

Caring for Guardian Donkeys

Farmers are increasingly turning to non-lethal techniques for predation management. Donkeys have become a popular protector of sheep that can perform very well under certain conditions. Following are some guidelines on management and caring for guardian donkeys to maximize the animal's capacity in regards to flock protection.



Shelter

Donkeys, as desert animals, generally do better in temperate climates although they do adapt to cold weather when provided with adequate shelter and extra feed. Donkeys dislike rain since their coat absorbs water leaving them wet and chilled. Donkeys are susceptible to pneumonia and bronchitis when chilled. It is therefore important to provide shelter for donkeys in case of rain and to scrape the snow off of the donkey's coat when they are coming into the barn in the winter. In Ontario, during late spring, summer and early fall an open front shed will suffice for shelter if it is well bedded with dry straw. In winter, depending on the location of the farm as well as the weather conditions, donkeys may be shut in the barn and allowed out on nice days or let outdoors if provided good shelter facing away from prevailing winds.

Pasture

Donkeys can graze coarser pasture than a horse. Lush pasture is not recommended for donkeys since they have a low energy requirement and are prone to obesity and certain metabolic disorders such as laminitis (founder) and hyperlipaemia if allowed free choice of quality pasture. Each donkey should be allocated between one-half to one acre of pasture per month (depending on the size of the donkey).

Feed and Water

Fresh water is essential for donkey. They will drink from 10 to 25 litres per day. Donkeys must also be provided with fortified trace mineralized salt in block or loose form. Check with the district agriculturalist to learn which minerals are deficient in the feeds of the region (selenium, copper, zinc etc.) These must be added to diets for donkeys when deficient in feeds.

High quality hay should be fed in winter or when pastures are depleted. Legume hay (rich in alfalfa or clover) is not recommended as the only hay for donkeys because of its high protein levels. Timothy, meadow grass, brome grass or mixed legume-grass hays are suitable. Hay composed of 50 per cent timothy and 50 per cent alfalfa is suitable for growing, pregnant or nursing donkeys as well as during the coldest months of the year.

Donkeys utilized for work such as guardian donkeys require grains. Prepared horse feeds provide supplemental energy, protein, minerals and vitamins required by donkeys. Supplements formulated for cattle, pigs or poultry should not be used because they may contain anabolic agent additives that are toxic to donkeys such as Rumensin, Deccox or Bovatec.

A rough guideline for feed of working donkeys is to feed a total weight (hay plus grain ratio) of 1 kg of feed per 40 kg of body weight. E.g. A 450lb donkey should have approximately 5kg (11.25lb) total feed daily.

Hoof Care

Proper hoof care of the guard donkey is extremely important. Trim and clean out donkey's feet regularly (approximately every 4-8 weeks). Donkey's hooves are very elastic and do not wear down like those of other equines. If neglected, the hooves can grow to an astounding proportion and may cause the animal to become permanently crippled.

Deworming and Vaccination

Donkeys are susceptible to the same disease and parasites as horses and need regular vaccination and deworming. Donkeys should be dewormed three to six times year, using any of the equine paste wormers currently on the market. Consult with your veterinarian if the presence of parasites is suspect as well as to discuss vaccination for your donkey.

Donkeys live for 30 or more years. Good management and care of a good guardian donkey will provide flock protection for many years.

For more information please visit:

[http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/agdex598](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/agdex598)