



**THE DONKEY  
SANCTUARY**

# **CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE**

**A REPORT HIGHLIGHTING  
THE ISSUES FOR WORKING  
DONKEYS IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

WRITTEN BY GIRIJA DUGGAL,  
NOVEMBER 2015



## **OUR MISSION**

The Donkey Sanctuary has a mission: 'To transform the quality of life for donkeys, mules and people worldwide through greater understanding, collaboration and support, and by promoting lasting, mutually life-enhancing relationships.'

This report is to help extend our mission into an area of the world where donkeys, mules and the people who care for and rely on them for their daily livelihoods are not currently getting the recognition and support they need.

The Donkey Sanctuary was founded by Dr Elisabeth Svendsen MBE in 1969 and is now the largest organisation providing sanctuary for donkeys and mules in the world.

In the UK, Ireland, and parts of Europe permanent sanctuary is provided for any donkey in need of refuge. In the rest of the world, The Donkey Sanctuary works directly and with partners in over 30 countries to provide care and training in behaviour and handling, nutrition, harness-making, hoof-care, and veterinary care, to ensure better welfare for donkeys and mules throughout their lives.

If you would like to support the work of The Donkey Sanctuary and learn more about our vision of a world where donkeys and mules live free from suffering and their contribution to humanity is valued, then visit our website and see how you can make a difference today.

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A painting by Egyptian artist Miriam Hathout.





# INTRODUCTION

A working donkey eats alfalfa in Wardan, Egypt, during a visit by Stephen Blakeway and staff from The Donkey Sanctuary partner Egyptian Society for the Protection and Welfare of Working Animals (ESPWWA).

The International Department of The Donkey Sanctuary regularly receives photos, videos, or reports, often forwarded from social media websites, sometimes showing positive stories of donkeys and mules, but sadly more often showing disturbing stories. Over recent years, a disproportionate number of the deliberate abuse or cruelty stories appear to originate from the Middle East and suggest the negative effects of conflict on human-animal relationships.

For The Donkey Sanctuary as an animal welfare organisation and for International Department staff, it becomes important to do something with this information — if only to ‘bear witness’. Therefore in early 2015, we commissioned this report.

*Caught in the Middle* documents the situation of working animals generally, the effect of conflict on animals and people, and the way animals are portrayed on social media across 15 Middle Eastern countries, specifically zones of human conflict but also other areas, by gathering multimedia evidence and insights from people spearheading local animal welfare charities. The intention is to provoke debate and an interest in learning more about these realities. The countries surveyed are Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Yemen, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, and the six Arab states that comprise the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia.

The research has been primarily carried out remotely by consulting newspaper reports, published papers, books, blogs and social media websites such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and LiveLeak, and is largely focussed on events from 2012 until the present. Since The Donkey Sanctuary has been working in some areas of Egypt for a number of years via our partners the Egyptian Society for the Protection and Welfare of Working Animals (ESPWWA), this report also includes a number of case studies from them. Other regional charities actively involved in equine welfare were emailed a questionnaire to gather insights into the on-ground situation for donkeys and mules in their respective countries, as well as the problems they face. As a charity, we have not been able to afford the fees requested for the use of some of the photos that went with the main news stories, but many of these are still available on the web.

The report recognises that there are limited opportunities for ground truthing the current situation for donkeys in many parts of the region, and that some countries may be represented more than others depending upon the presence of and responses from animal welfare organisations and existing data.

Since *Caught in the Middle* was commissioned, the conflict in the Middle East has been highlighted in Europe by the exodus of refugees from the region. However, this report is a reminder that most of the people in the region remain at home in their communities with their animals. These animals include companion animals, production animals, and working animals. An individual animal can serve all these purposes at different times.

Donkeys and mules have been carrying physical and metaphoric burdens since people first brought animals into their communities. We believe they deserve to be treated with dignity and respect wherever and however they provide service. Part of the intention of this report is to lead us to new partnerships and collaborations across the region. With increasing recognition of the value to some people of animal-assisted therapy, we will be looking to find ways to use this valuable service that donkeys and mules can provide in the face of conflict, to shine a light on the harms and to help provide healing.

