

How ethically are donkeys treated?



Africa Network for Animal Welfare (ANAW) posed the following question:
'How ethically do we treat our donkeys?'

DfA asked a selection of our readers for their views on this topic. Thank you to those who responded. Due to space constraints we can only present a small selection of the many well-considered replies. General consensus was that donkeys are amongst the most unethically treated species. They have low status, are not valued and there is no consideration for sentience or good welfare.

Ansie Gildenhuys in Botswana says that they are seen only as a working animal. Jo Sedgewick and Penny James of Greyton, South Africa, state that donkeys are replaced by horses when possible, as horses have higher status. The general attitude to donkeys is not one of respect.

Dr Ben Fru Wara speaks of people in Cameroon: "Ethically, they value donkeys only by their economic worth. They do not think that donkeys are sentient beings, and do not treat them with compassion and respect."

Dr Philip Mshelia of Nigeria comments that even some professionals do not treat donkeys ethically. In many veterinary curricula donkeys are accorded little attention. Donkeys for Africa wonders if this relates to the fact that most practising veterinarians are unlikely to treat donkeys regularly in the scope of their daily work, because the owners cannot afford or access professional services and donkeys have little monetary value.

Dr Peta Jones of Donkey Power comments "Where I work, donkeys are unfortunately disregarded by the extension services, despite their essential economic role in many rural families. Government is really only interested in meat animals, so no effort goes into educating people about donkeys. Worse than that, it has suited rich cattle owners to blame donkeys unjustly for the effects of overgrazing in times of drought, thus developing a mythology in which donkeys are seen as dangerous villains."

Reasons for unethical treatment

Philip Mshelia proposed some interesting reasons for unethical treatment of donkeys: cultural beliefs and myths have shaped the way people perceive donkeys. Examples are the belief that all extremely tedious work was meant for donkeys. The ability of donkeys to carry out many different tasks and their stoic nature has provided a justification for cruelty and abuse. A donkey is not 'smart'. Because they show limited flight response to new situations they are seen as being stubborn. A donkey's bray is noisy and is associated with evil. A myth says that a donkey was ungrateful, so a supreme being was not happy with it - it was cursed and that is why it is suffering on earth.

How can we change the treatment of donkeys?

All respondents mentioned education as the key. Educating youngsters will improve their attitudes which can continue into their adulthood, so carrying over to their children. Educating adults can address immediate suffering of donkeys. Veterinarian and Animal Welfare Specialist, **Dr Stephen Blakeway** added that we can also try to change the external context through enforcement of well-considered legislation.

Philip Mshelia: "Religious and community leaders can play a vital role because a significant number of these beliefs are rooted in traditional and religious beliefs."

Peta Jones: "Emphasize the VALUE of donkeys as a work animal, a lifelong team member and contributor to family economies, working harder than most. I also emphasize that donkeys should not be seen as animals of the past, but very much of the future, and thus worth cherishing."

In conclusion Stephen Blakeway adds that so much depends on skills, knowledge, understanding and opportunity.



Six-year old Inganathi loves his donkey Roger.

Education is the key to more ethical donkey treatment. Children's education is especially important as young boys traditionally take care of livestock and are also responsible for looking after donkeys for their families.

<https://spana.org/latest-updates/working-donkey-champions-role-models-south-africa/>

Further model for holistic welfare

We believe in the sentience of animals. Current understanding recognises that animal welfare is not determined only by care, but includes the animal's subjective experiences (feelings, emotions or affects).

Updating thinking

In 2016 Prof David Mellor of Massey University, New Zealand, pointed out that most negative experiences listed in the 'Five Freedoms' can only be minimised, not eliminated. Whilst the 'Freedoms' focussed on negatives, positive experiences should also be included. There are internally and externally focussed states that affect the animal's welfare. Internally focussed include physical factors, like thirst or illness, whilst externally focussed include emotions generated by the animal's perception of its surrounding conditions, e.g. fearfulness or boredom.

Current thinking about welfare specifies management in such a way as to minimise internally and externally generated negative experiences, and/or replace them with positive experiences.

Four are the physically measurable: nutrition, environment, health and behaviour. The fifth domain encompasses mental states - to help us understand what an animal is experiencing,

both positive and negative. It is not easy to measure the animal's state of mind, but by measuring the four physical domains, the animal's state of mind can be concluded and the full picture of its welfare is obtained.

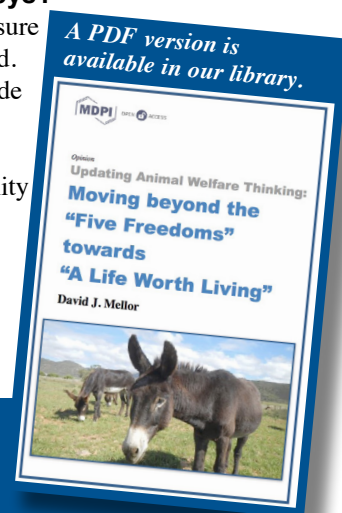
In summary:

- Donkeys can and, given the opportunity, do have positive experiences.
- An overall positive balance is possible and should be promoted to ensure better welfare.

