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INTRODUCTION

Selecting your donkeys

Owning or caring for a donkey is most rewarding, although very few realise just how much time, effort and expense goes into the care of these wonderful creatures.

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, 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?**

- **Do you have an acre of well fenced grazing with a shelter with a hard standing, fresh water supply and electricity?** (A minimum of one acre for two donkeys.)

- **Do you have a vet and farrier who 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?

- **Can you remove your muck heap regularly?**

- **Cost of caring for a donkey, we give a very general guide of £500 per year**

- can you afford this? You should also be aware of the need to maintain adequate contingency funds to meet unexpected veterinary bills and we would advise the need for third party insurance.

You should be fully aware of the commitment you are making. Although the average age for donkeys in the UK is 27, donkeys can live to over 40 years old. Therefore owning a donkey is a long-term commitment.

Donkeys are seen advertised for sale in local papers and equine publications, as well as being sold at markets. Once you have decided that donkeys are for you then we always recommend that you take an experienced person with you when looking. There are also donkey breed organisations, so if you are looking for a particular type of donkey then this may be your best option. The Donkey Sanctuary has produced a fact sheet called Buying a Donkey to assist you in this process.

The Donkey Sanctuary runs a Foster Scheme if you are looking to give a home to a pair of donkeys or mules. Please ring the Welfare Department for further details.

Donkeys can be territorial and new arrivals should be introduced carefully over a stable door. If possible allow new donkeys to explore their new home and settle in before allowing the new and old to mix. When donkeys are mixed for the first time ensure that they have plenty of space to avoid each other if they wish.

Take care with small pets such as: dogs, cats, poultry or lambs, as some donkeys will chase them thinking that they pose a threat.

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

Donkeys are versatile animals and can have many uses, for children to ride, for driving and showing or 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.

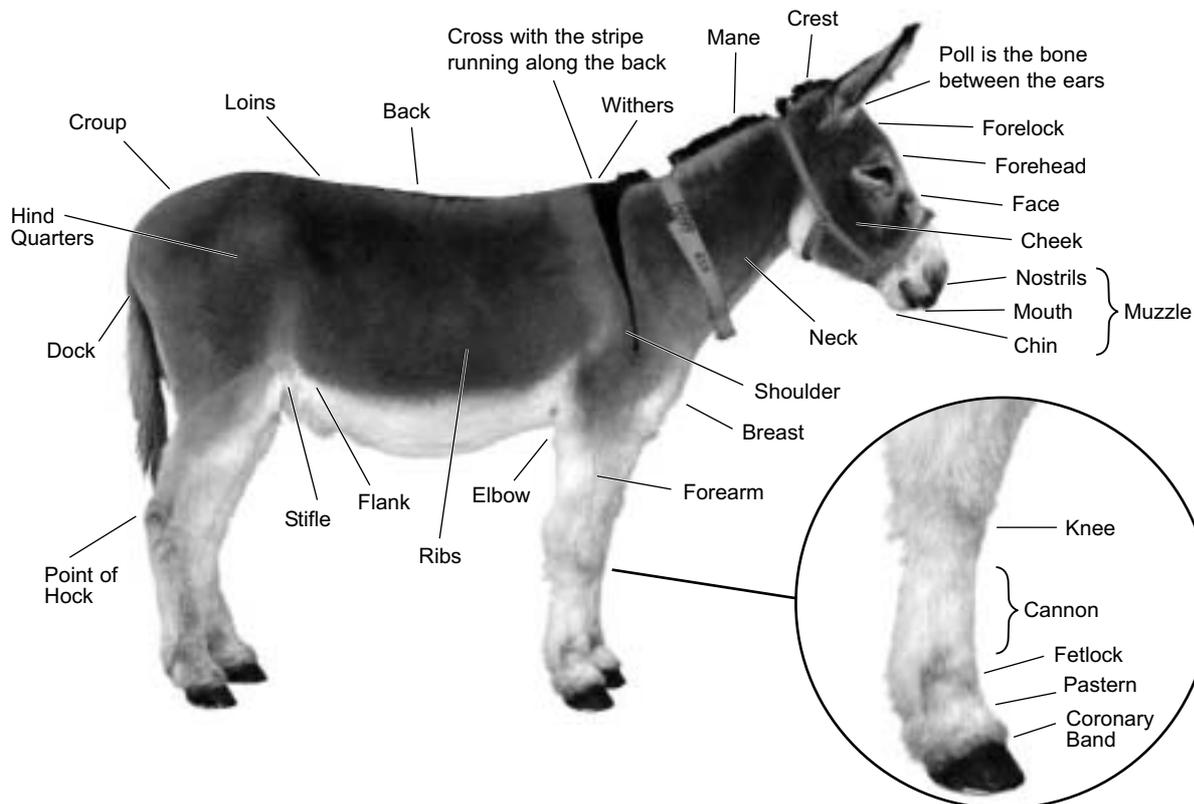
An average donkey of approximately 11 hands high or 160 kg should not carry more than 50kg (8 stone) on its back and we recommend that a donkey should pull no more than twice its body weight on level ground including the weight of a well balanced and maintained vehicle. If the donkeys are required just as pets then some older donkeys, or donkeys that could use a little bit of extra love and attention, may fit the bill.

If you obtain donkeys through The Donkey Sanctuary Fostering Scheme then the donkeys will have had a thorough medical examination and will have received all their vaccinations, been wormed and had regular hoof trimming. If donkeys are purchased from a market or private home then this may not have been done.

Unless you intend to breed donkeys, you should not have a stallion. Stallions by their nature can be extremely unpredictable especially if there is a mare in season nearby. Stallions need experienced handlers and are not suitable for children to handle or ride. Geldings (castrated stallions) and mares both have their own behaviour traits, playful geldings may romp and fight like schoolboys, mares come into season and need more understanding handling at this time. A pair of donkeys of the same sex will be just as happy as a mare and gelding combination.

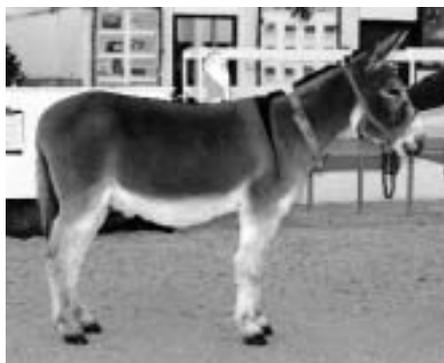
If you would like help or advice in selecting your donkeys then contact the Welfare Department at The Donkey Sanctuary.

Points of the donkey

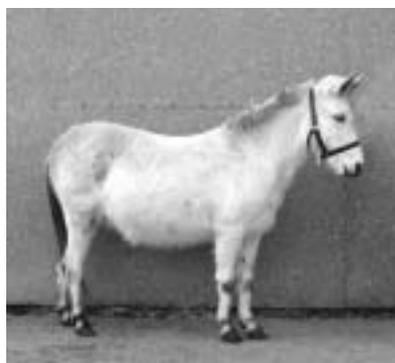


Donkeys are different!

There is a tendency to treat donkeys as if they are small horses, but donkeys are different! Donkeys are not like horses; they differ physically, mentally and emotionally.