Stephen Blakeway

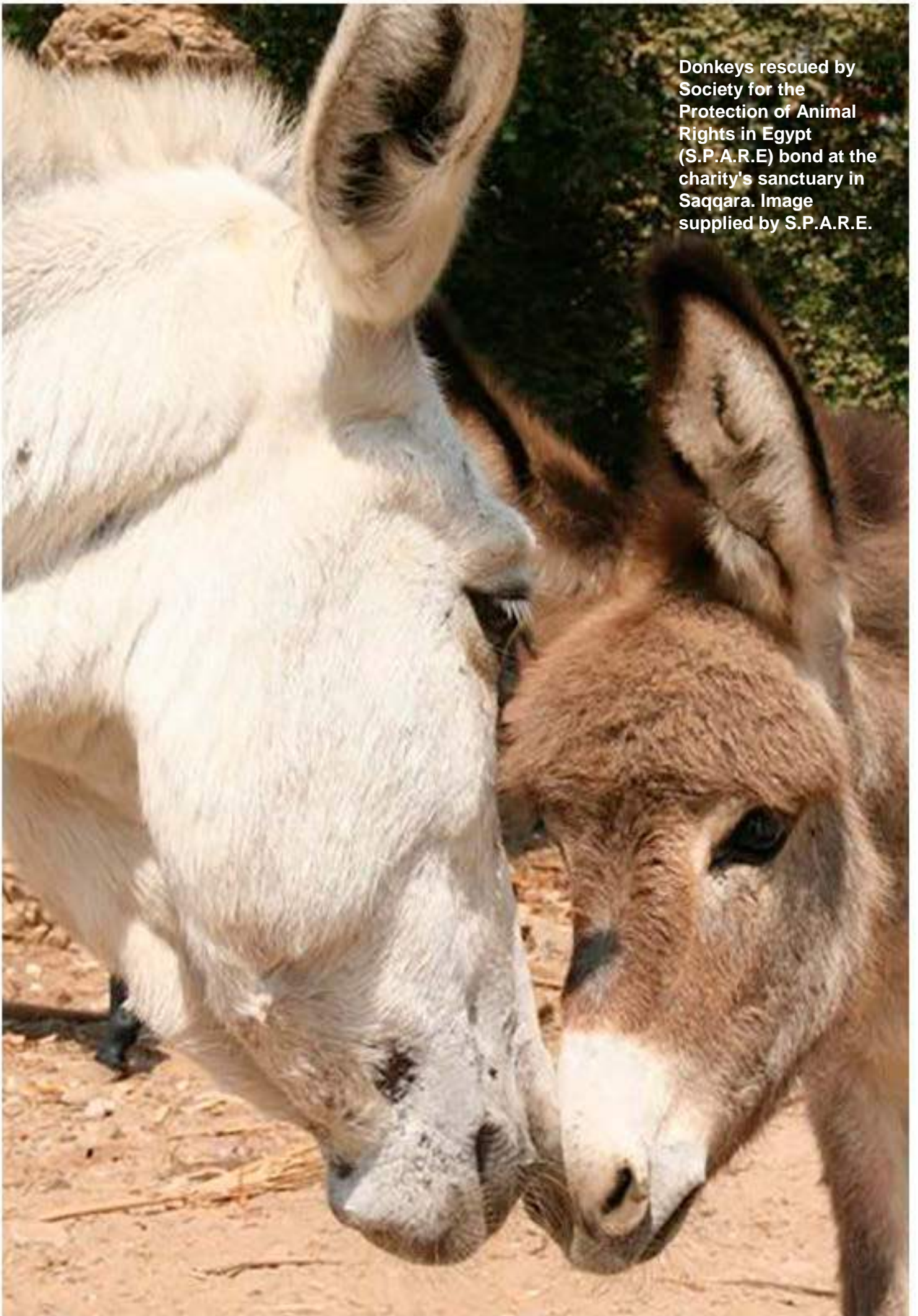
Director of International Operations

The Donkey Sanctuary



Rescued donkeys relax at the Pegasus sanctuary in Israel. Photo supplied by Pegasus.

Donkeys rescued by  
Society for the  
Protection of Animal  
Rights in Egypt  
(S.P.A.R.E) bond at the  
charity's sanctuary in  
Saqqara. Image  
supplied by S.P.A.R.E.







# SECTION ONE

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A pack donkey belonging to Ezidians in Kurdistan.  
Image courtesy Kurdistan Organisation of Animal Rights Protection.

## THE REGION IN CONTEXT

The Middle East is a term that refers to a group of countries centred around Western Asia — between the Black Sea to the north and the Arabian Sea to the south — including Iran and Egypt, which have similar culture and traditions. These countries also share a long history, which goes back to the earliest archaeological evidence anywhere, of using donkeys and mules for domestic use in transportation, labour and farming. For the developing areas of the



A donkey used for transport stands by the side of a road in Lebanon. Photo supplied by Animals Lebanon.

region, they continue to be the principal draught animals.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the status of the donkey historically has not always been humble; excavations of the tombs of two of Egypt's first pharaohs revealed the skeletons of ten donkeys buried in a manner usually reserved for high-ranking human officials.<sup>2</sup>

Official figures for working animals in the region are hard to come by, but the latest (2013) data by the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization puts the number at roughly 6.3 million donkeys and 200,000 mules,<sup>3</sup> with Egypt reporting half of the region's donkey population.

Working equine population trends appear to vary widely across countries: some, such as Jordan and Syria, have shown a steady decline in the last decade while others, like Iraq, Iran, and Yemen, remain more or less unchanged. With modernisation, particularly that based upon petroleum wealth, donkeys are being replaced by motorised transport in a few areas, and in some Gulf Cooperation Council countries,<sup>4</sup> there are now herds of feral donkeys in the rangelands.<sup>5</sup>

