

## Donkeys - Burros

Kingdom: [Animalia](#)  
Phylum: [Chordata](#)  
Class: [Mammalia](#)  
Order: [Perissodactyla](#)  
Family: [Equidae](#)  
Genus: [Equus](#)  
Subgenus: *Asinus*  
Species: ***E. asinus***

It is commonly believed that the ancestor of the modern donkey is the Nubian subspecies of African wild ass, a medium sized donkey with a grey and white coat, strips on back and legs and a tall, upright mane with a black tip. The African Wild Ass was domesticated around 4,000 B.C. The donkey became an important pack animal for people living in the Egyptian and Nubian regions as they can easily carry 20% to 30% of their own body weight and can also be used as a farming and dairy animal. By 1800 B.C., the ass had reached the Middle East

Donkeys differ from horses in numerous ways. The most noticeable difference is the ears. Donkey's ears are much longer in proportion to their size than a horse's and their necks are characteristically straighter. The croup and rump are also a different shape in the donkey and its hybrids, lacking the double-curve muscled haunch. The mane and tail in the donkey are coarse. The mane is still and upright, rarely laying over and the tail is more like a cows, covered with short body hair for most of the length. Donkeys do not have a true forelock, although sometimes the mane grows long enough to comb down between the ears toward the eyes. Because the mane is stiff and sometimes flyaway, many donkeys, especially show stock, wear their manes clipped short or shaved close to the neck.

A male donkey (jack) can be crossed with a female horse to produce a mule. A male horse can be crossed with a female donkey (jennet or jenny) to produce a hinny. This is North American word; in the United Kingdom, the word *hinny* is not used. A female donkey in the U.K. is called a *mare*, and the word *jennet* is applied only to the offspring of a female donkey and a male horse, regardless of whether the foal is female or male. Horse-donkey hybrids are almost always sterile because horses have 64 chromosomes whereas donkeys have 62, producing offspring with 63 chromosomes.

Donkeys have a reputation for stubbornness, but this is due to some handlers' misinterpretation of their highly-developed sense of self preservation. It is difficult to force or frighten a donkey into doing something it sees as contrary to its own best interest, as opposed to horses who are much more willing to, for example, go along a path with unsafe footing. Donkeys appear to be quite intelligent, cautious, friendly, playful, and eager to learn. They are many times fielded with horses due to a perceived calming effect on nervous horses.

Once a person has earned their confidence they can be willing and companionable partners and very dependable in work and recreation. For this reason, they are now commonly kept as pets in countries where their use as beasts of burden has disappeared. They are also popular for giving rides to children in holiday resorts or other leisure contexts.

In prosperous countries, the welfare of donkeys both at home and abroad has recently become a concern, and a number of sanctuaries for retired donkeys have been set up.

### DONKEY SANCTUARIES IN THE ALGARVE

Nana van der Velden  
Refugio Da Saudade - Donkey and Animal Rescue, Luz  
282 788 345

The Donkey Sanctuary  
Lagoa - Algarve – Portugal  
E-mail [refugiodosburros@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:refugiodosburros@yahoo.co.uk)  
telephone 282 459 207 or 282 431 334  
Charity shops in Carvoeiro, Lagoa, St. Bras de Alportel, Quarteira and Albufeira

Protect your pet with knowledge

Julie Pickering

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