Donkey



Mule



Horse

External features:

- Ears** The long ears of the donkey, which are well supplied with blood vessels, are a desert adaptation for cooling the body.
- Tail** The unusual tail resembles that of a cow because it is covered with short body hair except for the tuft on the end.
- Chestnuts** Ergots or chestnuts are practically nonexistent 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, smaller, tougher and more elastic than those of horses. Consequently, donkey hooves rarely need to be shod except, perhaps, if it is a working donkey.
Coat	Donkeys' coats tend to be longer and coarser than those of the horse, although texture can vary. It is important to note that donkeys do not produce as much natural grease as horses and, therefore, donkeys are more susceptible to climatic conditions such as rain, wind and snow. Insulation from heat or cold is largely created by air pockets between the longer hairs.
Mane	Short and seldom exceeding several inches.
Forelock	Donkeys do not have a true forelock.
Vestigial teats	The male donkey usually has vestigial teats on the prepuce, unlike the horse.
Genetics:	
Donkeys	62 chromosomes
Horses	64 chromosomes (przewalski horse - 66)
Mules	63 chromosomes

Behaviour:

Donkeys are more stoical in their behaviour and tend to startle less than horses, whereas horses have a strong flight instinct and are more easily startled. Often donkeys will show limited fear response to novel situations, compared to horses, and this can be mistaken for stubbornness rather than fear.

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.

Donkeys will develop strong emotional attachments with another animal, even when they are pastured with several other animals. Horses are herd animals and prefer to be in a large group.

Bonding:

Donkeys can bond very strongly with their companions which has implications for their management. Donkeys can form lifelong friendships and do not like being kept alone. We recommend that they are kept with a companion, preferably another donkey. Donkeys can bond very closely with their friend and may 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. It is, therefore, unwise to use a single donkey as a companion for a horse or pony, as the donkey may become distressed when the horse/pony is taken out for a ride.

Bonded donkeys need to be kept together at all times unless directed otherwise by a veterinary surgeon. 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.

A lone donkey will tend to bray as he is hoping for a response from other local donkeys. Donkeys living alone may bond with other animals living nearby for example: sheep, ponies, cows, goats, geese, chickens and dogs. A pair of donkeys will live quite happily together, or in a group with other equines.

Longevity:

A donkey's average life expectancy at the Donkey Sanctuary is 27 years, but donkeys can live to be over 40 years old.

Lungworm (*Dictyocaulus arnfieldi*):

Lungworms can be present in large numbers in the donkey without the animal showing any signs. However the donkey can pass on the infection to the horse, which will suffer from lung problems, coughing and discharge from the nostrils. If donkeys and the horses that are kept with them are regularly wormed this should not be a problem but consult your vet re a suitable deworming product.

Nutrition:

Donkeys browse as well as graze. Donkeys will eat coarse herbage in their pasture, which most horses will not eat. There is a subtle difference in the metabolism and physiology of the donkey and the horse. Donkeys have adapted to a high fibre diet, having their origins in regions where vegetation is dry and sparse.

Mule/Hinny:

Donkeys and horses can produce hybrid offspring.

Crosses between donkeys and horses/ponies:

Mule – cross between a male donkey and female horse/pony

Hinny – cross between a female donkey and male horse/pony

Mules and hinnies differ in appearance, stature and temperament. It is said that mules generally have the body of a horse with the extremities of a donkey, whereas the hinny has the body of a donkey with the extremities of a horse. The Donkey Sanctuary has produced a fact sheet on mules and hinnies.

GUIDE TO DONKEY HUSBANDRY

Donkey behaviour - daily care and general handling

Despite their domestication by humans donkeys continue to be a product of their evolution. Ancestors of our modern donkey survived mainly by running away from predators. If a donkey had no option and their life depended on it, they would be forced to fight and that means kicking and biting. Modern donkeys have the same survival instincts despite their domestication.

In the wild donkeys only have two decisions to make. These are to deal with a problem or not to deal with a problem, hence their evolution has meant donkeys are not great problem solvers. The domestic donkey generally has to deal with all difficult situations it encounters such as the farrier, the vet, traffic, loading into a lorry or any of the tasks we ask of a donkey that it would not encounter in the wild and this should be kept in mind whenever a donkey is being handled.

These guidelines should be followed whenever a donkey is being trained:

- Training should take place in a safe environment.
- The lesson should always be small enough to allow the donkey to succeed.
- The trainer should use the principles of shaping behaviour while training.
- Never rush, always allow sufficient time to complete the lesson.
- Use positive reinforcement to reward good behaviour.
- Use imagination, if a particular method is not working then try something else.
- Punishment should be avoided as a method of training donkeys.

Always accept that the donkey may be scared or frightened rather than naughty or bad.

Donkeys have complex methods of communication. A donkey's body language is its main method of communication and it relies on body language as much as we humans rely on speech for conveying our thoughts and fears. Donkeys will use their bodies to express their emotions and feelings.

The key to working with donkeys is to accept that there is always a reason for particular donkey behaviour. Try to look at things from the donkey's point of view and understand how the donkey feels.

There are differences in behaviour between the sexes. Stallions by their nature can be extremely unpredictable especially if there is a mare in season nearby. Stallions need experienced handlers and may not be suitable for children to handle or ride.

Geldings (castrated stallions) may romp and fight like schoolboys.

Mares come into season and need more understanding handling at this time. A mare coming into season will show her interest in any male donkey by making chewing movements with her mouth and presenting her rear end for service. Pairs of donkeys may simulate service during a mare's season.

A pair of donkeys of the same sex will be just as happy as a mare and gelding combination.

The Donkey Sanctuary has produced a fact sheet on the behaviour of donkeys.

Catching

A donkey will need to be caught for routine grooming and hoof care. This also allows the donkey to be checked over for signs of poor health and it will familiarise him with being handled. Also when the farrier comes to trim his hooves (every 6-10 weeks) then he will be happily caught, handled and he will be more likely to hold his feet up without struggling.

If a donkey is shy then he may not be happy to be approached to start with. It is best not to try to bribe him with tit bits as this may encourage the donkey to snatch the treat and run away or bite. The use of a bribe often means the donkey learns not to trust the handler and cannot be bribed in the future. By being aware of body language you can show him that the handler is not a threat. Different posture and changes of eye contact with the donkey will tell him if a human is a friend or a predator.

Quality time spent with the donkey allows the donkey to relax and learn the value of human contact. Make this time as positive as possible using a soft voice tone to speak to the donkey. If possible scratch the withers and gently scratch the ears. Make a fuss of the donkey but allow him time to himself to relax and be with other donkeys.

It is often helpful to allow the donkey to come up to the handler of his own choice. If the donkey steps forwards, stand still and wait for him. If the donkey walks away when approached continue to walk toward him slowly and confidently. This will teach the donkey that walking off does not mean he can avoid being caught. If the donkey stands still, stop following and relax for a 5-10 seconds before continuing to approach the 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.

Talking to the donkey may help calm the situation and relax the handler, provided a soft calm tone is used. Any nervousness on the part of the handler will be picked up by the donkey and may make it more difficult for the donkey to relax and be caught, so think positively whenever handling a donkey.