Table 1: **Working Donkey and Mule Populations in the Middle East**

Country	Donkeys			Mules						
	2000		2013	% change	2000	2013	% change			
Bahrain		DNA*		DNA		DNA				
Egypt	3,050,000	FAOE*	3,356,000	FAOE	10.03	1,150	FAOE	1,165	FAOE	1.30
Iran	1,600,000	FAOE	1,600,000	FAOE	0.00	175,000	FAOE	175,000	FAOE	0.00
Iraq	380,000	FAOE	380,000	FAOE	0.00	11,200	FAOE	11,500	FAOE	2.68
Israel	5,000	FAOE	5,000	FAOE	0.00	1,600	FAOE	1,600	FAOE	0.00
Jordan	12,700	FAOE	9,000	FAOE	-29.13	2,000	FAOE	1,200	FAOE	-40.00
Lebanon	15,000	UF*	15,000	FAOE	0.00	4,780	UF	5,000	FAOE	4.60
Oman	28,500	FAOE	24,000	FAOE	-15.79		DNA		DNA	
Syria	216,443	OD	83,546	OD	-61.40	12,854	OD	2,748	OD	-78.62
Yemen	550,000	FAOE	718,000	FAOE	30.55		DNA		DNA	

\*DNA (Data Not Available); FAOE (FAO Estimate); UF (Unofficial Figure); OD (Official Data)

Source: FAO Stat Production/Live Animals data 2013.

## WORKING DONKEYS PLAY A MULTI-FACETED ROLE

It is hard to exaggerate yet easy to overlook the critical role that working equines play in many countries, and this holds true for most parts of the Middle East. From ploughing fields and pulling carts to transporting people and goods such as fuel, food, water, agricultural produce and construction materials, whether on busy city streets or in remote rural settlements, they help turn the cogs that run local economies. They are an important and indeed often the only source of livelihood for an entire family. A survey carried out by UK overseas equine welfare charity The Brooke revealed that the money earned by each working horse, donkey or mule may support between five and 20 family members.<sup>6</sup> The same report notes that in countries impacted by armed conflict, such as Yemen and Palestine, donkeys help deliver aid and play a role in nationwide rebuilding projects, especially in regions with difficult terrain or where infrastructure is lacking.

The price for a working animal varies between countries and depends on various factors, such as its age, sex, strength, and body condition. In Egypt, for instance, a donkey costs around 1000le [approximately £80] and a mule around 2000le [£162]. "This is a lot for a poor villager but cheap for a wealthy stable owner," says Jill Barton, manager of the Abu Sier-based charity Egypt Equine Aid. In Iran, the price varies between

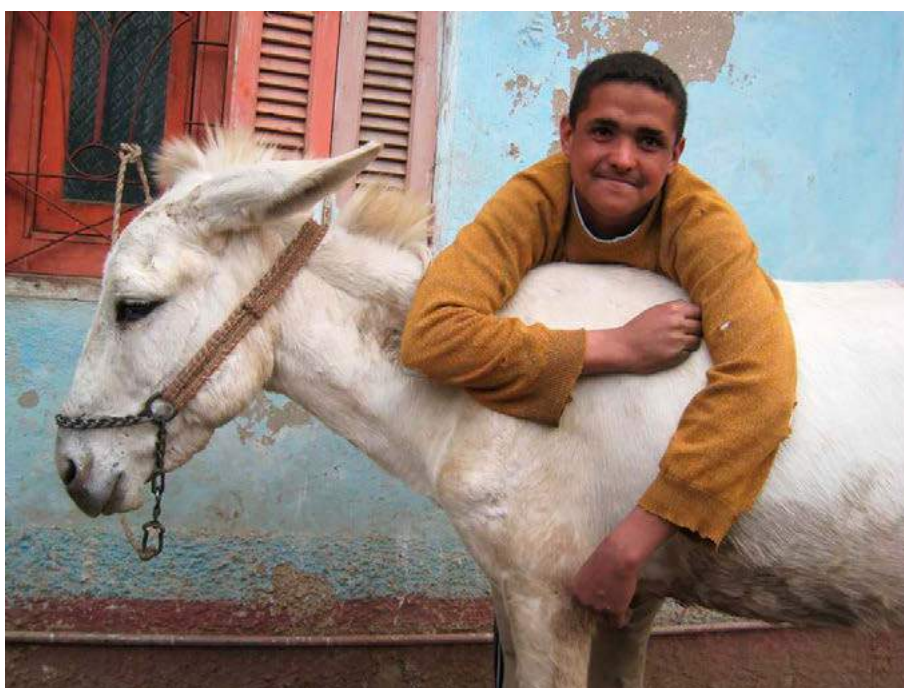
£98 to £325; in Lebanon between £65 and £162; and in Israel a healthy donkey can be bought for as little as £12 to £15.

The critical link between working equines and socio-economic development of humans can be gauged by the following points:

**Affordable to use:** a donkey can be easily sustained in rural areas that have limited or no access to motorised transport or in areas with fuel shortages.

**Boost local economy:** money invested in animal power circulates within rural areas and helps to sustain local economies.<sup>7</sup>

**Critical to food production and distribution:** working animals are crucial to food security as they help sow crops in the fields and transport them to the market. Small farmers benefit from an extended market reach and hence an increase in earnings.



Shaaban, a deaf boy from Egypt, poses with his donkey. Shaaban's family relies on the donkey for transport. He attended one of ESPWWA's mobile clinics. Photo supplied by ESPWWA.

