

# Donkey Ownership



*“Although donkeys and horses belong to the same family, they actually differ significantly and a donkey should not be treated as a small horse”.*



*The Charity's purpose is to provide and promote the welfare, care and protection of horses, ponies, donkeys and mules.*

# Redwings Welfare

The donkey is an endearing creature which is loved by both adults and children. The lure of the donkey's soulful eyes and long ears make them appealing as pets, but there is far more to the donkey than first meets the eye. Donkeys are highly intelligent creatures that need plenty of care and attention and can become grumpy, and even ill, if left unattended and lonely.

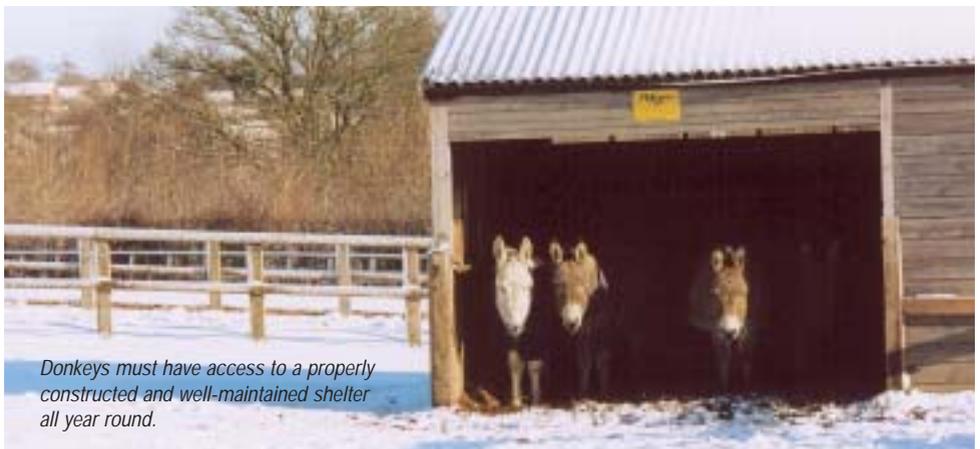
Before acquiring a donkey, all its' needs must be considered. Although donkeys and horses belong to the same family, they actually differ significantly and a donkey should not be treated as a small horse.

## Special Considerations

- Donkeys come from the warm, dry climate of North East Africa. Their thick hair protects them from cold nights, but their coats are not waterproof because they do not contain the same oils as horses and ponies. This means they

cannot cope with driving rain or snow, as moisture is able to penetrate their coat and reach the skin where it will quickly drain their body heat. A well ventilated shelter or stable is therefore a necessity. The shelter should be placed so as to protect the animals from the coldest winds. A gently sloping concrete floor will prevent the donkey from standing in mud and help drain soiled bedding. A donkey will also benefit from a waterproof rug as extra protection in the winter.

- Donkeys are herd animals and need constant **companionship**. If possible they should always be kept in pairs as donkeys bond very strongly with their friends. A story related to us by another sanctuary tells of two donkeys that were newcomers to the rest home. On their arrival the pair stood at the top of the horse box ramp and brayed loudly. A handful of the donkeys that had been



*Donkeys must have access to a properly constructed and well-maintained shelter all year round.*

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homed at the sanctuary several years earlier cantered towards the gate returning their call. Upon investigation it was found that the donkeys had all worked together on Blackpool beach. Despite the passing years the donkeys remembered their long lost friends and had recognised each others' calls.

Contrary to popular belief, there is no reason why donkeys and horses or ponies cannot live happily together. In the past there was a risk that donkeys could pass **lungworm** (which they can carry without ill-effect) on to horses. However, by sticking to a proper worming routine that includes Ivermectin products being given at the appropriate time, the risks are negligible.

- Never allow a donkey to become **fat**. It is much more difficult to put a donkey on a diet than a horse or pony once it

has become overweight. Sudden dieting is potentially fatal in donkeys as it can lead to a condition called hyperlipaemia. This mobilises fatty deposits round the body and overloads the liver and kidneys, causing organ failure. Should a donkey need to lose weight, it must be done very gradually, preferably under the guidance of a vet. It is far better to monitor and control a donkey's weight so that dieting does not become necessary in the first place.