Allow the donkey to sniff the head collar. Do not attempt to put it on until the donkey is happy to have the head collar all around him. Short lessons of a few minutes at a time tend to work best, always end a lesson on a good note.



Time taken to train the donkey to be caught will save large amounts of time in the future and prevent the occurrence of stressful situations for handler and donkey.

Purchase a head collar that buckles up under the nose if it's for a donkey, as donkeys have quite angular noses compared with that of a horse and because of this they are more prone to being rubbed by the buckle if it is on the nose band.

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 half way 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.



We would strongly advise that a head collar is never left on the donkey continuously as he may get caught up on something or catch a foot in it when scratching. However, should it be necessary it is safer to use a cheap leather head collar rather than a nylon one which would not break in an emergency. A range of field safe head collars, which are designed to prevent field injuries, can now also be purchased from most tack shops.

Handling

Fit the head collar and lead rope, making sure that the head collar fits comfortably and attach the lead rope to the centre ring under the chin, ensuring the hook faces backwards to prevent pinching. Stand quietly with the donkey, and do not tie him up at this stage. Hold the slack end of the lead rope and gradually get the donkey used to being handled all over his body and down the legs. Once the donkey is happy to be handled progress to the use of a soft brush to groom the donkey.

Tail swishing and foot stamping by the donkey can indicate that he is uncomfortable. Try not to react to this behaviour but instead wait until the swishing or stamping stops for a moment and then move away from the area that caused this reaction from the donkey. This type of reaction by the trainer teaches the donkey patience and tolerance and that standing still stops any discomfort rather than stamping feet.

Always be conscious of safety. A young or worried donkey may threaten to kick out by lifting his back leg up or if very frightened could even kick.

Let him know when he has been good by giving him a scratch on the withers and then giving him a break from the training session. The lesson for the donkey to learn is that standing still when being handled brings positive rewards.

Always choose a positive moment to finish your session, as the donkey will remember that part most clearly.

Leading

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

Do not wrap the end of the lead rope around your hands, as this could cause 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 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.



The donkey's natural instinct is to pull against any pressure on its head that is caused by pulling on the lead rope. Therefore the aim of the lesson is to teach the donkey to step into this pressure. To achieve this pull gently on the rope, watching for a very small amount of movement into the pressure. As soon as the donkey takes one step towards the handler release the pressure. Once the donkey realises that the pressure is released when he moves towards the tugging pressure then it becomes easy to increase the number of steps the donkey takes.

To stop the donkey; the handler should take a couple of slower steps to let the donkey know he is about to be asked to stop. 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 he will know the commands "walk on", "stand" and "trot on".

Grooming

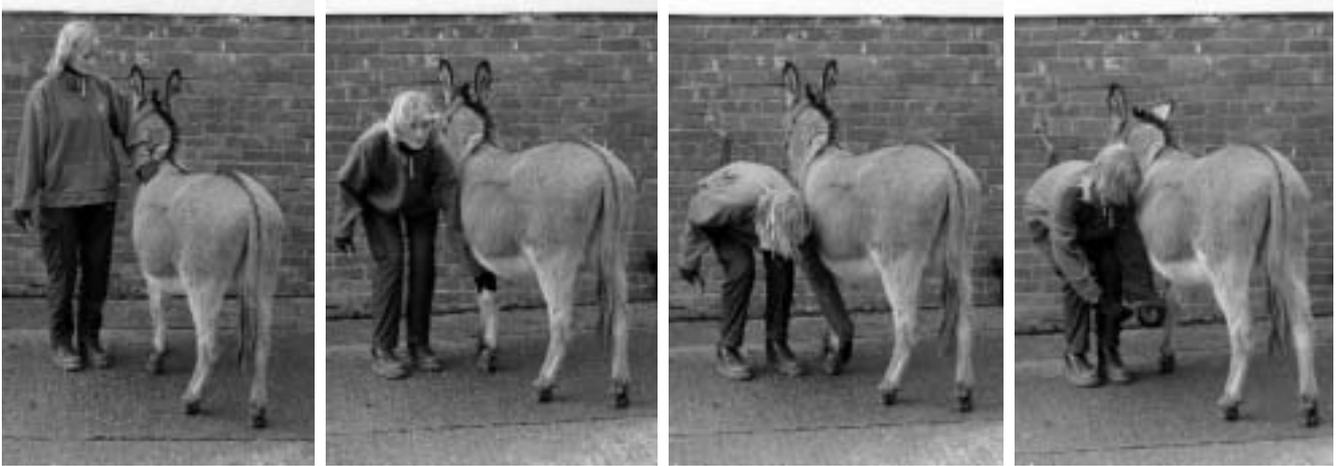
Once the head collar is on, do not assume that the donkey will be happy to be tied up. This is a separate lesson for the donkey. It may be easier initially to groom him while holding the end of the lead rope, or with an assistant holding the rope, as once tied up he may feel restricted and could panic. If the donkey is tied up stay with him at all times.

Tie a piece of string or twine to form a loop to a secure holding ring and the lead rope should be tied to this. Always use a quick release knot. If the donkey panics the string will break and save the donkey from hurting himself. Gardening string or spliced baling twine should be used, as new baling twine will rarely break in an emergency.



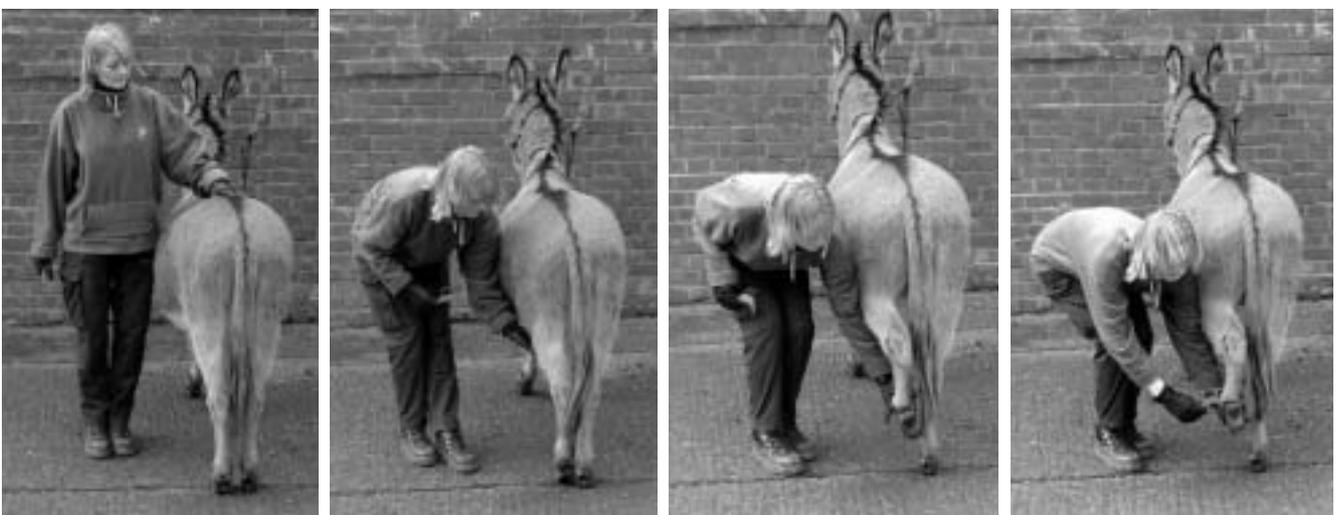
Grooming includes picking out the donkey's feet, which should be done every day. Feel down the legs to check for any signs of injury or swelling before you pick out the hooves.

