanctuary that provide practical guidance on aspects of donkey care and welfare.

- *An introduction to donkey care*
- *An introduction to donkey health care*
- *Growing old gracefully*
- *Donkey foot care*

Visit www.donkeyworld.org.uk/acatalog/DVDs or contact the Welfare Department.

CONTACT US

If you need any further help or advice with your donkeys, please contact us.

Our website has a huge amount of information that you will find useful. We also have a professional team of staff who can provide advice over the telephone or by email. Alternatively you may request that one of our Donkey Welfare Advisers calls to see you.

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YOUR NOTES

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The Donkey Sanctuary (registered charity number 264818) and its sole corporate trustee, The Donkey Sanctuary Trustee Limited (Company number 07328588), both have their registered office at Slade House Farm, Sidmouth, EX10 0NU.
Linked charities: The Elisabeth Svendsen Trust for Children and Donkeys (EST);
The International Donkey Protection Trust (IDPT)