



CARE OF DONKEYS IN EXTREME HEAT

During the extremes of summer donkeys may require some changes to their management in order to keep them healthy and comfortable in higher than normal temperatures. Although donkeys evolved in semi-desert environments and their origins can be traced back to hotter climates of Africa and the Middle East this is a long way back in their history. Domesticated donkeys may still struggle with extremely hot environments as they are not adapted to the heat and often have thick hairy coats.

ACCESS TO WATER

Ideally water should be freely available to donkeys at all times. A clean source of water such as a trough, automatic drinker or buckets must be provided at all times. Natural water sources such as streams, rivers and lakes should be checked to make sure that the water is not contaminated, and that access is safe so that there is not a risk of your donkey getting stuck or drowning. A donkey's water requirement is the same as that of a similar sized horse or pony. Ensure all drinking troughs or vessels are kept clean and topped up.

For donkeys that are used for riding, driving or work that affects their access to water, water must be offered at regular intervals to avoid them becoming dehydrated. Offer water as frequently as possible, and at least every four hours.

Some donkeys may refuse to drink very cold water, even in extreme heat. Allow the water to warm up in the sun, or add some hot water to try and encourage normal drinking behaviour.

Donkeys have a special adaptation and are physiologically more capable to deal with thirst than other equids, but this doesn't mean that they don't feel thirsty or become hot and tired, just that their bodies can function for longer in a state of water deprivation than a horse or pony would. However, water deprivation can lead to problems, such as impaction colic, and should be avoided.



ACCESS TO SHADE

All donkeys should be provided with a shelter in their field environment, doubling up as a dry place in winter, this shelter provides shade from the sun in summer plus some relief from flies. The shelter needs to be of adequate size to allow all members of the herd to come in and lie down at the same time. There are various different types of shelters available, which design you choose may depend on your herd size, budget and type of localised weather. Bear in mind that some shelters

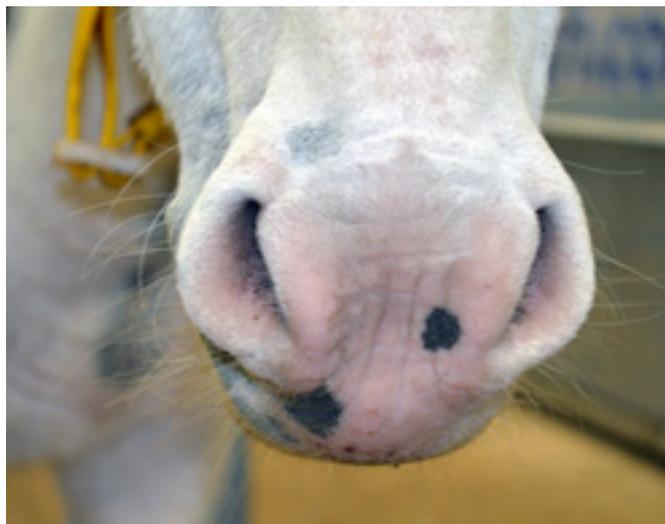
may get hotter than others in extreme heat, especially if the roof is low or made out of tin or if the building is poorly ventilated.

For those donkeys traditionally stabled at night and turned out during the day you may want to alter the times at which they are turned out in order to minimise exposure to the sun during the hottest part of the day. Turning out at night or for the early morning and evening may be suitable options.



PROTECTION FROM THE SUN

Donkeys with light coloured coats often have less pigment in their skin and may suffer from sunburn on any exposed skin (typically the muzzle, nose and ears). Coloured donkeys, including skewbalds, piebalds and tri-colour donkeys, may also be at an increased risk of sunburn. These lighter donkeys would benefit from having a high factor sunscreen applied to any exposed skin (not the entire body) when the UV index is moderate to high. In addition, a full face fly mask (including nose guard) can be used to add extra UV protection, especially for donkeys who do not like sunscreen application. The full face fly mask must be introduced with care when it is used for the first time.