Start at the withers and run a hand down the shoulder, onto the leg and then down the back of the front leg to the fetlock joint. Tug gently to encourage the donkey to pick the foot up. 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.



If the donkey is not keen to lift his leg, ensure he is balanced evenly on all four feet and then, by gently leaning against his shoulder with a hip, displace his 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 may have arthritis or other painful limb conditions). Do not bend the leg back more than a 45° angle or the donkey will not be able to balance. Avoid bringing the leg out to the side as this will be uncomfortable and again he may find it difficult to balance. Once you have finished picking out the foot lower it gently to the ground.

When picking up a back leg you should use the hand nearest the donkey and run it along the donkey's body. This ensures any sudden movement does not startle the donkey. Continue down the inside of the hind leg from the hock to the hoof and tug gently to encourage the donkey to pick the foot up. This prevents the arm straying across the donkey's back leg, which could be dangerous if he kicks backwards. If you put your hand inside the leg at the stifle it may cause the donkey to kick.



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.

General grooming

Donkeys need regular brushing to ensure that their coats stay healthy and free from matted areas. Grooming provides a chance to examine the donkeys for any bites, wounds or skin complaints. Grooming also helps you to build up a bond with your donkey.

Do not brush your donkey when the coat is wet, as this will allow water or dirt to reach the skin and this 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 should **not** be clipped out, and bathing should only be done in warm weather. 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 veterinary surgeon may advise requires clipping in summer and winter. Your veterinary surgeon may also require a donkey to be clipped to aid treatment of certain skin conditions.

When moving around a donkey keep a hand in contact with his body so he is not startled. It is preferable to walk around the front of the donkey whenever possible. If it is not possible to walk around the front then allow enough space while walking around the rear of the donkey to avoid being kicked.

Grooming equipment

The equipment used to groom donkeys is designed for horses, so can be purchased from any good tack shop or saddlers.

The grooming kit should include the following:

Dandy brush - should be used to remove caked mud and dirt from the main part of the donkey's body. Do not use the dandy brush on tender parts of the donkey as the hard bristles may irritate the donkey i.e. the face, legs and ears. Soft bristle dandy brushes are available and are ideal for donkeys when they have moulted out their coats in the summer.

Plastic currycomb - can be used on the long dirty coat in the same way as the dandy brush or it can be used to clean the dirt out of the brushes when used in conjunction with the body brush on the short summer coat.



Grooming equipment

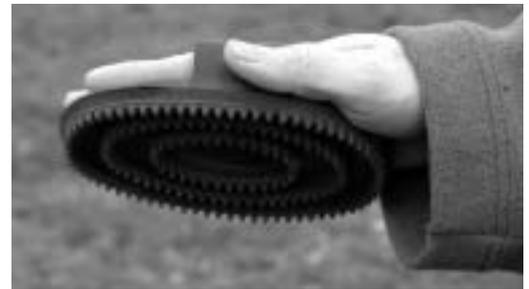


Dandy brush



Plastic currycomb

Rubber currycomb - can be used when the donkey is moulting. Use circular motions on the shoulders, neck, back and hindquarters to loosen all the dead hair. The donkeys really enjoy having this done.



Rubber currycomb

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. Do not use the body brush on the body in the winter months, as donkeys do not produce much natural grease in their coats and need to retain the grease for protection. It can be used on the sensitive areas that the dandy brush cannot.



Body brush

Hoof pick with brush is best for cleaning feet and cotton gauze swabs for cleaning eyes etc. We no longer advise the use of cotton wool, as even when damp, cotton wool can leave behind tiny fibres, which may cause irritation.



Hoof pick

The metal cattle comb is used to remove excess hair from the donkey's coat when they shed their coat in spring and summer.

A metal curry comb is used **only** for cleaning brushes; it is not used for donkey grooming, which can be done with a plastic curry comb.



Metal cattle-comb

Start with the dandy brush on the left side of the donkey at the top of his 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 him all over even when he is wet and cannot be brushed. This is the most effective way of detecting lumps, bumps and cuts etc.

Once the body has been groomed then brush the donkey's face, ears, legs and mane with the body brush keeping it clean with the plastic curry comb. Other areas such as the belly, between the front legs and body can also be brushed with the body brush. Use a body brush to brush out the tail.

Any discharge from the eyes, nose and tail 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.

Hoof oil or hoof grease can be applied to the hooves to make them look really smart especially for showing.

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

Riding your donkey

Donkeys learn by gradual, progressive repetition. Take into consideration the donkey's age (ideally between 4 and 25 years), build, conformation and temperament. If you are unsure of what you are looking for then ask the advice of a professional. Always get a vet to check that your donkey is physically fit to be ridden.

- Do not attempt to ride your donkey until it has reached the age of four.
It is not until then that the bones are fully developed.
- The rider should weigh less than 50kg (8 stone), and must always wear a well-fitted skull cap or riding hat which conforms to current safety standards – BSEN1384 or PAS015 or ASTM F1163, along with boots that have a flat sole and low heel.
- Always ensure that you have an experienced person with you, and if it is the rider's first time, then lead the donkey around an enclosed area first.
- Always praise the donkey by using your voice, particularly when he behaves well.
Always remain calm, with no sudden movements.
- 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.

Signs of good health

Every owner will, at some time, be concerned that all is not well with their donkey. By understanding the signs to check for it should be easier to spot an early warning of a problem developing.



Good health

It is certainly our experience that donkeys are very stoical by nature. They generally do not show obvious or dramatic signs of illness or lameness until the problem is well advanced. Familiarity with routine health checks and the behaviour of your own donkeys is the key to early recognition.

For both the new and experienced donkey owner, it is certainly advisable to become used to using the following 5 point check list on at least a daily basis:



Ill health

- Behaviour.
- Appetite and thirst.
- Faeces (and urine).
- Eyes, nose and resting respiration (breathing).
- Coat and skin.

Behaviour

This is perhaps the single most important check. A healthy donkey should be alert and aware, interested in what is going on around it with 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. Each donkey will have its own characteristics – e.g. a particular companion, grazing pattern, daily routine. It is sometimes only a slight change that indicates, at an early stage, a potential problem. Small changes in normal behaviour are often the first signs of illness, so get to know your donkey's ways as soon as possible!

Appetite and thirst

Donkeys would naturally graze for long periods of time. It is therefore important to control their diet to prevent obesity, but a healthy donkey should be looking to eat throughout the day and have no problems chewing or swallowing.

The amount a donkey will drink obviously varies according to air temperature, moisture content of food, workload etc. but routine checking of the water supply may provide evidence of its intake.

Faeces (and urine)

Check for fresh faeces, the consistency of which may alter with diet. There should be 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 occasions be cloudy. It should be passed freely, without straining. Repeated attempts to pass urine, or urine which is obviously discoloured or bloody, should be viewed with suspicion. Mares in season may be seen to attempt to pass urine more frequently.

