



Added Value of Donkey Breeds in Europe Project Report January 2013

Introduction

Donkey keeping in Europe has undergone a fundamental change. In South and Southeast Europe donkeys as "Tractor of the common man" are not highly valued. The stock numbers in the southern European countries are falling dramatically. For example the stock numbers fall continuously in Greece - despite the import of donkeys for milking in recent times.

In Northern and Central Europe the hobby keeping increases: The donkey has in some places become a status symbol. This does hardly keep the decline in stock numbers in Europe because the increase in the North is less than the loss in the South. Furthermore except a few special breeds like the Poitou Donkey breeding hardly takes place. Especially in the North little emphasis is placed on selection.



The Domestic donkey, its requirements and needs are today barely familiar. Misunderstandings and prejudices continue to be mentioned about this intelligent, durable and versatile Livestock. Even among the veterinaries knowledge of the treatment of donkeys is diminishing. Thus, barely veterinary books for the treatment of donkeys exist. Donkeys are not just horses with long ears, they show important differences like for example one lumbar less than a horse, their blood cells are larger, but less than in horses. In general donkeys are far too less researched. There are still many surprises to discover behind the long eared bats.

Project Progression



2012, a survey on the use of donkey breeds in Europe was carried out. A deliberately short questionnaire (see Appendix) was sent to the contact persons of the study "Donkey Breeds in Europe" from 2008 and additional contacts like the donkey keeping Arca-Net partner throughout Europe. (<http://www.arca-net.info/>).

In order to make the answers comparable, the following uses were given in the survey:

Harness	Zugtier
Pack	Lasttier
Stable Companion	Stallgefährte
Herd Protection	Herdenschutz
Breeding	Zucht
Mule production	Maultierproduktion
Milk	Milch
Meat	Fleisch
Sausage	Wurst
Cosmetics	Kosmetika
Therapy	Therapie
Pet	Haustier
Trekking	Trekking / Wandern
Riding	Reiten

Internet Database 2012

Parallel to the survey, on http://agrobiodiversity.net/topic_network/donkey/breedatlas_donkey.asp a database was set up. Here all information of the study mentioned above is recorded and the information of the results of the survey are supplemented. Besides this the responsible contact for each country and for the particular breed is listed under "Institutions" like livestock parks, farms and private holders with the relevant usage. Suitable images complete the datasets. Some "best practice" documents round off the information.



Evaluation



As it seems to be typical with surveys the return was very low at the beginning. Nevertheless the interest in this investigation grew up during the study. Up to now European and even world-wide never such an effort has been done so far to obtain serious information about the use of the donkey. Valuable contacts and discussions fostered the interest in potential and actual new forms of use for donkeys. It turned out that the properties of donkeys recently (again) are used where it is not economically feasible to work with machines:

Grazing

The selective feeding behavior of donkeys is successfully used in the Swiss canton Valais for keeping open dry grasslands. It has been shown that endangered species of plants and insects are encouraged by this type of grazing. Examples of successful projects of donkey grazing on dry meadows demonstrate the value of donkeys for keeping open scrubby meadows and pastures, which are no longer of interest for agriculture. In many countries of Central Europe, this type of

usage is being examined or even applied successfully. Examples of this are dry meadows in Valais (Municipality Chalais, Bavois), the old airport Karlsruhe in Germany or the dry meadows of Besançon region in France.

