

The therapy of Donkey

The use of animals in human wellness programmes is well recorded. Less known is the role donkeys play as therapy animals.



Donkeys relate well with the elderly, the disabled and children. Above from left: Pensioners visiting a donkey retirement home, donkeys sense when someone is physically handicapped, a blind girl hugs a donkey for the first time.

Unrecognised attributes

We all work with, and for, these humble, stoic animals that we love: *Equus asinus*. Their roles and functions are many and varied. Are we perhaps missing opportunities to benefit from aspects of their nature that are often overlooked in the challenging environments in which they serve mankind? Yes, they do make excellent pack and draft animals, but what of their gentle and willing natures to engage with humans who treat them with respect?

Emotional support

Many donkeys are used as therapy animals, enabling people to experience the warmth and support given by a trusting donkey. Examples of this occur in different parts of the world: in the United Kingdom and elsewhere there are formal centres for therapeutic donkey-human interaction, facilitated by trained professionals with donkeys well suited to this role.

Donkey therapy is used to help with a range of problems — from visits to hospitals and homes for the elderly and sick, bolstering the confidence of children with autism to try something new, helping those who've been through trauma or illness, to helping adults deal with anxiety or emotional difficulties.

A professional therapist who uses donkeys with patients comments 'It doesn't work for everyone, but no one gets any

worse using the donkeys and most get an awful lot better. We call it donkey magic — and it is very, very special.'

Informal interactions

Spontaneous therapeutic interactions occur between rescued donkeys and visitors in many sanctuary settings. Not only visitors with special needs benefit from these "pockets of peace". Most people have troubles of some kind and hugging a donkey brings feelings welling to the surface, resulting in tears and emotional release. Interaction with suitable animals in a calm manner is known to lower blood pressure and reduce levels of stress hormones in people.

Creating compassion

This need not be limited to a sanctuary setting — teaching moments arise spontaneously and a culture of caring is created by the donkeys' gentle acceptance of the humans. With working donkeys, often handled by children, the opportunity to teach

compassion and kindness arises daily. Explain to the youngsters that these donkeys do feel pain, fear and exhaustion. The better they are treated, the better they will work. These feelings of compassion can be extended to include all animals, and all sentient beings, including other humans. Donkeys can help us to be better people!

A teacher who brought severely abused children to a donkey sanctuary, wrote: "Thank you so much for an unforgettable morning! It was so special to witness such tranquillity. To be in an environment of love and safety is something these children rarely experience. Their lives are filled with fears — how else if you live in a community characterized by almost all the social evils of this world."

Zambian Artist and Musician Greg1 has brought out a song with a message on animal welfare with a particular focus on donkeys. He condemns the killing of donkeys to extract their skins for Ejiao purposes. Read our survey about the Skin Trade and download this song for free on Page 2.



The skins trade is impacting negatively on the development of Africa

We asked our contributors, from around Africa, to respond on the status and impact of the donkey skins trade. Our questions included how different countries are reacting from a governmental, legal and commercial aspect to this scourge and how it is impacting on local communities. We received a wealth of feedback from Zimbabwe, Zambia, Lesotho, Nigeria, Niger, Tanzania, South Africa, Cameroon and Kenya. Thank you to all who contributed.

Legal and illegal slaughter

Registered abattoirs for donkeys are found in Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya and Tanzania. Following the closure of Tanzanian abattoirs after hard work by TAWESO and The Donkey Sanctuary, donkeys were smuggled to neighbouring countries. Tanzania re-opened the abattoirs under regulations and the meat is mostly exported.

The main market for donkey meat gleaned informally in Lesotho is the Chinese community. In Ghana illegal slaughter is carried out for export of the skins and the Directorate of Veterinary Services has warned against the purchase of such meat.

Ben Fru Wara of FAWCAM reports that in the North West region of Cameroon donkeys are regarded as dirty animals, and slaughter, consumption of the meat or use of the skins is not even considered by locals. Carcasses are buried or old donkeys are abandoned in the bush to die and rot. Clearly the skins trade has not yet reached this region.

Philip Mshelia from the Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria says “Unless people find a more lucrative business, they are unlikely to stop trading in donkeys. The trade is of great concern but the most appalling is the inhumane way donkeys are treated. People see them as a commodity to earn a living. They work hard for man but man does not appreciate this.”