**Empower women:** in developing countries, donkeys help women with laborious chores like fetching water from far-off sources, thus freeing up time that they can use for other constructive purposes, such as earning an extra income, childcare, tending to livestock, or food production.

**Means of transport:** the use of donkeys and mules for transportation has a positive socio-economic impact on local communities. The benefits are diverse: from bringing loads of sugarcane from the fields to the markets in Egypt and labouring in its brick factories, to enabling Bedouin children to attend distant schools and carrying olives picked in the mountains of Israel. In Lebanon, they are used for transport of fruits and vegetables in the larger cities and on farms in the Bekaa Valley. In areas of conflict, such as Syria and northern Iraq, they are a vital means for transporting entire families and their possessions to safety as well as for delivering aid to refugees. For example, in the war-torn western province of Hodeidah in Yemen, the World Health Organization started using donkey carts in May 2015 to distribute water to people in need.<sup>8</sup> In western Iran's mountainous border area they are sometimes used for human trafficking or smuggling narcotics, goods, and fuel.

**Tourism and entertainment:** in areas with significant tourism economies — such as Petra in Jordan and Giza in Egypt — donkeys are used for giving rides or for photo opportunities. Petra alone has 1,350 working horses, donkeys and mules, of which roughly half work in Petra Park on a regular basis to ferry tourists on their back or in carts up and down its long, narrow route.<sup>9</sup> They are also used in Iran's remote rural and mountainous regions to transport tourists, mountaineers and their luggage. In Yemen, Oman, and Bahrain, donkey races are a common form of local entertainment.

## A MUTUALLY DEPENDANT RELATIONSHIP

Given that the role of working equines is central to the socio-economic welfare and food security of hundreds of thousands of people across the Middle East, it is not surprising to find that many owners share a close bond with their animals. In Egypt, for example, where farmers with smallholdings own more than 70% of the total animal population in the country, the system of rearing leads to close association between the farmers and their animals. In addition, the farmers show respect, care, and kindness for the animals with whom they share their lives.<sup>10</sup>

In the Uludere district on the Turkish side of the Turkey-Iraq border, mules are more than just a means of transport. They are all named, and each animal's personality and lineage is known to everyone, including the children. In an article published by the BBC in May 2015, one villager tells the reporter: "This mule is more important than my sons... He is one of the family."<sup>11</sup> A similar sentiment is apparent in a 2013 YouTube video (since taken down), which shows what appears to be an Iraqi man weeping hysterically and hugging his donkey, who is lying badly injured in a pool of blood after a road accident.<sup>12</sup>

Elsewhere, one comes across snapshots of compassion in images of children hugging or playing with their donkeys, a young boy letting a donkey rest his head on his lap or giving it a drink of water from his own bottle, and donkeys covered by makeshift raincoats as protection from rain.

In large swathes of the region, however, where a mix of factors including poverty, a lack of education, human suffering, and a widely held perception of the donkey as a lowly creature are present, most people tend to view the well-being of an equine as secondary to human welfare, if not entirely inconsequential.

This is vividly illustrated in the words of a Palestinian blogger and activist named Sami (who goes by the name "Sami, the Bedouin"), who lives as a refugee in the West Bank. In a recent post, he writes of his indignation when he hears of a European animal welfare delegation coming to his village to treat donkeys, at a time when the people were in need of assistance. "Didn't they see how the Palestinians are treated like donkeys (apology for the donkeys) under the Zionist occupation, how they are captured in the zoo of Gaza? Probably we Bedouins are not donkey lovers because we are more camel-oriented. Bedouins not only care about animals, but really love them because they are an essential part of our daily life. We care for them in the hot summer, in the cold winter, feed them, name every one of them and name the newborn babies as if our kins...we love



A boy poses with a donkey in Luxor, Egypt. Photo supplied by Animal Welfare of Luxor.

them and kiss them like our beloved children. But I personally care more about my people!”<sup>13</sup>

In its more extreme form, the same factors listed above converge into a relationship of harsh exploitation, where the donkey is viewed as a non-sentient possession to be worked as hard as possible. The result can be a severe violation of donkey welfare in the region.

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### CASE STUDY 1: LOSING A FRIEND

An example of the affection possible between donkeys and humans was highlighted to The Donkey Sanctuary team in Egypt when 16-year-old Ahamed from Beni Suef Governate in Giza brought his family donkey, named el Dayar, to one of ESPWWA's mobile clinics after it lost weight and became listless. El Dayar had belonged to Ahamed's recently deceased grandfather, who relied on the donkey for transportation and visiting relatives. The donkey had been born at the family home and Ahamed's grandfather had always taken great care looking after him, even when he himself got sick. Ahamed's ailing grandmother was worried the donkey, whom she associated with the memory of her late husband, would die. Initially she sent el Dayar with Ahamed to a private vet, but the medication they prescribed did not help.



16-year-old Ahamed with his donkey el Dayar in Giza, Egypt. Photo supplied by ESPWWA.