Eyes, nose and resting respiration (breathing)

Eyes should be clean and bright, open and free from discharge. The nostrils equally should be clean and discharge free. At rest there should be minimal movement of the nostrils as the donkey breathes. In fact 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. A flaring of the nostrils, a marked rise and fall of the ribs and flanks, or any noise associated with the donkey's respiration should be cause for further investigation.

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 and head – a donkey's coat can often hide developing problems.

The above five points should be checked at least on a daily basis. If you are concerned that all is not well then 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/heart girth measurement.

Vital signs - “TPR”

Temperature

Normal values: Adult Range 36.2–37.8°C (97.2-100°F), Average 37.1°C (98.8°F).

Young donkeys up to 2 years old 36.6-38.9°C (97.8-102.1°F).

Buy a clinical thermometer from your vet and ask him how to use it. Get used to checking your donkey’s temperature so that you feel confident should you suspect that there might be a problem developing. Donkeys are individuals and their normal temperature will vary, so taking your donkey’s temperature will not only get the donkey used to this procedure but will allow you to record their normal temperature range.

Pulse rate

Normal range: 36-68 Average 44 beats/min.

With a little practice anyone can learn to count the pulse in the artery that runs under and across the lower jaw. Count the number of pulses felt in 15 seconds and multiply by 4. Keep the donkey’s head still with a hand above the muzzle. Use the fingertips of the other hand to locate the artery (about 4mm diameter) and by varying the pressure you will soon be aware of the pulsations corresponding to each heart beat. Getting to know what is normal for your donkey is very important so that any changes can be measured against the normal range for the individual.



Respiratory rate

Average 12-20 inspiration/min.

It is best to do this with the donkey undisturbed. Stand back to one side and either watch the rise and fall of the flank or chest or the breath coming out of the nostrils (on a cold day). Again count the number of breaths (a “rise” and “fall” = one breath) in 15 seconds and multiply by 4. Getting to know what is normal for your donkey is very important so that any changes can be measured against the normal range for the individual.

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 your own ear placed against the skin of the flanks (between the last rib and the hind leg) should pick up some of them, however great care should be taken as the donkey may kick particularly if in pain. If you get used to the normal sounds in a healthy donkey this can be a useful test – particularly if you suspect that your donkey may have colic (abdominal pain) or may not be passing faeces.

Feed test

A favourite test at The Donkey Sanctuary is the “ginger biscuit test” although many poorly donkeys will take a biscuit, particularly if they are used to this treat. A lack of interest is a definite cause for concern.

Condition score/heart girth weight measurement

Keeping a written record of your donkey's condition score and heart girth is a very useful exercise – especially in the elderly donkey where gradual weight loss might be missed. A simple measure of heart girth weight measurement recorded regularly will help to monitor your donkey's condition. To do this accurately a standard technique should be used. The donkeys' height to their withers should be measured in centimetres while standing on level, hard ground. Once a donkey is over four years old this measurement will only be required once and the same measurement can be used in future weighing.

The heart girth measurement is taken in centimetres using an ordinary tailor's tape measure. The tape measure should pass 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 10 centimetres (a hand width) back from the withers. The front of the cross can be a good guide to the position of the withers. The tape measure should not be vertical around the donkey when viewed from the side. The tape should be pulled firmly but carefully around the donkey and the reading taken in centimetres.

The heart girth should always be taken in the same location preferably by the same person to ensure a continuity of the measurements taken. Both measurements can then be marked on The Donkey Sanctuary weight nomogram, which is included in the back of this guide, and the donkey's weight read off the centre scale. e.g. a donkey 110cm tall and with a heart girth 130cm would weigh approximately 217kg.



Height (cm)



Heart girth (cm)

The monthly weights can then be compared and feed rations and strip grazing adjusted according to the donkey's dietary requirements. Please note that horse weight tapes do not work on donkeys due to their proportions being so different.

To condition score donkeys use the Body Condition Scoring Chart (refer to chart in back of this guide). Donkeys are given a condition score between 0 and 5. 0 is very poor and 5 is very fat. The ideal body condition score is 3. We recommend you weigh and condition score your donkey at least once a month.

When to call the vet?

If at any time you have concerns over your donkey's health or well-being then a call to your local vet should help to put your mind at rest. By providing information on each of the signs of health discussed here, your vet will be able to quickly decide the best course of action to take.

Points to be incorporated into the day:

- Always observe your donkeys' normal behaviour.
- Check your donkeys morning and evening for injuries.
- Fresh feed and water should always be available.
- Muck out the stable, check droppings and urine are normal.
- Check grazing and fencing for damage and poisonous plants.
- Groom your donkeys; pick out feet, clean eyes, nose and dock areas.

You need to remember the bigger picture. Your donkeys will also need:

- A routine worming programme as advised by your vet.
- A routine delousing programme as advised by your vet.
- A farrier to visit every 6-10 weeks as advised by your farrier and or vet.
- Annual vaccinations.
- Annual dental checks – older donkeys and donkeys with teeth problems may require more regular checks.

Common skin conditions

Parasites – a number of ectoparasites can cause problems

Flies

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.

To prevent fly worry, good management includes:

- Removing manure frequently and siting muck heaps as far away from stables as possible.
- Providing field shelters.
- Using fly fringes or masks.
- Insecticides can be used to kill flies.
- Fly repellent can be used on the donkey – a number of preparations are available – some chemical, some herbal. Always read and follow the safety data for the product purchased.
- The use of a summer sheet or anti fly rug should be considered.

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 the donkey, leading to excess rubbing - especially on the mane and tail areas. The sore areas often bleed, attracting more insects.

Again prevention is most effective but can be difficult.

- Stable the donkey at dawn and dusk.
- Use fly repellents several times daily.
- 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 veterinary surgeon.

Mites

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

Lice

These are mainly found in winter and unlike mites are quite easy to see with the naked eye. They are often found in large numbers and cause rubbing and hair loss. A number of anti-louse preparations are available and will need to be used more than once to kill off any unhatched eggs.

Ticks

In the UK ticks are found especially in certain locations with areas of long grass e.g. the New Forest. Usually ticks cause mild irritation at the site of the bite, but they can be implicated in the spread of Lyme disease. Most insecticides or anti-flea preparations will kill them. If pulled out, leaving the head in, an area of irritation can persist.

Rain scald and mud fever

Both of these conditions occur when the 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 and causes crusting and matting of the hair coat. When the hair coat 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 your vet will need to see the donkey.

Ringworm

This fungal skin condition is contagious and if suspected, call your vet for advice and treatment. Lesions sometimes appear as circles with hair loss, but can take different forms and become widespread. Although it will resolve in 6-12 weeks, treatment should be followed to limit the spread. Usually washes are used on the donkey and the environment should be disinfected. Ringworm can be transmitted to humans so great care is required when handling a donkey with ringworm, gloves should be worn and hands washed thoroughly after handling the donkey.

Sarcoid

Sarcoids are skin growths that can take a variety of forms, from flat to profuse 'wart' masses. They can be hard to remove completely and often reoccur. Veterinary treatment will be needed for these, so contact your vet if you discover any suspicious lumps or bumps.

