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Notes on DONKEY CARE

Donkeys are not small horses: they are of the same family, but they are different. They are hardy, bred to suit dry, barren areas where food quality is poor and the ground hard. Their coat is dry and cannot develop the protective oily lustre seen in horses. They **need a high fibre diet, fed 'little and often'**; and they **must have shelter from the elements**, especially when it is wet and cold. They bowse as well as graze and are very easy to overfeed.

All donkeys are individuals. No donkey can be rushed into doing something it doesn't want to do: but this is often caution rather than stubbornness. Most get along, some never do. Pair bonding or bonding to another animal is common and can be problematic. Stallions can be extremely unpredictable

Transport: Donkeys that are friends can travel together and do not need partitions. They can wear a collar or halter, but do not tether them; it can interfere with their balance. Walls and floor of the crate should be solid and clean.

LIFESPAN 25 – 35 years

Weight Jennies 160 – 240kg Jacks 200 – 360kg

VACCINATIONS For tetanus, at 6 and 12 weeks, then at 15 months then each 6 – 8 years
Older donkeys can start a course of tetanus at any time.

Worming Their worms are shared with horses. They evolved in arid conditions, so donkeys have little tolerance for the pasture – borne worms found in temperate regions. Cross grazing with sheep or goats will help; as will spelling pasture during hot, dry periods.

Donkeys can be wormed with a horse drench, just scale the dose to suit their weight.

... Foals should be treated from 6 weeks each 6 weeks until 9 months old..

... Treatment of older donkeys is aimed at two things [1] ridding their system of a dangerous pathogen and [2] minimising contamination of pasture. In Tasmania, it is best to drench each 8-12 weeks, dependent on the type of drench used, the age and number of donkeys, the amount and type of space We can work out a regime to suit each client. Especially, drench during the Spring flush [Sept/Oct] and when Autumn rains break the summer dry-spell.

Feet Donkeys have tough little feet, but can develop wall cracks, overgrowth or infections, especially if kept on soft wet ground. Remove all the muck and stones regularly, rasp overgrowth, and check for any hint of laminitis. Trimming by a 'bare-foot farrier' may be needed each 6-8 weeks.

Teeth Donkeys fed a suitable high roughage diet rarely have trouble with their teeth. Those fed grains or pellets may do. Also elderly donkeys can find it hard to chew long strands of grass; they need to have it short-chopped.

Signs of teeth issues = drooling, dropping feed, reluctant to feed, bad breath, weight loss.

Cereal-based concentrates can also lead to gastric ulcers [!] and colic.

General daily health check: *Normal Behaviour. *Normal Appetite and Drinking. *Normal Dung & Urine. *Clean Eyes /nose and easy breathing. *Healthy Coat and skin

Temperature: For an adult donkey, 36.2 to 37.8°C. Foal temp is more labile.

Two common health issues ... both related to diet

hyperlipaemia notably in fat donkeys, and often brought on by stress, when a drop in eating means their body fat is mobilised into their blood stream to facilitate protein production by the liver. If prolonged, hyperlipidaemia leads to liver and kidney pathology. So take care when a painful episode, travelling, a change of diet, a change of environment or loss of a companion occurs.

Watch for: a drop in appetite, lethargy, depression

Laminitis can be precipitated by excessive consumption of grass or cereal grain-based feeds. Special danger = stressed grass, during frosty conditions, & rich grass growing quickly during spring & autumn, and if fertilised.

It is thought that many donkeys [and many hardy little ponies] are inherently insulin-resistant: this would help them cope with poor quality/scarce herbage, but can precipitate laminitis when the diet is too rich

Watch for: lameness, a 'proppy' gait, reluctance to move at all !

Basic rules of feeding

1. They should feed little and often ["trickle feed"] on high fibre herbage. They may become obese on unrestricted grazing. Electric/moveable fencing will help grazing management.

2. They should graze low quality pasture, **high in fibre** and low in protein, sugars, starch/carbohydrates and calories. Restrict their access to rich grasses. In Winter supplement with meadow hay [check it for ragwort] rather than oaten or lucern hay.