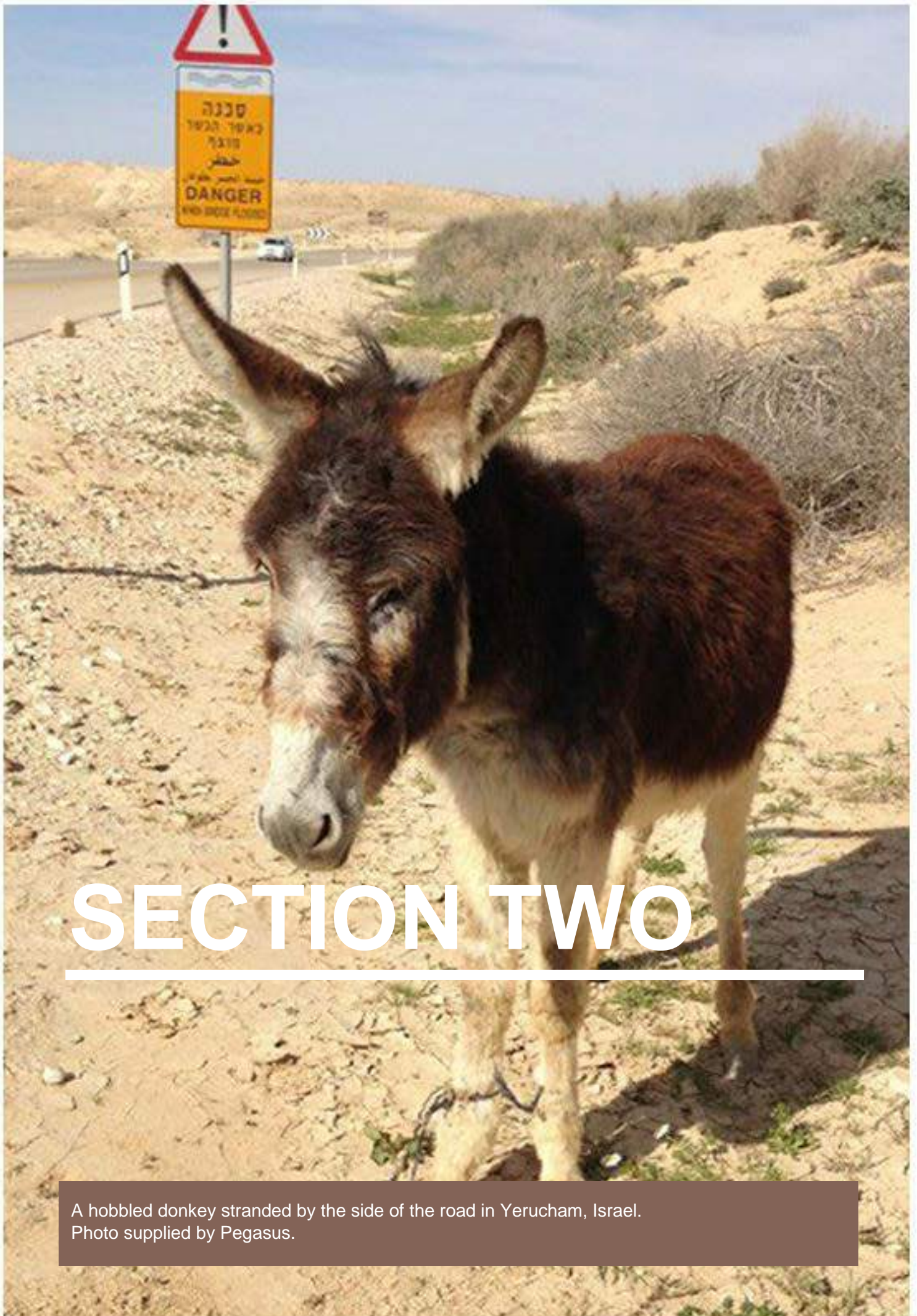
When he came to ESPWWA, staff gave el Dayar a full examination and suggested Ahamed buy a new donkey to keep el Dayar company. They also advised Ahamed to help his grandmother take care of el Dayar's physical needs.

“We believe donkeys grieve when they lose a friend, so we explained to Ahamed that the donkey was sad and depressed because he had lost his life-long friend — Ahamed's grandfather,” said Dr Howida El Hadary, ESPWWA country manager.

Later, Ahamed's grandmother got in touch with ESPWWA, saying el Dayar had bonded with the new donkey and his health and spirits had greatly improved.

*This work was funded by The Donkey Sanctuary.*

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# SECTION TWO

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A hobbled donkey stranded by the side of the road in Yerucham, Israel.  
Photo supplied by Pegasus.

## DONKEY WELFARE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Unfortunately, constraints such as poverty and a lack of knowledge and skills about donkey health and behaviour often lead owners to cause unintentional harm to their animals. Exhaustion, illness, malnourishment, dehydration, and injuries caused by crude harnesses, poor hoof care, and beatings are common ailments that arise from such a situation.

Although traditional and social, and in some cases legal, guidance about the humane treatment of animals exists in the region, there is a lack of enforcement of laws and regulations in most countries. All the regions' major religions provide instructions on animal welfare, with Islam being particularly strong in this regard. However, religious views of animals as beings created to serve humans, and of animals such as dogs and pigs as impure, are often misinterpreted as a licence for cruelty.<sup>14</sup>

"With a lack of any animal welfare laws in Qatar, we face the same issues with all species of animals — they are seen as possessions instead of living beings who have feelings," says Kelly Allen, co-founder of Qatar Animal Welfare Society (QAWS). Where laws do exist, as in Lebanon or Israel, they are either outdated or not implemented. "The [Agriculture] Ministry is only interested in what brings in profits, i.e. animal agriculture [husbandry], so combating mad cow disease and bird flu etc. are the priorities. Welfare doesn't count," explains Nina Natelson, Director, Concern for Helping Animals in Israel (CHAI).

