

Donkeys



Donkeys are not small horses, and their natural environment is not the temperate conditions of the UK but a more semi-desert like environment where food is scarce and of a poorer quality.

In the UK donkeys live a pasture lifestyle, and many of the clinical problems which arise are the result of too much food and not enough exercise. These are problems which are exacerbated as a donkey reaches old age.

Donkeys frequently live into their thirties, so are a long term undertaking and need regular veterinary and dental care throughout their lives.

ROUTINE MANAGEMENT OF DONKEYS

Feeding

Donkeys are more efficient at digesting food than horses and as a result survive on less forage than a similarly sized pony. The challenge is to provide enough food to keep them busy, but not to allow them to become obese. Most donkeys in good condition require only hay (25%) and straw (ad-lib), and no concentrate feed even in winter. Pasture fed donkeys will need restricted grazing in the summer months.

Donkeys require constant access to clean drinking water.

Dangers of obesity

Obesity increases the risk of developing hyperlipaemia and laminitis, both of which can be fatal. Prevention of obesity is better than cure, because rapid loss of condition in overweight donkeys can trigger hyperlipaemia.

Hyperlipaemia is a condition in which triglycerides (fats) are released into the circulation which can result in organ failure and death unless treated rapidly. The early signs of dullness and reduced appetite can be difficult to detect. Hyperlipaemia can be triggered by anything that causes a reduction in food intake e.g. stress, transport, dental disease.

Laminitis is a condition in which there is inflammation in the laminae of the foot that connect the pedal bone to the hoof wall. This can progress to rotation or sinking of the pedal bone within the foot. The cause is not fully understood and many factors are involved but obese animals are more prone to develop the disease.

Dental care

Donkeys require regular dental examinations and treatment at an interval of between 6 and 12 months by a vet or qualified equine dental technician. They are prone to developing sharp enamel points and overgrowths on their molar teeth largely as a result of the diet differing from that of their natural environment. Dental disease is especially prevalent in older donkeys. Even advanced dental problems can be difficult for owners to detect so regular examination is paramount.



Foot care

Donkey's feet generally require daily hoof care and trimming every 6-10 weeks.

The sole does not naturally flake away so often needs paring back.

CHECK LIST FOR DONKEY OWNERS:

- annual influenza and tetanus vaccinations;
- dental examinations at 6 to 12 month intervals;
- regular assessment of body condition score, to enable fine tuning of the diet;
- regular routine farriery;
- worm control strategy incorporating pasture management, worm egg counts and the use of wormers as required.

Common conditions affecting donkeys:

- laminitis (predisposed by obesity)
- dental disease
- obesity/ hyperlipaemia
- foot problems
- parasites
- respiratory disease
- colic.

The Donkey Sanctuary will analyse, free of charge, blood samples and faecal samples submitted by your vet. They also provide information on the treatment of donkey diseases.

The sick donkey

The donkey and the horse are closely related, and are affected by many of the same conditions; but the detection of sickness and disease in the donkey can be made more difficult by its stoical nature. Dullness and depression may be the only symptoms exhibited. Any dull donkey should therefore be seen by a vet at an early stage to determine a diagnosis.



The thin donkey is as much of a welfare concern as an obese donkey. Beware of woolly coats masking poor condition. Investigation into the causes of why a donkey is thin may include:

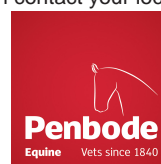
- examination of the teeth;
- faecal worm egg counts to determine parasite burden;
- evaluation of the diet;
- clinical examination and blood tests;
- determining other causes of pain e.g. osteoarthritis.



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