

CHAPTER 1. SELECTION AND CARE

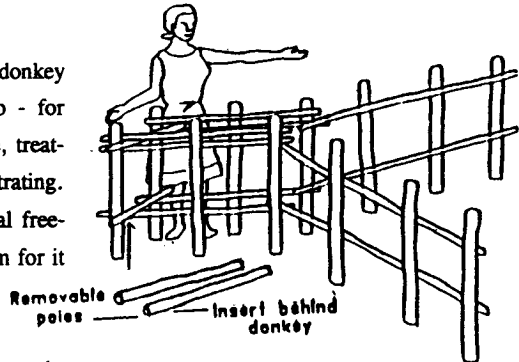
1.4 CARE OF DONKEYS

1.4.3 MANAGEMENT AND HOUSING OF DONKEYS

RESTRAINT

Donkeys will always behave best if they are not hit indiscriminately, but are handled often, groomed regularly and are talked to in a friendly way. Use a soothing voice and comfort a donkey with stroking when grooming or treating them. A very different sharp tone of voice should be used if a donkey misbehaves, reinforced (if really necessary) with a clear, but not cruel, disciplinary blow.

Sometimes it is necessary to make a donkey stay still, even if it does not want to - for example when you are giving medicine, treating injuries, caring for the feet or castrating. Sometimes it is good to give the animal freedom to move, but not sufficient freedom for it to go very far.



A donkey crush is similar to a cattle crush.

The simplest crushes consist of four or six strong posts fixed in the ground, with parallel rails nailed or lashed to them (Fig. 1). The

rails are put at such a height that the donkey cannot get out, but the handler can comfortably work besides the animal. The back rails are inserted and secured once a donkey is inside the crush. The donkey's head is tied by ropes to the two front posts, or its neck is held by a helper.

Fig. 1 Donkey crush.
Source: after Jones, 1991

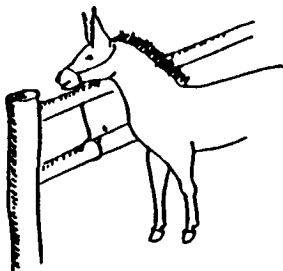


Fig. 2 Donkey restrained at fence

If a crush is not available, a donkey can be restrained at a two-bar fence (Fig. 2). A person can hold the neck, just behind the ears. Alternatively the head can be tied with the chin resting on the upper rail, and the head rope secured to the lower rail. In general, do not throw donkeys to the ground, as they may have difficulty in breathing. Never twist the ears, as they are easily damaged. Instead use a crush or stocks, and perhaps a hobble as well.

Foreleg restraints can keep donkeys still for examination or treatment. A wide strap or soft rope is used to tie the forearm and pastern together (Fig. 3). This restraint should not be used for more than the time of treatment - it should not be used to control a grazing animal.

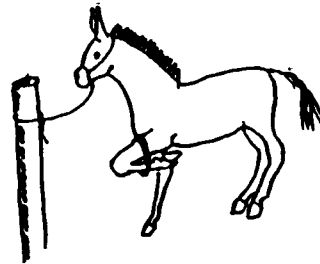


Fig. 3 Foreleg restraints

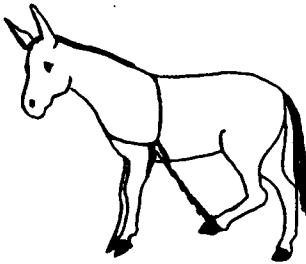


Fig. 4 The Scotch hobble

The Scotch hobble (Fig. 4) is another means of restraint.

Using a 4 metre length of rope, tie a

loop around the neck of the donkey using a non-slip knot. The other end of the rope passes around the pastern, back up through the neck loop, around the pastern a second time and the excess rope is secured at the neck loop.

A belly rope can also be used to restrain a donkey (Fig. 5). A 6 cm non-slip loop is made at the end of a 3 metre piece of rope. The rope is passed round the girth of the donkey and threaded through the loop, leaving the loop on the underside of the belly.

The rope passes out between the forelegs, and is tied to a post.

When the donkey pulls back the rope tightens, causing the donkey to move forward again and stay still.

