











**Donkey Behaviour**

Donkey behaviour is different of that of horses or ponies. Their stoic, self-preserving nature serves them well in the wild but can lead to behaviour often incorrectly being labelled as stubborn rather than a painful condition being acknowledged.

Domestic donkeys form pair bonds with other donkeys, which means they must never be kept solitarily. These strong pair bonds means that if one of the pair is euthanised or dies the other donkey will suffer significant stress- the survivor must be left with the companion until they are disinterested in the body.

Vocalisation in the donkey includes their signature 'bray', which is unique to each individual and can travel over several kilometres. They also use this in anticipation of human activity such as feeding or attention from a handler.

**Facial expressions**

Relaxed facial expressions		Facial expressions associated with fear/stress	
Relaxed, open nostrils			Nostrils clamped tightly shut
Relaxed muzzle - no visible wrinkles			Tension around mouth leading to wrinkles forming around nostril and lips
Relaxed nostrils, even in shape			Uneven nostrils due to facial tension on right hand side leading to right nostril being drawn upwards
Eyes open, muzzle relaxed			Eyes semi-closed with tense muzzle
Sclera not visible (care in some donkeys with sclera visible due to eye conformation)			Palpebral fissure widened, sclera visible

## Enrichment

Enrichment is an important welfare principle to account for when keeping donkeys: mental stimulation helps to maintain normal behaviour, prevent boredom, and help increase exercise.

A simple enrichment tool is to add non-poisonous bark covered logs or branches for the donkeys to chew on. One popular favourite is willow; however, silver birch or apple trees are also thoroughly enjoyed. This activity is particularly good for a donkey with weight issues.



This activity could also be combined with walking if there are willow, birch, or other donkey friendly trees within safe walking proximity, this then allows them to freely browse. However, make sure you are aware of which trees are safe and which ones are poisonous in that area.

Flavoured water or teas is also good stimulation. Fill a bucket with lukewarm water and leave a fruity or minty teabag in for a few hours to release the flavour and remove before popping into the donkey's enclosure. This is novel and a good source to encourage drinking.

Donkeys also have a keen sense of smell so rubbing mint or banana over wellington boots can cause them to interact and play with the 'toy'.

Please remember with overweight donkeys some of these may not be possible.



For more information, please visit [The Donkey Sanctuary website](http://TheDonkeySanctuary.org) which has a great guide to enrichment.

## Shelter

A donkey is not made for the wetter climate that the UK has to offer, due to the fact that their coat is not waterproof, and their feet can start to crumble, so it is imperative that they have access to a warm, dry shelter at all times.

For a standard donkey, a shelter must allow approximately 4.7 square meters (50 square feet) of covered area per donkey for their bedded area. This is approximately 9.4 square meters (100 square foot) for a pair. There should also be sufficient headroom for the animal to rear without hitting their head.

The stable door should be low enough for the donkey to see out but high enough to prevent them jumping out, often a gate style is recommended as this allows a miniature donkey to still have visibility.

It is also advisable to have a bottom bolt as donkeys are great escape artists and can learn to open the top one.

An equine mineral lick should also be hung up inside the table or shelter so a donkey can supplement their diet as they wish. Do not use a molasses treat as this contains lots of sugars and can cause the onset of laminitis.

It is desirable in winter months to have lighting and a facility for a heat lamp – especially for older or unwell donkeys. When adding lighting, it is imperative to make sure that wiring is rat-proof and switches are weatherproof, donkey-proof and outside the stable. Lights should also have plastic covers and wire mesh guards.

## Fencing

Although expensive, post and rail fencing with four rails is ideal. The fourth rail is particularly important if housing miniature donkeys as they can often wriggle between the third bar and the ground. Barbed wire must be avoided.

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## Diet & Nutrition

The donkey is descended from African wild asses and therefore evolved to live in a semi-arid environment with a sparse food supply and limited access to water. In an environment with limited natural resources a donkey will graze and browse on forage with low nutritional value for 14-18 hours per day, regularly walking 20-30km in 24 hours. This is hard to replicate with donkeys in the UK as they are not used to our lush grass and an 'easy' lifestyle, so obesity is very common. This means we need to try and put them on the sparsest of pastures and or limit the access times for most of the year. A donkey in the UK is commonly grazed on 0.1-0.2 ha/animal.

