

Donkeys

Donkeys deserve respect! Not only did they help build the pyramids of Egypt, but millions of them work in agriculture, construction and tourism throughout the world, often in extremely harsh conditions.



What makes donkeys so special?

They make wonderful companion and therapy equines and can learn to be ridden and driven in harness.

Donkeys are great survivors, they evolved in dry climates with limited food, have amazing memories and ability to problem- solve (including escaping!), they are careful and like to work through a problem rather than rush into unfamiliar situations. We also know that they can live a very long time and are incredibly good looking with their amazing ears and dorsal stripe.

Behaviours

Sometimes we misunderstand their cautious behaviours and call donkeys “stubborn”, - you just cannot rush a donkey, allow them time to think and relax in new places. Forcing them will lead to a very stressed donkey likely to fight you rather than work with you.



Their long memories mean they remember unpleasant experiences, so we need to make routine procedures like foot trimming, dental and vet care as calm and pleasant as we can. Donkeys respond well to behaviour modification techniques, so do ask us for help if your donkey is struggling with procedures.

In the wild donkeys live in small groups and hide signs of pain to avoid being eaten by predators. This can make it hard for us to detect when a donkey is in pain, and by the time they show clinical signs they can be very unwell indeed. If you think that your donkey is sick it probably is, so ring us straight away.

Donkeys make close friendships and need their companions close by; they can get very anxious if they are separated. If one donkey of a pair sadly dies, the remaining donkey should see the body to understand the loss and is likely to pine without another friend to live with.

Feeding

Donkeys are even more efficient at digesting than our native ponies and easily gain too much weight, leading to obesity and laminitis. If they have good teeth a donkey can cope with a straw based diet, supplemented with limited grazing and a vitamin/mineral balancer to promote strong hooves. Some hay is needed in winter or for pregnant and lactating jennies with increased energy needs.



Hyperlipaemia

If donkeys suffer stress, and then stop eating, they mobilise body fat to provide energy to the brain. This fat blocks the small capillary blood vessels to the major organs leading to liver and then multi-organ failure. A donkey that is off feed, dull or not eating is an emergency call for your vets, as the disease has a poor prognosis without treatment.

Preventative care

Donkeys need the same preventative care as their horse and pony cousins, even if they are not ridden, they need a minimum of annual dental care, vaccinations, checking for PPID and faecal worm egg counts, as well as regular hoof trimming.

Good hoof care is vital as our wet climate is not good for donkey hooves and many of them suffer from white line disease, thrush and un-noticed laminitis

Make sure that your donkey has an annual health check with your vet to discuss their individual needs.

Drugs and vet care

There are some differences in the way we treat and manage donkeys, but fortunately there are a lot of excellent resources to help including advice sheets and online course from The Donkey Sanctuary.

Contact us: 01297 304007

summerleaze@summerleaze-vets.co.uk

Vital points

- Routine preventative care is needed for donkeys
- Don't rush or force a donkey- take time
- Donkeys need high fibre diets to avoid obesity
- Sick donkey are usually very unwell
- Donkey that are not eating are emergencies
- Donkeys need companions