It is important that the loop slips easily, so the tightness around the girth is released quickly if the donkey moves forward.

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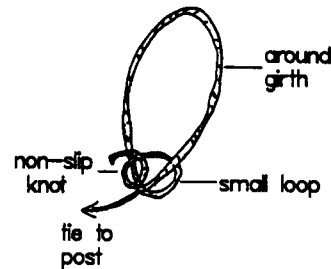
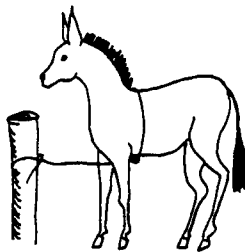


Fig. 5 Restraining a donkey with a belly rope

Some donkeys respond well to a lip twitch (Fig. 6). This is made by passing a cord through a hole in the end of a stick, and making a loop of about 10 cm diameter. The loop is put around the top lip and the stick is twisted until the cord is pinching the donkey's upper lip. This makes

some donkeys hold quite still - one suggestion is that the twitch stimulates the release of natural tranquilizers. The lip twitch should not be used for more than half an hour at a time.



Fig. 6
Lip twitch

too tightly as walking is made very uncomfortable and blood flow is stopped.

Grazing hobbles (Fig. 7) in which the front feet are loosely tied together can be used to stop donkeys walking far. Do not tie the legs together



Using wire or thin rope is cruel. Do not use this.



Soft rope is suitable if not too tight.

Fig. 7 *Front feet hobbles*
Source: SRANA (undated)

long periods. **Never** use wires or thin ropes that may cut into the donkey's skin, causing injury.

BREEDING DONKEYS

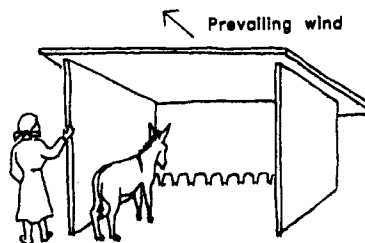
Only the best male and female donkeys should be used for breeding (for the selection of suitable animals, see Module 1.2.2). Male donkeys (jacks) that have not been selected for breeding are best castrated. Castrated jacks are about as strong as entire males, but are safer and easier to

with its mother. It is better to keep it tied up at home and it is important that the foal suckles several times a day, and during the night. The foal should be touched, handled and groomed from an early age (even a few hours after birth). This will make it very easy to train for work.

It is common to wean a foal at 8-12 months. Weaning at 6 months may be advised if the jenny is thin and the foal seems strong. Milk production can be reduced by restricting mother and foal contact to once a day. The jenny will dry off if the foal is then separated for a week or more. Provided they are strong, young donkeys can assist with light work at 1-2 years (eg, very light packing or as an extra at the side of a cart). This makes training easy, but it is important that they are not worked too hard, as their growth will be stunted. Full work can start at three years.

HOUSING

Donkeys need protection from rain, flies, strong winds and cold nights. Unless there is danger from theft or wild animals, a simple stable is all that is required, and this can be a slanted roof supported by three walls. It should be built on a well-drained surface, with the open side away from the prevailing wind (Fig. 8). One donkey needs an area about 3 m by 1.5 m. It is important that the roof extends about 0.5 m beyond the walls, to provide shade and prevent wind blowing inside. Donkeys are sensitive to the ammonia fumes that can arise if their urine and droppings accumulate in a restricted area. Thus stables should be well ventilated.



*Fig. 8 A donkey stable
Source: after Jones, 1991*

A feed trough, water trough and hay rack should be firmly fixed in the stable so they cannot be knocked over. A salt block may be fixed in a clean, dry corner of the stable. The stable should be cleaned daily, to prevent the accumulation of droppings. The manure can be composted in a pile, and the heat of the pile should kill parasites. The manure should be kept away from animal food and water sources, and spread on fields where donkeys will not graze immediately.

If space and materials are available, build a paddock to allow the donkey to exercise while not grazing or working. This will provide a place for the donkeys to roll, which they like doing to relieve itching. The paddock must be well-drained, and not be allowed to become muddy or infested with manure. A tree can provide shade and shelter and be used as a rubbing post. Make sure there are no broken rails, loose wires or nails sticking out that could injure the donkeys.