A donkey's diet can be supplemented with barley straw, which is the best nutritionally; being high in fibre and low in sugar, resembling what they are used to in the wild. This also helps with dental health and gut motility as it allows them constant access to forage without consuming too many calories.

A lot of donkeys suffer from obesity in the UK, these donkeys must be on a strict straw-only diet, the use of a hay net can help slow eating and reduce waste.

## Obesity






As obesity is common in donkeys in the UK it is important to understand how to body condition score the animal. The table below shows the 5 prevalent areas of the body that need to be felt in order to add up a suitable condition score.

A weigh tape can be used as a rough estimation of the weight - this is not 100% accurate but it can give a guide to any weight gain or loss that may not be visible.

It is important when body condition scoring to consider that donkeys frequently develop a fatty crest which may fall over to one side of the neck, these deposits rarely disappear and should be ignored in a mature animal that is in otherwise good condition.

The best method for coping with obesity is to monitor the donkey's diet, keep them exercised and appropriately manage pastures.

Donkey body condition score chart

Condition Score	Neck and shoulders	Withers	Ribs and belly	Back and loins	Hindquarters
<b>1. Poor</b> 	Neck thin, all bones easily felt. Neck meets shoulder abruptly, shoulder bones felt easily, angular.	Dorsal spine of withers prominent and easily felt.	Ribs can be seen from a distance and felt with ease. Belly tucked up.	Backbone prominent, can feel dorsal and transverse processes easily.	Hip bones visible and felt easily (hock and pin bones). Little muscle cover. May be cavity under tail.
<b>2. Moderate</b> 	Some muscle development overlying bones. Slight step where neck meets shoulders.	Some cover over dorsal withers, spinous processes felt but not prominent.	Ribs not visible but can be felt with ease.	Dorsal and transverse processes felt with light pressure. Poor muscle development either side midline.	Poor muscle cover on hindquarters, hip bones felt with ease.
<b>3. Ideal</b> 	Good muscle development, bones felt under light cover of muscle/fat. Neck flows smoothly into shoulder, which is rounded.	Good cover of muscle/ fat over dorsal spinous processes withers flow smoothly into back.	Ribs just covered by light layer of fat/muscle, ribs can be felt with light pressure. Belly firm with good muscle tone and flattish outline.	Cannot feel individual spinous or transverse processes. Muscle development either side of midline is good.	Good muscle cover in hindquarters, hip bones rounded in appearance, can be felt with light pressure.
<b>4. Fat</b> 	Neck thick, crest hard, shoulder covered in even fat layer.	Withers broad, bones felt with firm pressure.	Ribs dorsally only felt with firm pressure, ventral ribs may be felt more easily. Belly over developed.	Can only feel dorsal and transverse processes with firm pressure. Slight crease along midline.	Hindquarters rounded, bones felt only with firm pressure. Fat deposits evenly placed.
<b>5. Obese</b> 	Neck thick, crest bulging with fat and may fall to one side. Shoulder rounded and bulging with fat.	Withers broad, unable to feel bones.	Large, of ten uneven fat deposits covering dorsal and possibly ventral aspect of ribs. Ribs not palpable. Belly pendulous in depth and width.	Back broad, unable to feel spinous or transverse processes. Deep crease along midline bulging fat either side.	Cannot feel hip bones, fat may overhang either side of tail head, fat often uneven and bulging.

## Common Dietary Issues

Laminitis is an inflammation of the laminae of the foot and is the most common cause of lameness in a non-working donkey and can often go undetected. Donkeys with laminitis are:

- Reluctant to move.
- Show a short stride.
- Recumbent for more time than usual.
- Likely to show a laminitic stance.

It is essential to maintain fibre intake as sudden access to lush forage can cause laminae flare-ups, but starvation is likely to result in hyperlipaemia. Barley straw is the best to feed to give a good source of fibre and allow for gut motility, with limited bouts of turnout. It is important to note that if an animal has been kept off grass for a period of time, they should be re-introduced slowly to remove the risk of laminitis.