2. Always have clean water available

3. Make any change in feeding regime gradually, over at least 14 days

4. Feed according to the donkey's age, weight and temperament

5. They should not eat with a raised head. Use floor level feed bins.

Hay nets can be problematic as if kept low enough the donkeys get tangled up in them!

6. Be aware of the risks of laminitis & hyperlipidosis

Donkey Breeding

Puberty from 5 months

Breed from 18 months

Heats For 3 – 7 days each 3 weeks, especially in Spring. They will mate and conceive toward the end of their heat period.

Is she pregnant ? Once pregnant the jenny will not have a heat cycle, and will not attract the stallion to service. But mostly it is quite difficult to know when a donkey is pregnant or not. In the last trimester her belly will become asymmetric, especially when viewed from behind.

Urine and blood tests are available, but can give false positives if she has, perhaps, lost the foal. An ultrasound examination can be organized.

Gestation 11-14½ months ... but '10 month' foals usually do well.

Signs that foaling is due ... The mare becomes more solitary, may seek affection.

Her udder will swell, but then subside for even a month, finally increasing in size until the teats also swell. In the last 72 hours milk may "wax" from their tips.

Pelvic muscles slacken in the last 48 hours so her spine and hips will seem more prominent, especially when viewed from the back.

During the last 24-48 hours, she may get restless, stop eating, perhaps roll frequently and stretch.

Then It is often only 30 – 40 mins from the first straining until the foal is free on the ground.

Foaling ... is usually at night, with the mare lying down. The foals 'dive' with the head held between the forelegs. They are very rarely breach. Afterbirth follows ... it should be passed within an hour. If retained 2 hours, call a vet]. The cord is usually intact until the foal's movements rupture it, thus vital blood can pass from placenta to foal after birth

Mares dry and clean their foal, which then stands to suckle, nudged into place by its mum.
Is that foal healthy? ... Do not get too involved. You may upset the mare, and interfere with her bonding to her foal. However, it is good to ensure the foal's mouth and nostrils are clear of membranes & mucus, that the eyes are open and clear, the gums and tongue pink. Breathing should be steady and easy.

They need a feed within 2-4 hours of birth to gain strength, and **should drink 1-2litres of donkey colostrum within 12 hours of birth:** it contains donkey-specific antibodies essential for the foal's health. The mare creates colostrum ["first milk"] only once, and the foal can utilise these antibody properties only in its first day of life. After that, colostrum is nutritive and can help with bowel disorders, but the antibodies are broken down into constituent proteins before being absorbed by the foal.

Tetanus antitoxin can be given, especially if the mother's toxoid status is unknown

Handling: Foals can be groomed and taught to lead, to lift their feet, to allow their teeth to be examined, but guard against too much cosetting. Donkey foals are so very cute, but spoiled foals can develop bad habits and behaviour that may be annoying or even dangerous when they have grown.

Weaning From about 5 months, but they often stay with their mum till 8-9 months old. Colts can be gelded whilst at heel. Pregnant mare should be rested from feeding a foal 2 months prior to their expected date, so they can gain condition themselves, give strength to the new foal, and create its essential colostrum.

Orphans

They will need intense care for 5 months.

Strict hygiene + donkey/horse colostrum within 12 – 24 hours is essential

Keep them warm, safe & sheltered, with regular exercise outside. Vitamin D is needed for proper bone development.

Most are kept inside at first. During that time, prepare, spell and clean their future enclosure.

Fostering them to another donkey, or a pony, is best. Hand-rearing a foal is not easy; it is expensive, and very time consuming.

Also donkey foals needs non-human grass-eating role models to avoid developing bad behaviour ... friendly sheep or goats are OK but donkey foals should see/meet other donkeys or horses too and graze with them from 4-6 weeks of age

Suitable Milks: Best = Foal milk replacer e.g. Wombaroo Horse Milk
Good quality milk formula e.g. Wombaroo Formula One
Divetelac

Possibly Human infant formula
Goats Milk
Pasteurised, homogenised cows milk

Not Calf milk replacer. Not unhomogenised Cows milk The fat globules are too big for them to digest, and they are a poor source of protein



DONKEY in POOR COMDITION



GOOD CONDITION



TOO FAT

Due to foal? Tends to be distended more on one side than the other.