Sunburn/Photosensitisation

Donkeys with pink, unpigmented skin may burn in summer and require daily high factor sun-block application and/or a mask with detachable nose flap. Some donkeys will also develop sensitivity to the sun if they have liver disease or have eaten certain plants e.g. St John's Wort. As you cannot tell clinically which condition is present, a blood sample is recommended.

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

Footcare

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 donkey's feet healthy:

- Get to know his feet! Pick them up and remove all the muck and stones daily.
- Keep bedding clean and dry. Wood shavings or cardboard beds well maintained 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.
- Keep him trim! Overweight donkeys are more prone to foot problems.
- Encourage regular exercise particularly if housed during the winter. A daily walk out in-hand will be good for everyone.
- Find a farrier who regularly trims donkeys' feet; ask him to visit every 6-10 weeks. If your donkey has specific problems it may need more frequent visits. Keep your farrier happy! The following check list will help keep your farrier happy.

- a Catch the donkey for your farrier and be there to hold the donkey while the farrier works.
 - b Ensure the donkeys legs and feet are dry and mud free.
 - c Provide a clean, well-lit, preferably concreted area, which is protected from the elements.
 - d Seek and follow any advice your farrier may give you, particularly the date when the feet should be seen next.
 - e Offer a cup of tea and provide prompt payment.
-
- Avoid laminitis. Restrict access to new or fast growing grass by use of a moveable electric fence or by limiting grazing to early mornings and bring donkeys off pasture by mid morning. Feeding with hay or straw prior to turning out may help reduce consumption of too much rich grass initially. Grazing frosty grass has also been implicated in increased occurrence of laminitis. Avoid grazing donkeys during frosty periods particularly late frosts followed by bright sunny weather. Avoid obesity. Take care with feeding. Introduce any supplementary feed slowly and feed small feeds frequently. Similarly reduce or change feeds slowly usually over 7 days. Use high fibre/low starch-sugar feeds. Good quality new hay may need to be introduced slowly in limited amounts. Have feet well trimmed on a regular basis.
 - Seek veterinary help without delay if you suspect lameness or laminitis.
 - Individuals prone to “seedy toe” (a disease of the hoof wall when areas become weak, grey and crumbly) or “thrush” (an infection of frog and sole) need particular care and attention. They must be kept in a clean and dry environment and have their feet picked out daily. If seedy toe or thrush becomes a problem then professional help needs to be sought.
 - Hoof oil/grease is not normally required. However, occasional use for shows etc. should not be harmful.
 - Supplements to encourage hoof growth should only be used on the advice of a vet.

FEEDING ADVICE

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.
- Always feed according to the donkey's age, weight and temperament.
- Avoid dusty or mouldy feeds.
- Always have clean water available.
- Access to an equine salt or mineral lick is advisable.

Regular worming and dental checks are necessary to enable the donkey to make efficient use of its feed.

Feeding

In their natural habitat donkeys are lean, fit animals browsing on fibrous plant material, eating small quantities throughout the day and often walking considerable distances. A well-balanced high fibre diet is ideal for maintaining a healthy donkey in the correct body condition.

- It is a good idea to learn to body score your donkey. Donkeys should be weighed once a month on livestock scales. Where these are not readily available the heart girth and height measurement method should be used. A gradual change in weight can then be identified if the measurement is undertaken monthly and feed adjusted accordingly.
- Most donkeys, even those undertaking limited exercise, will only require a maintenance ration. Only underweight, old or sick individuals usually need any form of additional feeding. Restricted grass, hay, straw, with an equine mineral salt lick and water will be all that most healthy donkeys require. Late or second cut meadow hay is preferable because of the lower fructan sugar levels thus reducing the risk of laminitis.
- Any change in your donkey's diet should be made gradually, and if extra feeds are required they are better fed in small, frequent feeds rather than simply once a day. If a donkey is underweight, then a veterinary and dental examination is likely to be necessary.
- Any donkey that is not grazing or is stabled should be given small amounts of fibre, such as straw throughout the day.
- 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 those caused by an allergy e.g. to fungal spores.
- When donkeys are at pasture their daily care should not be forgotten (see grazing). 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. Prevention is better than cure and dieting an overweight donkey is not an easy task.
- Barley straw should be fed where suitable, as it increases the fibre content of the diet. However, old donkeys with worn or missing teeth may be unable to chew straw adequately.
- Please see our fact sheet on "What to Feed your Donkey" if you require more information on other foodstuffs.

Dieting your donkey

Becoming 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 e.g. hyperlipaemia (a disease of excessive fat metabolism).

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!

Here is our suggested 'weight watcher's guide':

- Is he fat? Learn to condition score. We would recommend that a healthy donkey should be no more than condition score 3. (Refer to body condition score chart.)
- What does he weigh? This provides an objective starting point to refer back to. Accurate livestock scales are obviously ideal but the heart girth nomogram is an alternative.
- Is it safe to diet? Newly acquired donkeys and elderly donkeys must be carefully assessed prior to starting any diet. Always allow a recently arrived donkey time to settle down, preferably managed and fed as he was in the previous home. Only start the diet when he is content and has adapted to the new environment. Elderly donkeys may benefit from a full veterinary examination including a thorough dental check prior to dieting – they must be able to eat, chew and digest effectively any restricted diet or serious problems could ensue.
- What does he eat? Write down and estimate, or ideally, weigh EVERYTHING he eats each day, including bedding (straw). This is obviously easier with housed donkeys but careful use of moveable fencing will restrict grazing intake.

Work out a plan and stick to it! Estimate a reduction of approximately 20% of all food items eaten. Feed small, frequent meals rather than one or two large meals.

- Put down a non-edible bed such as wood shavings or cardboard.
- Encourage exercise – walking in hand or encourage the use of a bare grazing strip, with water at one end and a little feed and straw at the other.
- Repeat weight and condition score checks every week. It may take a couple of months before any changes are noticed, so perseverance is required. If there is no change after two months, review diet and reduce by a further 10% (and ensure that the other family members are not offering treats on the sly!).
- Keep a close eye on your donkey for any signs of ill-health or problems developing (for help refer to signs of good health).

KEEPING A DONKEY AT GRASS

Grazing

Adequate pasture for grazing and exercise is essential. Depending on the type of land and quality of grass, a one acre field correctly managed should provide sufficient for a pair of donkeys.

For good pasture management the following points should be considered:

- Most donkeys will become obese on unrestricted grazing. The sensible use of electric/moveable fencing will enable you to control your donkey's intake and maintain an area for haymaking if desired. Electric tape systems are preferable to wire as they are more visible. Always follow the manufacturer's guidelines. Keep your fence neat and well maintained and check it every morning and evening, moving as appropriate. The rotation of grazed areas can also be very useful in helping to control parasitic worms.
- Limiting grazing time can be a useful way to restrict access to grass as well as restricting grazing area by electric fence. Limiting grazing to early mornings and bringing donkeys off pasture by mid morning may also help prevent laminitis.
- Check perimeter fences regularly to ensure they are donkey proof and well maintained.
- Ideally pick up dung daily as this prevents the spread of worms. Where this is not possible dung should be removed from the paddock at least twice a week. Donkeys do not like to graze areas spoiled by faeces and a twice weekly pick up will really help to remove many 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 likely problem plants. Yew is also very toxic to donkeys. Bracken is potentially toxic and some donkeys may 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 (stressed grass i.e. frosty grass can also be a problem). Donkeys being turned out in the spring after winter housing are particularly susceptible. It is advisable to feed donkeys hay/straw prior to grazing, for a limited time only, when first turned out. Fields which have been previously fertilised may pose a greater threat. Spring, however, is not the only "risk period". Whenever grass is growing well it may be a potential problem. Frosty conditions can also increase the threat of laminitic attack.
- Avoid grazing recently fertilised fields until the fertiliser has been taken into the soil by sufficient rain.
- Provide shelter and protection from the elements.
- Check water supplies daily and clean troughs regularly.