CLIPPING

Elderly donkeys or those suffering from PPID (an endocrine disorder which affects coat growth amongst other things) may have trouble shedding their coats in summer. During the hotter months it would be advisable to clip any donkeys that have a long coat to help keep their body temperature down and make them more comfortable. During the initial period after clipping, when the hair is standing on end, it may be advisable to use a light rug, depending on skin pigmentation and weather conditions. If the weather quickly turns cold again consider providing a suitable rug for your donkey (see Donkey Care Handbook for more information). Donkeys with light skin or those prone to fly bite irritation should be clipped with caution as the skin will be more vulnerable to sunburn and to flies once they are clipped.

DANGEROUS EFFECTS OF EXTREME HEAT

Heat stroke, heat stress and dehydration can affect all donkeys. Just like people, there are some donkeys which are going to be more sensitive to extremes of weather, they will be the very young and very old, pregnant, ill or overweight animals. These donkeys will need to be monitored very closely for any signs of heat stress (some of which may or may not be present) including:

- raised respiratory rate, heart rate or temperature
- profuse sweating or no sweat at all
- flared nostrils

- disinterest in moving or eating
- lying down more than normal
- glazed/sunken eyes
- no urine or very dark in colour
- dark red or purple mucous membranes (should be pink) or tacky to the touch (should be moist).

Remember that donkeys may not show overt behavioural signs of being ill or unwell like a horse or pony would. It is important to know your donkey's normal body temperature and resting respiratory and heart rate so that you may accurately observe a rise in either (see Donkey Care Handbook for normals).

During very hot conditions, especially if the air is humid, your donkey may have trouble controlling their body temperature through the normal methods of heat dissipation and sweating. This causes a build-up of heat in the body which can disrupt normal bodily functions, and if not treated may cause organ failure and ultimately death.

If overheating is suspected move your donkey out of the sun and start cold hosing your donkey straight away. Call your vet as soon as possible as a donkey suffering from heat stress will need to have electrolytes to replace the lost body fluids, water alone will not be enough to rehydrate the animal.

DONKEYS IN WORK

If your donkeys are ridden, driven, walked in hand or worked in any other way, try to minimise any unnecessary activity during the hottest parts of the day. Keep them cool by choosing shady areas over sunny areas and offer water regularly. Avoid travelling if possible as horse-boxes can become very hot if poorly ventilated or in slow moving/stationary traffic.

Be aware that sometimes donkeys travelling away from home will refuse to drink. Adding peppermint cordial or bringing water from home may counteract this.

FLIES AND OTHER INSECTS

Summer is also the height of fly season (although some species may actually peak in early autumn). Shelter provides relief from the sun and also from some insects. Unfortunately most insecticides available on the market have very little useful repellent effect. For those donkeys that are particularly susceptible or sensitive to insect bites we recommend contacting your vet for advice as well as looking into protective clothing such as fly rugs, hoods, masks, fringes and even socks.



EXTRA MEASURES

If you would like to you may offer your donkeys frozen treats to help them keep cool. Freeze an ice cream tub of water with safe leaves/fruit/veg inside to provide a healthy ice lolly (see our 'Tasty tempters (safe treats)' and 'Safe trees and shrubs for donkeys' factsheets). If you have a small herd rather than a pair of donkeys it may be better to freeze several smaller tubs so that each donkey gets to have a turn.

For stabled donkeys providing a fan may be an option to keep them cooler. Check that the donkeys don't mind the noise and ensure fan positioning isn't too close so as to annoy the donkeys or be a

potential hazard.

Your donkeys may appreciate a cool sponge off in extremely hot weather. Donkeys that have been in work and sweated up will be particularly appreciative of this. However, even those who are pets or companions may like to be gently washed down with cool water. If your donkey is not used to be being bathed it would be advisable to introduce the sponge gradually working from the neck down the body. Hosepipes can be used on donkeys but introduce carefully if your donkey is not familiar with the hosepipe. Start by hosing gently on a front leg and work up the body if your donkey is tolerant. Always be gentle with your donkey, especially when bathing the head and avoid getting any water in their ears.

If you need further advice or information please do not hesitate to contact us on **01395 578222** or by email **nutrition@thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk**