Another reason fibre intake is important is the risk of hyperlipaemia. When a donkey is starved or stops eating enough it goes into a state of 'negative energy balance'. The essential organs still require a food supply, so the body tries to use energy that is stored as fat deposits. Two risk factors are overweight donkeys or those that have stress from suddenly losing weight. Signs may include:

- Dullness
- Reduced appetite or halitosis (bad breath)
- Mucous covered dung
- Liver or kidney failure which can be evident with head pressing, circling or ataxia (lack of voluntary coordination of muscle movement)

### Dentition

Our donkeys are always sedated for dentist visits and we would highly recommend continuing this procedure to save undue stress and harm to anyone involved in the procedure.

This is done annually, but older donkeys may need to move to six monthly dental checks to closely monitor teeth.

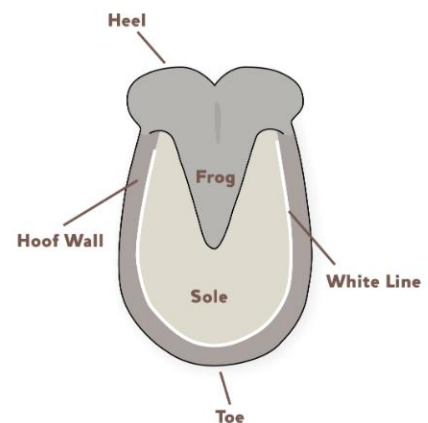
As with horses, if a donkey is having difficulty eating, stops eating or develops bad breath a dentist needs to be called immediately.

### Farrier

Our donkeys are barefoot and generally require a farrier every 8 weeks. It is important to pick feet out daily to check for any hoof changes and to remove any foreign bodies that can get stuck in the foot.

Due to our wetter climate donkeys are more susceptible to foot diseases, however these are entirely preventable. Common foot diseases include:

- Seedy Toe- the white line area becomes weak and crumbly. If the white line area is widened this allows stones to get stuck in the space under the horny part of the hoof and can cause pain or infection. A farrier can easily treat this by cutting out the affected part of the hoof.
- Thrush- This is an infection of the underneath of the foot, particularly the frog and is associated with keeping a donkey in wet conditions. It has a distinctive unpleasant smell. To treat the foot must be kept as clean and dry as possible and iodine or dilute hydrogen peroxide may be applied- speak to a vet if unsure.



Donkeys may also suffer from weakness of the outer hoof wall, to give strength and moisture a basic hoof oil can be used, however, if there is weakness, Cornucrecine is most beneficial.

The weakness in the hoof during wet weather means a donkey must have access to hard standing and avoid muddy gateways where possible. The main prevention method would be to shut them on a covered hard standing area during wet weather.

### TPR

It is important to have knowledge of the physiological parameters of a donkey. These differ from that of a horse or pony.

- Temperature: 36.5-37.8°C
- Pulse: 36-53 beats/minute
- Respiration: normally 20 breaths/minute but ranges between 12-28

## Parasitology

Donkeys are affected by the same parasites as horses and ponies and are treated with similar worming programmes.

There are many different approaches to the worming of equines, but the most recent research has shown that a mix of egg counting and tapeworming for Spring and Autumn provides a good level of coverage and reduces the issue with over toxicity and wormer resistance.

The other practice we follow when doing this to remove excessive chemical exposure is to alter the chemical compound annually used in our wormer. An example that we follow is:

- Year 1: Pyrantel embonate-based tapewormer (Pyratape P or Strongid P),
- Year 2: Moxidectin/ Praziquantel-based tapewormer (Equest Pramox)
- Year 3: Ivermectin/ Praziquantel based wormers (Eqvalan Duo or Equimax)

When egg counting, the vet will be able to recommend the most suitable wormer. They will also advise on if the animal needs to be wormed - which is normally any count above 200epg.

It is imperative that preventive programmes are in place to balance parasite control and preserve anthelmintic effectiveness. These simple controls are:

- Dung removal at least twice per week; we do this daily, which is preferable in smaller pastures.
- If composting, the manure should be left a minimum of six weeks before spreading.
- Co-grazing with ruminants (sheep/goats/cows) is useful as they can clear up parasitic burdens on fields and are not affected by the larvae, which die within the ruminant.