The Donkey Sanctuary has produced a fact sheet on poisonous plants.

Fencing

There are many alternative types of fencing, or combinations of fencing, that can be used to contain donkeys. Two donkeys will require a field of approximately one acre. Add half an acre per additional donkey. The acreage required will vary 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 that the brambles and hawthorn found in hedges will provide. Donkeys are great escape artists and can eat their way through a hedge before you realise what has happened, therefore you should 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 such as: yew, laurel, rhododendron, foxglove, oak, bracken, ragwort and deadly nightshade to name a few.

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 bar should be positioned 45cm (18inches) 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.

Donkeys may chew the wooden fences. This may be because they like the fibre and roughage or because they are bored. If you provide 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 are a less expensive 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 then the donkeys could put their hooves through the wire and get caught up. A single wooden rail or a strand of well-tensioned plain wire should be positioned above the netting to prevent the donkeys from the dangerous activity of leaning over to reach the grass or hedging on the other side.

Barbed wire

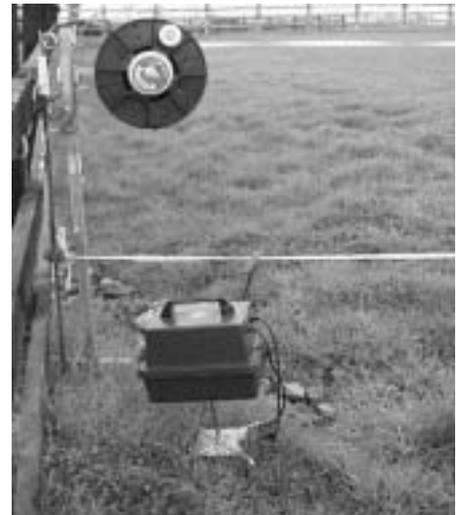
Wherever possible you should avoid using barbed wire. If pig/sheep netting is against a boundary hedge then the top strand of wire could be of well-tensioned barbed wire. If barbed wire is used in your pastures as a top strand for pig netting, the wire should be well tensioned and regularly inspected. It is not safe to use barbed wire as a dividing fence between paddocks, as the donkeys could run into it. To avoid the risk of lower leg injuries do not use barbed wire below 3ft off the ground.



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 strip graze. 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 the donkeys are getting.

Setting up an electric fence involves setting out fencing posts, threading tape or wire through and linking it up to a battery powered fencing unit. At The Donkey Sanctuary we prefer to use the more visible tape than wire. 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. The instructions supplied with the fencing unit should be followed carefully.



Gateways

During winter months gateway areas, or access points, will 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 hard standing. They can then get turned out when conditions allow. Not everyone has this luxury so prevention is better than cure. Here at the Sanctuary hard wood chippings (bark) is put down during the winter months to prevent gateways becoming wet and boggy.



Points to be considered

- Always keep water troughs or feed containers away from gateways and trees.
- If you can use another access then do so, this prevents the area becoming too boggy and wet.

Gateways should also be designed to allow easy access both in and out of the field. All gateways should have good hinges and must be fastened securely, preventing the donkeys from escaping.

Rugs for donkeys

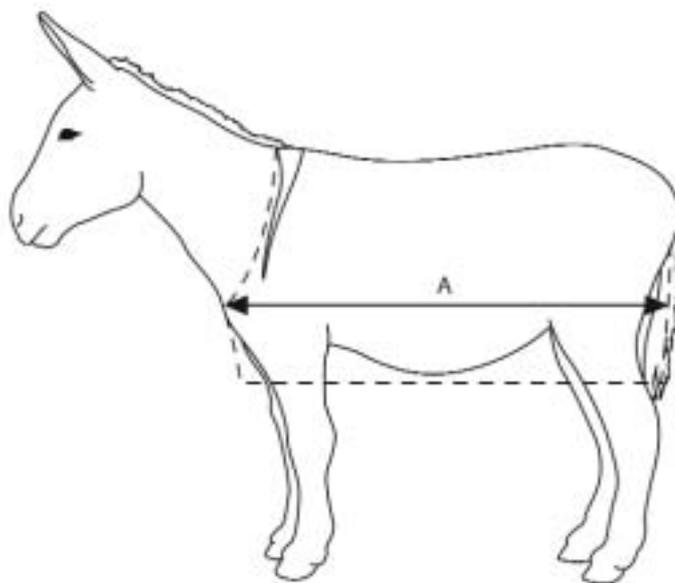
Young healthy donkeys are extremely unlikely to need a rug but due to the donkeys' lack of a waterproof coat they should always have access to a field shelter or stable. However, if a donkey is old or sick he will be more susceptible to illness and cold and it will become more difficult to keep weight on him. A well rugged old donkey will need to eat less to maintain his body weight and temperature than he would if left un-rugged. To help to keep him 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 donkey's 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 over the hindquarters). There is often a tail flap to allow any rainwater to run off away from the back legs of the donkey.

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

To measure your donkey for a rug: measure from the centre of the chest along the donkey's side to the point of buttock (see line A on the diagram), 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.



When fitting the rug to the donkey work slowly and confidently. Do not lift the rug high and throw it on the back of the donkey, this is likely to frighten the donkey. Keep the rug low and slide it gently over the back of the donkey. Position the rug further forward than required, fasten the front straps and slide it backwards into position, as this ensures the donkey's hair lies flat under the rug.

Fasten the neck of the rug first and then secure the belly straps. 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.

A wet donkey should not have a rug on until it is dry. However, a wicking rug could be used to help in drawing moisture away from the donkey and will help the donkey to dry before its usual rug is fitted.



STABLE MANAGEMENT

Shelter

The donkeys' stable or shelter should provide an area for the donkeys to get out of the heat and flies during the summer and as a refuge from the bad weather in the winter. The stable should have a floor that drains well and have some form of bedding so that the donkeys can lie down in comfort.