What does this mean for donkeys?

Donkeys are social creatures, make sure they have company of their own kind. They are inquisitive, therefore provide opportunity for mental stimulation. Be informed about their natural behaviours and give ample opportunity for them to interact and develop naturally.

Ensure that their physical health is good enough for them to be able to enjoy positive feelings.



Welfare assessment now looks to the Five Domains

The 5 Domains Model for Assessment of Animal Welfare

Measurable domains can be determined by:

- 1) Nutrition & hydration
- 2) Environment
- 3) Health & Injury
- 4) Behaviour

5) their mental state, which includes:

- Breathlessness - Sickness
- Thirst - Debility
- Pain - Weakness
- Nausea - Anxiety
- Hunger - Fear
- Dizziness - Helplessness/distress

A more accurate animal welfare status analysis.

For more information:

- http://files.upei.ca/avc/sjdawc/2015_five_domains_poster_david_mellor.pdf
- An overview of the concept of the Five Domains and its application to the welfare of animals, presented by Professor Kevin Stafford of Massey University, New Zealand, at <http://onewelfare.cve.edu.au/five-domains>

Reflections of 2018

There seems to be increasing recognition of – and, we hope, application of – a holistic approach to welfare. The One Health, One Welfare concept is logical: thriving equid-owning communities will lead to thriving equid welfare and vice versa (Brooke). This was the theme of the 2018 Conference of the African Network for Animal Welfare held in Nairobi.

The OIE held a Working Equid Welfare Assessment Seminar, facilitated by the International Coalition for Welfare of Equines, in Lesotho. The knowledge and practical experience gained by the delegates will be passed on to people working with donkeys. Ask the OIE

We look at the challenges and achievements of the past year.

representative in your country to share the knowledge gained.

Various gatherings, conferences and workshops happened throughout Africa this year, with a global emphasis often on the donkeys of our continent. The sixth annual Donkey Welfare Symposium at the University of California Davis featured presenters from Egypt, West Africa and Ethiopia.

2019 will bring new opportunities for learning and sharing. An updated donkey welfare assessment is imminent. There is hope that further intervention programmes will make a difference to donkeys and owners toiling under

challenging conditions, far from the conference halls and corridors of power populated by politicians and government officials who have other priorities.

Dr Philip Mshelia in Nigeria provides focus to our passion: "Donkeys have to be dignified by us. Donkeys are suffering in Africa while valuable principles go missing in the ledgers of history and our new generation loses the understanding of values. Donkeys are also victims of this lack of knowledge.

We need to keep talking about donkeys until donkeys make sense to people!"

Share your thoughts about donkey welfare in Africa during the past year by emailing us.



amaTrac uluntu works with communities by providing training and support to working donkey owners and guides the local community about using donkeys for transport and agriculture.



<http://amatrac.wixsite.com/amatraculuntu>



www.facebook.com/workingdonkeyowners/

Based in Grahamstown in South Africa, this NGO operates in surrounding rural areas where resources and infra-structure are often non-existent.

The work of amaTrac uluntu is community-based. Villagers are identified and selected to be trained in a variety of fields. Owners and drivers of working donkeys learn basic business and other skills such as money management and taking care of their assets (donkeys and equipment). This enables them to effectively offer services to their communities. Often women request training so as to improve their income to pay school fees for their children.

One Welfare

When owners understand the benefits of healthy working animals, the One Welfare concept operates: good welfare for the donkeys leads to good human welfare which again results in providing better care for the donkeys.

Working Donkey Champions

These are people who have been selected and trained to provide basic veterinary treatments and advice, as well as to educate, assist and guide donkey owners in their communities. By empowering the owners, positive results are sustained.

Children's education

Often the working donkeys are managed by young boys in a family. When they have to work with the donkeys, they may miss time with their friends. This can lead to mistreatment of the donkeys from frustration or ignorance.

Our Vision

- is that the livelihood and resilience of poor communities is improved through access to affordable and reliable transport and traction for agriculture.

Our Mission

- is to provide developmental training and support for people that already earn an income from their small businesses to develop and adopt appropriate skills in order to improve the services they offer to communities.

They lack knowledge of animal care and view animals as having no feelings. Donkey owners are trained in Humane Education of children and also pass this knowledge on to teachers in schools. The children respond well to education about the sentience of animals and lasting change in attitudes result. This also leads to positive attitudes being carried over into adulthood and hopefully to future generations.

Changing farming methods

In these rural areas teams of up to twelve donkeys were being inspanned using yokes and heavy ploughs developed for oxen. By developing light equipment to be pulled by one or two donkeys in suitable harness, the work is done more efficiently, the animals don't suffer and the compaction of soil is reduced. Organic farming methods conserve water and are resilient to the challenges of the semi-arid region. Less tillage of the soil is encouraged and owners use their donkeys to transport resources such as manure and dried plant material, as well as produce for communities, rather than using their donkeys to plough fields.