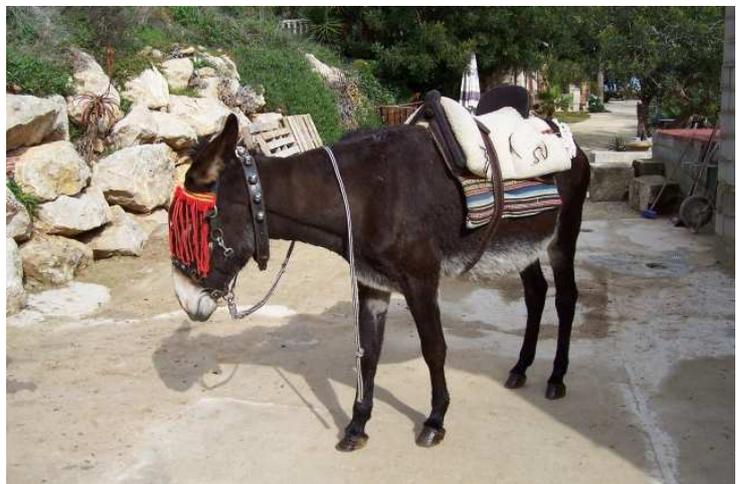
Livestock Guardian

Another field of application is herd protection. Donkeys which are kept already as young animals in a flock of sheep defend this against wolves. They scream, show their teeth and attack the aggressor with their hooves. Successful attempts to herd protection are currently being carried out on alpine pastures. Here donkeys are usually used in addition to guarding dogs.

Therapy

Hippotherapy: Some donkey breeds have a so-called "Tölt-gait", which in contrast to trot and canter does not hover, but is a spilled gait. The rider sits nearly without any vibration on a loosely swinging back. This is especially the case with the mules (horse mare x jackass = mule).

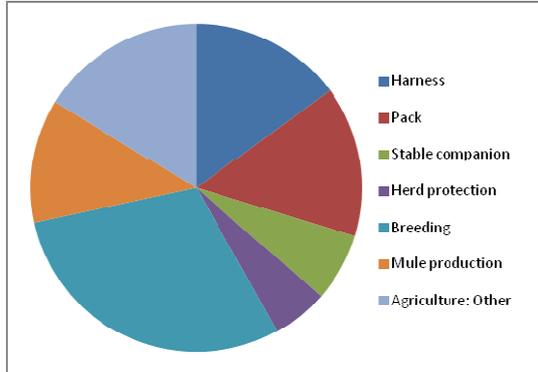
Therapeutic agent: to promote the development in educational or therapeutic processes, with gross motor deficits or lack of impulse and emotional control.



Results

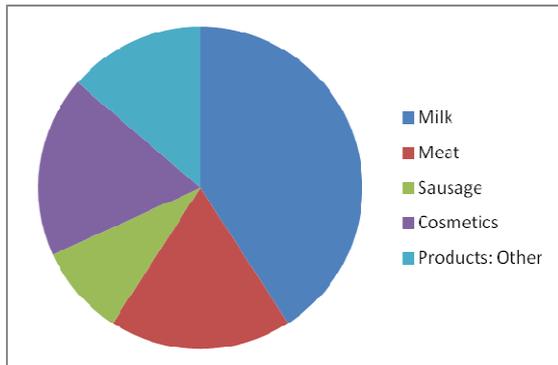
The results based on the main criteria agriculture products and social are as follows:

Agriculture



For agricultural use breeding still plays a role. However, hereunder often reproduction is rather meant as breeding in the proper sense. This also applies to the mule production. In addition to the use as a draught (Harness) and pack animal (Pack) new uses such as livestock guardian or stable mate (Stable Companion) with other species play a rather subordinate role. In the category "Other" agrotourism and landscape maintenance are recorded.

Products

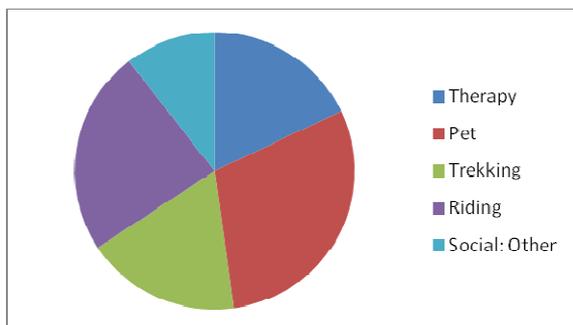


As expected, milk production is in the foreground. This is currently especially in Greece "en vogue". However, the animals are imported without knowledge base and mated in the hope of a rich milk yield. The lack of processing facilities puts this sector at present narrow limits. The survey also showed that the overall figures in Greece continue to decrease: the University of Thessaloniki announced in 2007 15'483 donkeys, in 2012 14'580 animals. In Italy, Croatia and Serbia traditionally a larger

know-how exists. Here, the milk is either directly marketed or exported through a third party. The products range from milk, dried milk and even cheese (by the way the most expensive cheese in the world) to cosmetic products such as soap or cream.

