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CARE OF THE DONKEY

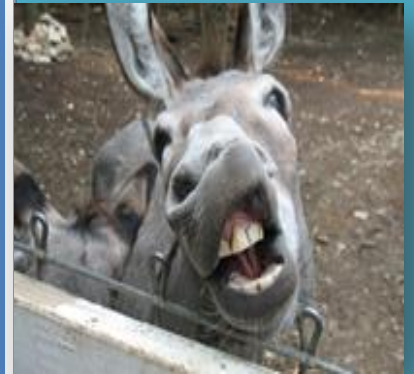
It is important to be aware that owning a donkey is a long term commitment, the average age for a donkey in the U.K is 27 but they can live for up to 40 years! Donkeys are more social in their behaviour and tend to startle less, they show less fear response than horses in new situations which can often be interpreted as stubbornness rather than fear. Donkeys are very sociable animals and form strong attachments, because of this it is not advisable to keep donkeys on their own.

Feeding and general management

Donkeys are natural browsers and will graze for up to 16 hours a day on a diet of high fibre plant material. They are very effective at metabolising their food, therefore their energy requirement is lower than that of a similar sized pony. This makes them very easy to over feed which makes them prone to laminitis and other health problems such as hyperlipaemia. A donkey at grass will not need much supplementation and in the spring and summer their grazing may need to be restricted.

Illness in the donkey

The horse and the donkey are very closely related therefore many of the conditions that affect them are similar, however detecting illness in the donkey can be made difficult by its stoical nature. Dullness and depression may be the only clinical signs exhibited, sometimes accompanied by anorexia, this means the donkey may be in the advance stages of disease before signs are noted.



Hyperlipaemia is a potentially life threatening not uncommon disease in the donkey, it is a result of a negative energy balance where fat reserves are sent to the liver to be converted to energy. It can result in liver and kidney disease. It is important to ring the vet if you notice any dullness or in appetite in your donkey, we will always take it seriously.

Foot care

Donkeys' hooves are smaller, more upright and tougher than those of horses. Hoof problems are common and it is essential that they receive proper care to minimise any occurrence. Feet should be trimmed every 8 weeks by a farrier that has some experience with trimming donkeys. Donkeys are prone to thrush, seedy toe and laminitis. They should be kept on dry clean bedding and it is important to pick their feet out regularly.

Vaccinations and dental care

Donkeys should be vaccinated for influenza and tetanus yearly as in the horse, they also should have regular dental checks. They suffer from similar problems with their teeth as horses but problems may not be picked up as readily as they may not be ridden so it is important to have them checked regularly.

Castration

Castration in male donkeys is generally done under general anaesthesia rather than standing as is common in the horse. This is because donkeys have a greater blood supply to the testicles than horses so they often require the blood vessels to be tied off and it makes the procedure safer.

Parasites

The parasites that effect donkeys are comparable to those that effect horses however there are a few exceptions. Donkeys are asymptomatic carriers of lung worm (*Dictyocaulus arnfieldii*), which can cause respiratory disease/coughing in horses and ponies. It is therefore important to worm both donkeys and horses with ivermectin or moxidectin when they are co-grazed.



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