Correct harnessing

A grant from The Brooke's Innovation Fund enabled amaTrac uluntu to appoint two consultants to design and test donkey-suited equipment. Dr. Peta Jones (Donkey Power) and Bruce Joubert (former Animal Traction Centre, Fort Hare University)

selected donkey owners for the project and trained Working Donkey Champions. They taught the manufacture and use of Powersets: harnessing that uses the donkey's point of power correctly and can be made by owners using locally available materials.

"I no longer tease donkeys and don't throw stones at them, or at other animals."

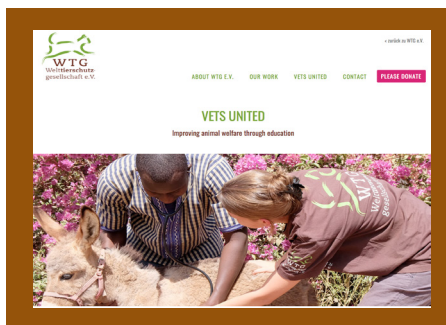


Glenmore donkey wearing a homemade bitless using a pattern designed and taught by amaTrac uluntu.



Phakamani and his donkeys in the Powerset delivering water.





Vets United - The organisation Welttierschutzgesellschaft (WTG) has a programme known as Vets United. This programme acts to improve animal health care standards in emerging and developing countries through locally organised education and postgraduate training. The training courses impart knowledge and practical skills to people who work in, or who are trained in, the field of veterinary medicine. Find out more and register for access to their training materials at <https://welttierschutz.org/en/vets-united/>

Educational impact assessed

Children commonly participate actively in the management of their working equids around the world, and can therefore have an important impact on their welfare. An interesting study in Tuliman, Mexico, by Tadich-Gallo T.A. et al, examined children's recognition of the needs of working donkeys. Animal welfare talks were provided to children between eight and eleven years of age in schools in Tuliman. They were then asked to represent their donkey's needs through drawings. The drawings showed that the children easily recognized the need to provide food and water, but they rarely recognized the need for veterinary services.

<http://veterinariamexico.unam.mx/index.php/vet/article/view/404>



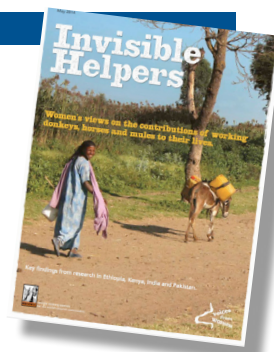
Children's drawings showing the needs they identified.



Zimbabwe: After obtaining the closure of the proposed donkey abattoir in Bulawayo in 2017, AWARE Trust and SPANA were recently asked to take the 21 surviving donkeys still at the site. They are now in good care and will be rehomed. Interestingly, the abattoir owner has kept three of the donkeys as pets.

Voices from women

A recent webinar arranged by the FAO Livestock Technical Network featured Petra Ingram, CEO of Brooke, presenting an overview of their work. She mentioned the Voices from Women programme, amongst others. Imagine a world where donkeys' status met the following wish: "If I was asked, I would prefer my dowry to be paid as donkeys instead of cows" proposed Joyce Ndegwa from the Kamuchege Women's Group in Kenya. The full Voices from Women report is at <https://www.thebrooke.org/sites/default/files/Advocacy-and-policy/Invisible-helpers-voices-from-women.pdf> and also in our library.



Nigeria: A bill prohibiting any Nigerian or foreigner from killing or shipping a donkey for commercial purposes is in process in Parliament. Ten years' imprisonment is stipulated for offenders who break this proposed law.



Tanzania

Vets United together with Meru Animal Welfare Organisation (MAWO) and Tanzania Animals Protection Organization (TAPO) have constructed shelters for donkeys in rural areas where theft and slaughter for skins was a problem. Thousands of donkeys are now safe at night.



The Autumn 2018 GHDT

Newsletter is now available at <http://www.gambiahorseanddonkey.org.uk/autumn2018.pdf>

Education of young children can impact positively on the welfare of working equids within communities. Please share your experiences about this.

From the editor – has this been a positive year for donkey welfare?

We have all faced many and varied challenges during 2018. Despite tireless efforts by welfare organisations, some things do not change, or change too slowly.

Donkeys largely remain invisible animals, forgotten by governments and law-makers. They are not accorded the status or professional attention they deserve. Often overlooked in veterinary courses, they are seen as belonging to the poor who cannot afford other means of traction. Although they are essential for survival of many far-flung rural and urban communities, they are not counted amongst livestock as they do not produce edible or usable products in most countries.

Ironically the trade in donkey skins has

caused even more suffering to these humble animals. Their worth has risen, but not with accompanying improved welfare. In many unscrupulous markets the condition of the donkey does not influence the value of the skin, so maltreatment is rife. If the donkey dies before slaughter it saves the trader time and money.

The trade in donkey skins does not seem to be declining. Sources are being sought elsewhere, as many African countries have banned the trade. A recent report by The Donkey Sanctuary (UK) exposed shocking conditions in Brazil.

Let us hope -and take action to ensure that 2019 will mark a turning point for the better, for donkeys in Africa, and world-wide.

A lighter moment...



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