Milk production causes offspring, which needs to be used. Therefore also meat or meat products like Salami are also produced. In most cases, holders of milk mares do not like to speak about this or they indicate that the offspring is sold to other farmers. If this is the case the stock numbers must increase quickly, which is not the case.

Social Use



The social use within the meaning of therapy, pet, riding and hiking and other animal is particularly widespread in the northern countries. An interesting use is the donkey as a therapeutic mediator particularly for impulse and emotional control, as for example, in the penitentiary Saxerriet in Salez, Swiss canton St. Gall within the meaning of "mnemonics for offenders" takes place. An animal-assisted therapist prepares inmates to their life after

prison. Meanwhile, the Institute for Applied Ethology and Animal Psychology in Zurich offers an a two-year training for animal assisted therapy experts. In zoos and animal

parks donkeys serve as a tourist attraction, demonstration of the (former) use as pack and riding animals.

Further Results and Prospect

Through the survey new contacts could be made to Donkey interested and experts. At a press conference in the Zoo Rapperswil for the presentation of the film "Kluge Esel" by Annette Frei-Berthoud (see www.agrobiodiversity.net/topic_network/donkey/donkeys.asp) the project and the general problem of keeping donkeys could be explained to a wider audience. Meanwhile The University of Seville, Spain has undertaken an attempt to link donkey experts worldwide. The competent young scientists are trying to give a voice to their "Worldwide Donkey Project" via Facebook and Twitter. Furthermore, a book with various aspects of the species donkey is in preparation. SAVE Foundation is expected to participate in this project with a chapter on donkey utilization in Europe and is already listed in the list of experts. Thus, the situation in Europe will be made conscious at least in scientific circles. It remains to be seen how this initiative will develop.



The Internet database could not be completed entirely within the project. Nevertheless, the information contained for committed people are very interesting. The relevant holders and organizations signaled great interest in a networking and information exchange. A few variations of Donkeys were also integrated into the project "Feral Populations in Europe" such as the Asino Amiata from Italy, the Burro Majorero from Spain and the Karpaz donkeys from

northern Cyprus, because they are living in a feral or semi-feral status in the respective regions (www.agrobiodiversity.net/topic_network/feral/breedatlas_feral.asp).

With the present project an important cornerstone was set in motion. To obtain the value of the donkey as a companion of man further steps are necessary:

- Establishment of structured conservation programs
- Networking of experts - support for research
- Raising public awareness
- Farms and holders need to be networked and be made available to interested parties -. eg through the Ark network (www.arca-net.info)
- Monitoring, problems and conservation of wild donkey populations

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Waltraud Kugler

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Appendix: Donkey Use Survey

Donkey Use in Europe Survey 2012

Please fill in for each population a separate questionnaire and send it to: SAVE Foundation Project Office, e-mail: office@save-foundation.net; fax: +41-71/222 74 40.

Please send a picture incl. the source to be used to illustrate the publication. Thank you very much!

Contact Details

Donkey Population

Name of Organisation: Contact person: Country: Address: Telephone: Fax: Email: Website:	Country: Location: Breed: Synonyms (if any): Population size: Total: Females: Males: Is this an estimate?
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Donkey Use

Agriculture:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Traction	Remarks / Comments:
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pack	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Stable Companion	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Herd Protection	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Breeding	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mule production	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please specify)	

Products:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Milk	Remarks / Comments:
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Meat	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sausage	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cosmetics	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please specify)	

Social:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Therapy	Remarks / Comments:
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pet	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Trekking	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Riding	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please specify)	