- Donkeys can be less expressive than horses and ponies and people often think this means they are less sensitive. In fact, donkeys are very susceptible to both physical and psychological **stress**, but symptoms can easily go overlooked until a problem has overwhelmed them. For example, often the only symptoms a donkey with colic will display is loss of appetite. Stress can be caused by



*Donkeys form very strong bonds and can suffer from severe anxiety or depression if separated from a close companion.*

separation from or loss of a companion, change of home or routine and long journeys. Anything with the potential to cause stress should be carefully thought through and changes introduced as gradually as possible with the donkey being closely monitored. If a donkey's companion dies, the body should be left with the surviving donkey for at least an hour. Not all equines will approach a body, but many do and to have the opportunity is important.

- Gates should always be fastened securely as donkeys are naturally **inquisitive** animals and will wander off at the slightest opportunity. Post and rail fencing is always recommended as donkeys are also excellent escape artists and can squeeze through the smallest of gaps.

## Standard Requirements

Remember that the special needs outlined here have to be taken into account in addition to the basic equine requirements. Anyone thinking of taking on a donkey must also be prepared to provide:

- At least half an acre of securely fenced, suitable paddock per donkey.
- A balanced diet based on grazing, with supplementary forage in the winter.
- A constant supply of fresh water.
- A regular program of de-worming to control internal parasites.

- Routine visits from a farrier to trim the hooves and fit shoes if necessary.
- Vaccinations to protect the donkey against equine influenza and tetanus.
- Veterinary care whenever needed.
- Plenty of attention, including grooming, health checks and mental stimulation.

*Donkeys feet are a noticeably different shape from those of horses and ponies. They will need regular trimming from an experienced farrier.*



Remember too that donkeys have the greatest longevity of all the equines and can sometimes live for over 50 years! Despite their small stature, they are also extremely strong, can be wilful and have the potential to cause injury by kicking and biting. As with any equine, they should always be handled with patience, care and respect.

## Mules

As a cross between a donkey and a horse, a mule can inherit characteristics from either parent. They will probably have some of the special characteristics of both types of equine and their individual requirements should be carefully assessed in order to make sure all their needs are met.

# Redwings Welfare Contacts

The following are useful sources of further information:

## **The Donkey Sanctuary**

Slade House Farm  
Salcombe Regis  
Sidmouth  
Devon EX10 0NU  
01395 578222  
[www.thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk](http://www.thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk)

**'The Handbook of the Donkey'** by Dr Elisabeth Svendsen  
(Available from The Donkey Sanctuary)

## **Donkey Breed Society**

The Hermitage  
Pootings  
Edenbridge  
Kent TN18 6SD  
[www.donkeybreedsociety.co.uk](http://www.donkeybreedsociety.co.uk)

## **The British Mule Society**

[www.britishmulesociety.org.uk](http://www.britishmulesociety.org.uk)

## **British Equine Veterinary Association**

Wakefield House  
46 High Street  
Sawston  
Cambridge CB2 4BG  
01223 836970  
[www.beva.org.uk](http://www.beva.org.uk)

## **Redwings Horse Sanctuary**

Hapton  
Norwich  
NR15 1SP  
Horse Care and Welfare 01508 481008  
General Enquiries 01508 481000  
[www.redwings.co.uk](http://www.redwings.co.uk)

# Redwings Welfare Information

Redwings' Welfare Team is proactive in the promotion of equine care and welfare, believing that access to accurate and up-to-date information is vital if owners and carers are to meet the needs of their animal.

Redwings' welfare leaflets are designed to provide an overview of many important issues which are encountered regularly in welfare cases with which the Sanctuary is involved. The series includes information on the following topics:

- Laminitis
- Hoof Care and Farriery
- Worms and De-worming
- Food, Digestion and Energy
- Veteran Horses and Retirement
- Horse Psychology
- Donkeys
- Equine Welfare and the Law

To request copies of leaflets or to speak to one of the team about any equine welfare issues, please feel free to contact the department by post, phone or email.

## The Welfare Team

Redwings Horse Sanctuary

Hapton

Norwich

NR15 1SP

Tel: 01508 481008 (8.30am - 5pm, Monday to Friday)

Email: [info@redwings.co.uk](mailto:info@redwings.co.uk)



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