

DONKEYS

There are approximately 17 species of Donkey in Europe alone. The donkey is believed to have originated from their ancestors the African Wild Ass and were first domesticated in Egypt around 3000 BC.

Donkeys have been used as a working animal for at least thousands of years and today there are more than 40 million donkeys worldwide, most of which will be found in underdeveloped countries and are used for several purposes such as breeding, carrying heavy goods, to sire mules, to guard sheep, as pets and for donkey rides for children or tourists. A small number are also bred for their meat and milk. Italy has the highest consumption of equine meat in Europe and where donkey meat is the main ingredient of several regional dishes, about 1000 donkeys were slaughtered in 2010.

In China 4 million donkeys are factory farmed and slaughtered each year to produce an alleged miracle youth serum – ejiao, a multi-billion-pound industry built on vanity and superstition. These huge numbers of donkeys are also shipped in from other countries to be slaughtered and often skinned alive.

In the UK there are a growing number of cases where donkeys are poorly treated, neglected or abandoned each year. The lack of enforcement of legislation related to the breeding, keeping and trading of donkeys is a huge driver as to why so many of these animals are being abandoned at rescue shelters. The Donkey Sanctuary in Devon has reported an increase in the number of donkeys being abandoned and in 2014, 400 were admitted into their care with no sign of the numbers declining since. They have stated that young males are more commonly abandoned due to the cost of castrating and microchipping. They also have discovered many cases of donkeys being tied up for 24 hours a day with overgrown hooves and very little food, water or shelter.

Like horses donkeys are complex animals that also need a great deal of care and attention. They too suffer from illnesses such as colic, hyperkinaemia, hoof problems, laminitis, kidney disease, respiratory disease, pancreatitis, arthritis, dental problems and fractures if they do not receive appropriate care. These illnesses and diseases can cause them significant suffering and many



Rescued donkey at Dean Farm Trust

irresponsible owners will go for prolonged periods of time without treating them and may even leave them to die or have them euthanised as they cannot afford the veterinarian costs.

Working donkeys will often suffer from ill treatment. They are made to carry heavy goods on their backs for extended periods of time with very little rest, water and food. In tourist destinations, you will see people riding them, again forced to carry people everyday for the rest of their life until they are too old to cope and will be slaughtered for meat. In many developing countries, a working donkey's average life expectancy is 12 to 15 years but given the right care and treated well they can live anything between 30 and 50 years.

If you want to help the plight of these animals do not ride them when on holiday.

Adopt from the Donkey Sanctuary or other reputable rescue centre www.thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk

Dean Farm Trust promotes compassionate living