Skins trade

The skins trade is alive and flourishing in Northern Nigeria where a particular donkey dealer is known to buy 3000 donkeys a week. This is a lucrative business, with the potential for making quick cash. The value of donkeys has increased, making them expensive for owners to replace animals sold or stolen.

Impact on owners

The long term impact is negative. Farmers might start by selling the old and sick animals first, as an income opportunity. As the trade increases, theft increases, raising the price of live donkeys and fuelling a demand that can't be satisfied.

From Tanzania: Donkeys are stolen at night, leaving local families who depend on their working donkeys, in trouble. Possibly initially the community members were happy to sell one out of ten. Now they cannot manage without their donkeys. At this rate there will be no donkeys in Tanzania in five years' time.

There are many other welfare concerns associated with the skins trade, such as poor transportation practices and inhumane slaughter methods, especially when done informally. Solomon Onyango from The Donkey Sanctuary, Kenya: “As an organisation we are still pushing for a ban on international trade in donkey skins. Despite its negative impact on livelihoods, donkey welfare, the environment and the danger to human health, there is political push to keep the trade going.”

The need for a united voice

Samson Nyendwa from Mwamfumba Cooperative Animal Welfare Society in Zambia feels positive: “Our organization has done a lot and we are still fighting very hard at national and international level and the battle will be won. We are urging the governments in Zimbabwe, Namibia,

Malawi and Botswana to stop the skin trade. All we need is support from donors, governments and other stakeholders. Together we are winning and we have already won in some countries like Burkina Faso and Botswana.”

Conclusion

The unique African situation is in danger of being destroyed to satisfy demands from a different culture. Irreparable damage will be done through greed and ignorance of the devastating consequences, not only for the animals but also for the communities that rely on them.

This can not be allowed to happen.



Donkeys at a market in Tanzania. No shade, no water, no food and no hope...

Listen to and download Greg1's song about donkey welfare by clicking on the Afrofire icon or go to: <http://afrofire.com/greg-1-donkey-welfare-awareness>





ASPA - a significant hoofprint making a big difference to donkeys

The ASPA team in Tanzania has been effective in improving donkey welfare and understanding in this African country

ASPA was established in 1997 and operates in the entire Arusha region. ASPA is funded by partners and has five full-time staff, assisted by local and international volunteers. The government does not provide financial support, but assists by creating a good working environment.

ASPA's objectives are:

- 1) To improve awareness, attitudes and practices with a view to promoting humane treatment of animals among animal owners within the community;
- 2) To contribute towards full, efficient and effective implementation of the relevant animal welfare laws and regulations in Tanzania;
- 3) To contribute towards having healthy animals and improved access to animal healthcare;
- 4) To contribute towards building a strong movement for animal welfare in Tanzania;
- 5) To facilitate evidence-based research to promote good practice and inform advocacy and results-based programming.

Vision Statement: A society of happy animals, happy people
Mission Statement: To promote community-led and sustainable Animal Welfare through education, animal health care, advocacy and networking.

education. Donkeys are examined by the vets and animal health officers. On average between 100 and 300 donkeys can be helped in one mobile clinic.

By using the methodology of 'The Hand',

welfare changes are monitored and the following progress has been identified where such training has taken place, namely:

- Positive behavior and communication between the donkeys and owners.
- Overall body condition of donkeys has improved.
- Fewer wounds, particularly tethering wounds, have been noticed. Some harnessing wounds still appear.
- Lameness has vastly decreased.
- Other signs of injury and disease have also decreased.

<http://www.aspa.co.tz/>
 ASPA Head Office,
 PO Box 1743, Arusha,
 Tanzania.

Arusha city is the capital of the Arusha Region in north eastern Tanzania. In this region are the Ngorongoro Crater, Mount Meru and Mount Kilimanjaro.



Frank Alkado training LSPs of Monduli district on the approach and handling of donkeys.



Educating about donkeys at Nadosito Primary School in Arusha.

ASPA deals mainly with small animals and donkeys, but all domesticated animals are included in their policy and advocacy actions. Education is seen as a critical element to increase community responsiveness to animal welfare issues.