## Vaccinations

A flu and tetanus vaccination are required annually, and full recorded information of the past treatments can be found in the vaccination section of the passport.

## Dull Donkey

Healthy donkeys have a good appetite for forage, browse and treats, and may chew on logs. In response to thermal stress a healthy donkey will shiver and seek shelter if cold or shade if too hot. As befits herbivores, a donkey spends most of its day foraging over wide distances and may sleep lying down in short bouts and relax standing for approximately 2-6 hours.

Understanding the normal behaviours of a donkey can help to see subtly clues of pain. Important findings show that a donkey in pain may:

- Spend more time with a lowered head carriage.
- Be unresponsive with their ears to the environment around them.
- Spend up to 30% more time recumbent.
- Spend up to 40% less time eating.
- Show abnormal aggression.
- Show reluctance to move.
- Be depressed/anxious.
- Reduce interaction, self-isolate and lack social grooming.

If unsure about the donkey, it is vital to observe its behaviours whilst eating and check the recent history including any changes in diet/ management and the status of worming, vaccination, dental treatment, or any other prevalent health problems they may have previously suffered.

## Geriatric Donkeys

Like all animals as a donkey gets older it is important to ensure they have a comfortable life. These will not be appropriate in all cases, however a few points to consider are:

- If the animal is arthritic, the fields should be as flat as possible to remove the challenge of a slope and allow for them to move around freely.
- Water, feed and shelter should be more easily accessible.
- A deep shavings bed may be easier for them to navigate than straw.

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- A stable-safe heat lamp may be advised when temperatures drop, and/or rugging if appropriate.
- If rugged, an owner must be vigilant of sores or lesions arising.
- To reduce risk of dehydration and if water is too cold, a donkey may have aversion to drinking, so adding a bucket of hot water daily to allow it to be room temperature will help encourage them to drink.
- Loss of teeth or dental disease may mean that a donkey struggles to take in enough forage and is dropping weight – you can use soaked donkey diet pellets to ensure donkeys get all the nutrients and minerals required to lead a good quality of life.

## Insurance Guide

**Every equid that goes out on loan from Raystede must have current 3<sup>rd</sup> party/ public liability insurance cover. Proof of insurance must be provided each subsequent year. There are several options which are acceptable. As follows:**

### 1 Society Membership

**The British Horse Society, British Dressage, British Driving, British Eventing, The Pony Club and World Horse Welfare. All offer 3<sup>rd</sup> party cover as part of the membership.**

**NB** The name of the horse will not be on the membership card, but the name of the borrower will be as well as the expiry date.

### 2 Pet Insurance

**All pet insurance has 3<sup>rd</sup> party cover included in their policies. Pet Plan, Animal Friends, NFU, Horse Insurance Ltd etc.**

**NB** The name of the horse is normally on the policy as is the expiry date. But with Luna policies, (28-day payments) the expiry date is not obvious. It is alright to assume that, in this case, the insurance lasts a year from the date on the top of the policy document.

### 3 Business Premises

**By law all Farms, Riding Stables, Livery Yards and Racing Stables must have a comprehensive insurance cover. This will include Public Liability Cover.**

**NB** The only part of the policy that we need on record is the Public Liability Certificate, never the Employees' liability cover.

### 4 House Insurance

**Borrowers sometimes have public liability cover built into their house insurance.**

**NB** If this isn't obvious on the policy document the borrower should ask their insurance company to confirm to the Raystede Equine Team by email that they are covered.

### 5 Other

If there is no paperwork available to prove cover, the borrower should ask their insurer to provide us with confirmation.

## Legislation

Owners must also be aware of government regulations and codes of practices when caring for their equines. From 2004 all equines must hold a valid passport and from October 2020 all equines must be microchipped by law. It is important to comply with the guidance in the Animal Welfare Act (2006), details on these requirements can be found here: [Code of practice for the welfare of horses, ponies, donkeys and their hybrids \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/424247/code_of_practice_for_the_welfare_of_horses_ponies_donkeys_and_their_hybrids.pdf)