Diana K. Davis and Denys Frappier posit that one reason for this apathy is the state's feeling of embarrassment towards what is seen as the 'traditional sector', which is nearly universally extended to working equines. They write: "As tourist boards recognise, working equines are poignantly visible reminders of a traditional way of life in the everyday urban landscapes of the Middle East. Because these animals do not provide the status of a shiny new sports car or truck, their condition is ignored and their health is allowed to deteriorate. Indeed in many cities, especially capital cities such as Rabat and Cairo, working equids are often outlawed on city streets."<sup>15</sup> In its 2010 report on draft animals, the FAO's Agricultural Support Systems Division describes politicians' ignorance of the importance of working animal power to rural populations as a 'vicious circle of neglect' and advocates that working animals of all kinds should be included in international development strategies.<sup>16</sup>

Access to veterinary help remains limited and expensive in most countries. This is especially true of remote villages such as those lying in the border area between Iraq and Turkey or Iraq and Iran, and in war zones. Where veterinary services are not available, caring owners have no choice but to take recourse to what may be ineffectual or even harmful local practices. Where veterinary services are available, the economics of care poses a problem for owners. An animal that needs to be rested for even a day means a lack of earnings for that day. As a result, many owners choose to continue working their donkeys despite their ill-health.

Animal health authorities also face severe challenges due to the area's unstable political situation, which, as a 2006 study by



This donkey was forced to work with a broken leg till its owner found time to bring it to S.P.A.R.E's clinic, where it collapsed on the ground out of exhaustion. Photo supplied by S.P.A.R.E.



A donkey stuffed in the trunk of a car in greater Beirut. Photo supplied by Animals Lebanon.



An injured donkey pulls a cart of scrap metal in Israel. Photo supplied by Concern for Helping Animals in Israel.



A. Shimshony and P. Economides notes, is reflected in inadequate regional co-operation and negligible exchange of epidemiological information. It goes on to state that national veterinary services across the Middle East are in need of restructuring and consolidation “given their peripheral (field activities, extension) as well as central (diagnosis and research) deficiencies”.<sup>17</sup>

## **POLICIES AND LAWS**

As mentioned previously, animal welfare laws in the Middle East are largely non-existent or, where they exist, are unenforced. Authorities in Israel, for example, a country that does have an animal protection law in place, fail to enforce it due to “a lack of funds and real concern for the welfare of animals,” according to Natelson. She says: “People report cruelties to the Veterinary Services within the Agriculture Ministry and to local municipal vets, but unless there is media on the subject and public pressure, they generally do nothing. Occasionally, a municipal vet will act, but these are political appointees so it depends on the individual. The individual in the Vet Services responsible for enforcing the Animal Protection Law has no authority to force municipal vets to act. She can only try to persuade them.”

Iran has several laws pertaining to domestic and wild animals, but according to Fatemeh Motamedi, founder of Vafa Animal Shelter in Iran, they focus more on the rights and obligations of humans towards animals rather than on the rights of animals. “Despite public awareness and interest toward keeping and helping animals rising rapidly, there is no sign to show the government’s interest in enforcing an animal welfare law,” she says.

Across the region, only a handful of organisations have the resources to rescue abused animals, and in most cases they have to persuade the owner to either sell or give up the animal, as they have no legal jurisdiction to confiscate it. On the rare occasion that an animal is removed from its owner, reasons other than welfare are cited as justification. “Public health or following customs regulations are often the strongest arguments to confiscate, and welfare is secondary to that,” says Jason Mier, director, Animals Lebanon, of the situation in Lebanon.