There may be times when donkeys need to be shut in the stable such as when they are ill, when the vet is expected or while the 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

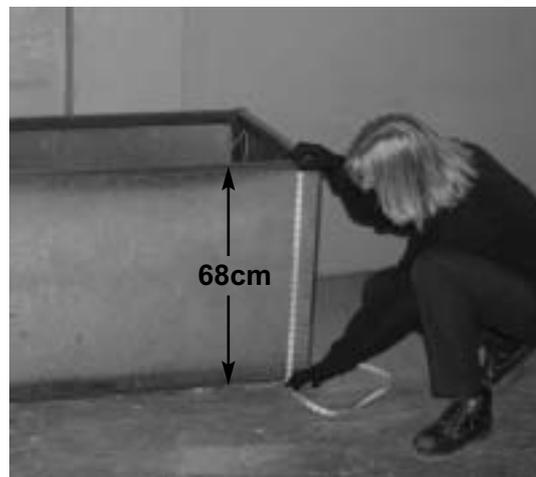
There are a number of points which should be borne in mind when designing a donkey stable:

- Adequate shelter should be accessible at all times. This is not only to offer protection during the winter but also to give shade in the summer.
- There is a wide range of stables and shelters available on the market or you may already have one that is suitable, or would be with alterations.
- Allow approx. 4.5 sq. metres (50 sq. feet) of covered area per donkey, approx. 9sq. metres (100sq. feet) for a pair.
- A well-drained non-slip hard standing floor is essential e.g. concrete or stable brick.
- Provide a drained concrete run out yard.
- 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.
- Stable doors must allow donkeys to see over with ease – doors for horses are normally too high.
- Protect glazed windows with wire mesh.
- A floor level feed bin or corner floor feeder situated so that feed is not soiled. The use of a hay net is not advisable as it is better for donkeys to eat from the floor and hay nets when empty can become dangerous for the donkey.
- Fit tying up rings at the correct height for your donkey, i.e. his/her eye level.
- A covered, well lit area with hard standing is a great help to the farrier.
- Site 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, a good, thick layer of bark chips spread around is an alternative preventive measure.)



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 then some particles of hay or straw could fall into their ears or eyes and respiratory problems can be exacerbated. To prevent this, provide a floor level feeder with no sharp edges. Place enough straw in the feeder so that they can browse through it, there will be no waste as the remainder can be used for bedding the following day. If possible, position the feeder so that the donkeys' feet are not on the bedding while they are eating. In the winter you may need to add a small amount of hay to the straw in the feeder if your donkeys are not maintaining their body condition with the grass and straw based diet. (See fact sheet on measurements for a donkey stable.)



Water

Donkeys should always have access to a clean water supply; they are very fussy about what they drink. 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.



Mineral lick

An equine mineral block should be hung up inside your stable or shelter so that the donkeys can supplement their diet as they wish. Molasses treat licks are not encouraged due to the amount of Molasses that they contain which can cause the onset of laminitis.

Electricity supply

Electric lights are essential in the winter months and the facility for a heat lamp is useful. 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. Clean cobwebs and dust off regularly.

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 storage facilities, cost and disposal of manure.

Straw

There are three main types of straw: barley, oat and wheat.

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 the donkeys to lie on and it drains reasonably well. If barley straw is not available it is acceptable to use oat or wheat straw. For overweight donkeys it would be better to select wheat straw. Straw is the cheapest form of bedding. If donkeys have respiratory problems or require dieting then a dust free bedding should be considered. You will need to purchase Barley straw for the donkeys to eat, so it is convenient to also use it for bedding.

Oat straw is higher in feed value and more palatable. The donkeys tend to eat more of it and gain weight.

Wheat straw is the lowest in feed value and tends to have prickly ears and is not so comfortable to lie on. It does not drain very well and can be dusty, causing the donkey to cough.

Shredded wood fibre is a breakthrough in dust free bedding. It is specifically manufactured from finely shredded recycled white wood such as palettes which makes it one of the 'greenest' bedding products on the market. 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 25kg 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 donkey moves around or gets up and lies down, thus helping to prevent injury.

Shredded paper bedding is a dust free bedding material which is usually made from any unwanted printing matter such as newspapers and magazines. Bales come wrapped in polythene which makes them easy to store outside. Paper can make a warm and soft bed which is also highly absorbent. However, once wet the paper can become heavy to work with and on windy days will easily blow around the yard.

Dust extracted shavings

Should be of white/soft wood and dust extracted. Red/hard woods can be poisonous and cause respiration problems. Shavings can make an alternative bed for a sick or lame donkey that has problems moving around in deep straw. When dieting an overweight donkey as advised by a veterinary surgeon, the use of shavings allows greater control over the amount of straw the donkey is eating. Shavings are more expensive than straw and they take longer to rot down. The shavings absorb urine creating wet patches that should be removed daily.

Shredded cardboard

Is an alternative to shavings making a comfortable, dust free bed for a sick or lame donkey. When dieting an overweight donkey as advised by a veterinary surgeon, cardboard bedding allows greater control over the amount of straw the donkey is eating. It is biodegradable but does take a long time to rot down. It costs about the same as shavings. Donkeys will eat cardboard bedding, so should be carefully observed to ensure there are no ill effects.

Rubber matting

Provides a comfortable safe area for the donkeys to lie down. Some types have honeycomb areas on the underside for drainage. A shallow layer of shavings, straw or cardboard must be used to absorb the wet areas. 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.

Mucking out

Wet patches or dung on straw, shavings, shredded wood fibre, cardboard or paper beds can either be removed daily or kept on a deep litter system. A fork, broom, shovel, wheelbarrow, disinfectant and a "pooper scooper" are required to maintain and clean the shelter. Daily mucking out is the best way to monitor your donkeys' environment and observe any changes in behaviour during your absence.

Deep litter is when dung is removed from the bed and, once a day, a layer of fresh bedding is scattered over the base 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

This is the preferred method, as all dung and wet areas are mucked out on a daily basis. Clean, dry bedding should be moved to one side as the dung and urine patches are removed. 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 fresh straw along with any straw left in the manger that was not



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

Once some banks of straw are built around the walls of the stable to the height of about 40cm (16 inches) a level bed of about 20cm (8 inches) can be laid, 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 of droppings and their consistency, 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 muckheap is an important issue for donkeys, owners, keepers and neighbours!

- 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.
- It must also be sited where it will not cause a nuisance to houses and users of public rights of way.
- Your muckheap 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 may cause a nuisance to your donkeys from flies or a fire hazard as muckheaps can become very hot.
- Your muckheap should have solid base and sides to enclose it, so that any liquid can be contained. Any temporary muckheap (for example one which your local farmer or allotment owner takes away weekly) should be at least 10m from any water course and at least 50m from a well, borehole or spring that supplies water for human consumption or dairy use.

Disposal of your straw muckheap can be done by local agricultural contractors, farmers, used on your flowerbeds or given to gardening friends and family. But it must be left to compost for a year. If you're not using straw bedding then a contractor or farmer would be a good option as other bedding takes a lot longer to rot down.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Ass/Donkey/Burro	interchangeable terms that mean the same thing.
Colt	stallion under three years old.
Gelding	castrated male donkey .
Grooming	is the cleaning and brushing of the animal's coat which helps to keep the animal healthy and prevent skin problems.
Hand	a measuring unit equal to 4 inches.
Hinny	product of a female donkey and a male horse/pony.
Jack	male donkey.
Jack foal	male foal.
Jennet foal	female foal.
Jennet/Jenny	female donkey.
John	male mule.
Molly	female mule.
Mule	product 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.
Stallion	entire male donkey – not castrated.
Tack	is the equipment used on the animal so that it can be ridden (saddlery is used) or driven (harness is used).