Challenges

The status of donkeys here is low and they are used only by very poor people. The most common problems are mange, eye problems, wounds caused by poor harnessing and beating, and harmful practices based on myths about donkeys. Common diseases are tetanus, parasite infestations, skin conditions like dermatophytosis, neoplasms, sunburn and photosensitization. The Donkey Sanctuary provides harnessing training and the staff transfers that knowledge and veterinary help to donkey owners/users. Training in farriery is an area needing attention.

Mobile clinics

ASPA mobile clinics visit different markets on a rotational basis in the Arusha region twice a week, providing treatments and



Demonstrating proper harnessing.

Concerns

Slaughter and the skins trade in Tanzania raise concerns: theft and illegal slaughtering, bad transportation practices, lack of food, water and shade at markets and abattoirs, and badly run abattoirs with inhumane conditions as well as environmental pollution. Frank Alkado of ASPA states that "Donkeys are declining in numbers as the slaughtering continues, disregarding factors such as the long gestation and maturing periods of donkeys."

A retractive story

An interesting case at Lamu, Kenya came to light from Muhsin Hassan who has five well-cared-for donkeys on Lamu island. He uses his donkeys for transporting goods. Recently one of the jacks, Chembe, was used for mating with a neighbour's donkey. After the mating the donkey was unable to retract his penis back into the preputial cavity. The condition persisted and five hours after the mating Muhsin brought his donkey to the hospital. The donkey was suffering from a condition called paraphimosis, caused by injuries to the penis and the prepuce during the violent mating exercise. Consequences can be serious. The donkey was admitted at the facility and given appropriate medication. After some time the condition was resolved and the donkey recovered fully.

Report: Felix Rachuonyo, The Donkey Sanctuary.



Chembe looking bright and happy after undergoing full recovery.



Professional recognition for Animal Welfare

Tozie Zokufa attended the 86th General Assembly of the OIE in Paris recently, as a member of the International Coalition for Animal Welfare (ICFAW) representing Africa. At this assembly the partnership between the OIE and ICFAW - www.icfaw.org - was formalised.

A lighter moment...

In April we showed you that donkeys help at building sites. Now we show you that they also read...



ICFAW represents non-governmental animal welfare organisations from all over the world. These organisations all share the primary objectives of preventing cruelty to animals and relieving their suffering. They use different strategies depending on the nature of the task, and the region and country in which they work.



The South African Veterinary Council held an

Animal Welfare Workshop in Pretoria recently, attended by numerous welfare organisations. The National Animal Welfare Forum was established and we look forward to seeing this grow to involve all species and interested parties. DfA was also represented at this seminar which provided interesting learning and networking opportunities.



Training in Gambia

More than 500 students have benefitted from the Makasutu Training Centre at The Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust. Read their inspiring newsletter at <http://www.gambiahorseanddonkey.org.uk/spring2018.pdf>



amaTrac uluntu is based in Grahamstown, South Africa. They train and support

owners of working donkeys to manage the traction services they offer as small businesses, to improve and expand their services and to care for their assets (donkeys and equipment). Enjoy their newsletter at http://amatrac.wixsite.com/amatraculuntu/about_us

Did you know?

- It is only in the industrialized nations of the western world where donkeys are kept as pets. Everywhere else in the world they are an integral part of an economic structure.

- Donkeys owned by a rural family are most often cared for by the women and children. If not for the donkey, the women become the beasts of burden. When a donkey dies, the women cling together and weep.

Donkey power

A good example of how donkeys are being used in rural communities. This cart was constructed for a family of farmers about a year ago. It is holding up well considering it has to go over dreadful roads that most 4x4 battle to navigate.

Lynne Mendelsohn, Livingstone, Zambia



Go not where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail

Ralph Waldo Emerson

From the editor

Uninformed perceptions

It is disturbing to notice that uninformed perceptions persist in reputedly respected media. The Economist of March 10th 2018 writes that: "Africans want to sell donkeys. Western charities want to stop them. . . Banning a trade that raises money for the poor makes asses of those who claim to speak for them." A worrying recommendation was made by a highly regarded South African investment advisor speaking at the annual London Value Investor conference in May 2018. He shared two stocks he loves – one of which was Dong EE Jiao (traditional medicine), listed in China. Clearly more education about the skins industry is needed globally and in economic circles.

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