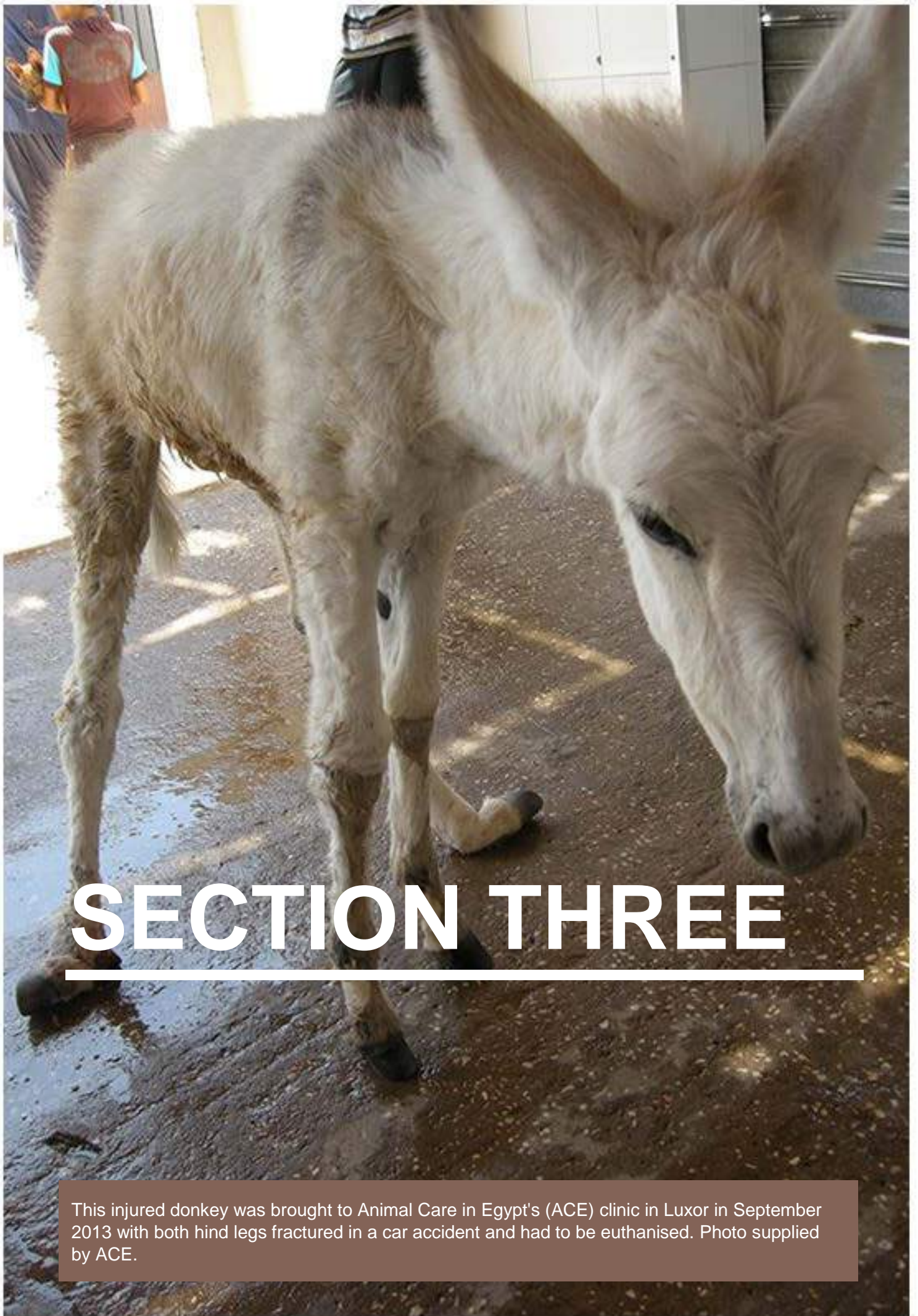
The last few years have seen several charities in countries like Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and the UAE lobby their respective governments to introduce or update laws and improve animal welfare, with some success. In Israel, it resulted in legislation passed in September 2014 that banned cart horses and donkeys on roads throughout the country. The Jordanian government, though turning down calls for a ban on horse-drawn carriages in Petra in March 2015, has initiated a programme in collaboration with The Brooke, Four Paws and the Princess Alia Foundation to set up improved veterinary aid and education facilities for equines in this popular tourist location. Last year, 11 government and non-governmental organisations coordinated by The Brooke came together with the Petra Development and Tourism Regional Authority to launch the ‘Care for Petra’ campaign, aimed at improving tourist behaviour and attitudes towards working animals.

In July 2013, Saudi Arabia developed animal welfare guidelines for the Gulf Cooperation Council member countries, which, among other

things stipulate strict fines and penalties for animal abusers.<sup>18</sup> However, a 2014 article reported that most citizens felt it was not being strictly enforced. In response to some widely circulated video clips on social networking websites showing animals including a horse and a cat being abused, animal lovers in the country took to social media to call for the establishment of voluntary societies to promote public awareness on the issue.<sup>19</sup>

In 2014, ESPWWA along with several other animal welfare organisations, including the Society for the Protection of Animal Rights in Egypt (S.P.A.R.E) and The Brooke, managed to lobby the Egyptian government to include a clause on animal welfare in the constitution, in the form of Article 45. “We are waiting for Parliament to enact the laws and legislation soon,” says Dr. El Hadary of ESPWWA.

In Lebanon, where existing laws are considered outdated and ineffectual, Animals Lebanon has been working with the national and local governments on two projects: to enact a new animal protection and welfare law through Parliament and collaborating with the Beirut Governor to improve animal welfare in the Beirut Municipality. But here, as in many other parts of the Middle East, political unrest slows down progress. “The political situation has made animal welfare more difficult for all species. There has been no president [in Lebanon] for 16 months, Parliament has not met in over a year, and the Council of Ministers is being increasingly restricted. Then the war in Syria [has led to a] dramatic increase in refugees. It is simply more difficult to get attention for any of the issues the country is facing,” says Mier of Animals Lebanon.



# SECTION THREE

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This injured donkey was brought to Animal Care in Egypt's (ACE) clinic in Luxor in September 2013 with both hind legs fractured in a car accident and had to be euthanised. Photo supplied by ACE.

## SUFFERING IN SILENCE

Sadly, the reality of life for many working animals is to be overworked, deprived of adequate access to food and water, and abandoned when they are too weak to be of use to their owners. The reasons for this are manifold, ranging from a lack of knowledge about donkeys' health needs and good farriery and harness-making techniques, to a indifference towards animal welfare and a tendency to view the animals as cheap, disposable objects.

In Israel, they are viewed as “children's toys or unfeeling beasts of burden” according to Natelson, and “the lowest of the low” according to Wendy Ahl, UK Operations Director of Safe Haven for Donkeys in the Holy Land (SHADH). “Unlike many countries where there is a shortage, donkeys breed indiscriminately and it is cheaper to buy a new animal than to pay for veterinary care,” says Ahl. “There is also a belief amongst some owners that donkeys physically cannot suffer pain, that nostril slitting is good for them, and that it is bad for the animals to drink water during the day.”

In some regions the relatively low cost of buying a donkey makes it easily disposable — it is cheaper to buy a new donkey than pay for veterinary treatment for the existing one — and hence makes the animal subject to misuse or abuse. But S.P.A.R.E president Amina Abaza asserts that in Egypt price isn't always a defining factor. “Donkeys are cheap, mules are more expensive and horses are even more expensive, [but] we have noticed that the price of the animal does not make a big difference in the way of treating them,” she says.

Whipping or hitting are common and widespread ways to communicate with and control a working donkey. This is taken for granted and not recognised as misuse. However, sometimes the lack of compassion is extreme. The following exchange posted by Egypt Equine Aid on its Facebook page recently is one example: “The ignorance we are up against! We spotted this horse needing a nose band in Nazlet. The conversation went something like this. Hazem asked: ‘Why do you keep this string here, you can see it is cutting into your horse's nose?’ The driver, shrugging, said: ‘So what? It's supposed to cut into his nose, that's how it works!’”

Blogger-activist Omar Ghraieb identifies a similar attitude towards animals in Gaza in a 2011 post. He writes of his move from Europe to Gaza and being shocked by scenes of children throwing rocks at dogs and cats or hitting them against something solid, and cart donkeys suffering from skin diseases or malnutrition. “I wouldn't generalize my accusation by saying all Gazans are brutal to animals,” he writes, “but you do witness animal abuse here not because the people love to abuse animals but because they think it is okay and it is the way to do things.”<sup>20</sup>

This sentiment is also deeply ingrained in, and in turn draws from, the language of insult — derogatory phrases and iconography in daily use that depict the donkey as an insignificant animal. It seems to play into the normalisation and casual acceptance of what would be classified as abusive behaviour.



A donkey with a severe nose wound caused by a chain used in place of a halter. Photo supplied by Egypt Equine Aid.



This emaciated, abandoned donkey was rescued off Egypt's streets by S.P.A.R.E.

## FORMS OF MISUSE OR ABUSE

This section describes the various ways that working or former working donkeys may suffer — some common, some less so.

**Overloading and Overwork:** Donkeys are made to carry or pull heavy loads — sometimes weighing as much as a tonne — of bricks, scrap metal, clay, furniture, and even entire families, and are made to work long hours, often in rough conditions. Overloading and overwork are especially pronounced when donkeys are hired out, for example in markets, or in jobs where owners' pay depends on the quantity of goods transported, such as in brick or clay kilns.

Poverty, a lack of alternative livelihoods and inflation can play a deleterious role, too. In 2006, for instance, a rise in the price of iron in Israel led to hundreds of people from the occupied territories coming into the border area of the Sharon plain with horse- and mule-drawn carts to collect scrap iron. They would pile the carts high with large, heavy loads of metal. In some cases they would force the animals to work until they collapsed. "Reports came in about five or six horses in distress every week. It turned into a constant flow, and I found myself with 15 horses to look after," Pegasus founder Zvika Tamuz explains in an article published by Israeli news website Haaretz. The equine rescue charity was formed as a direct result of this situation.<sup>21</sup>

It is also common to see exhausted donkeys in tourist sites such as Petra, Giza, Luxor, and Beirut. In Petra, which was mentioned earlier in the report, the ongoing civil war in neighbouring Syria has led to a dramatic drop in the number of visitors — from about 975,000 in 2010 to 596,600 in 2014.<sup>22</sup> When there is work, guides may push their animals to work longer and harder to compensate for lost earnings. Injuries commonly seen in overworked donkeys include leg, foot and back deformities, bruising, saddle wounds, and sometimes fractures, often rendering animals unable to work.

**Harnessing and farriery gaps:** when saddles, tacks and harnesses are poorly made, maintained or fitted, the friction of inappropriate materials against the donkey's skin leads to chaffing and, if left untreated, can lead to injury and infection. Harnesses are generally made at home using rope, metal and leather, and saddles are made from cloth, carpet, or wood. Low skill levels of farriers result in many hoof or shoeing abnormalities.

**Harmful local treatments:** these include nose slitting, which is believed to help improve donkeys' breathing; firing, or pressing hot irons to the skin to cure lameness, tetanus and other diseases; and filling wounds with cement. While traditional treatments are administered with good intent, some end up causing more pain and greater harm to the donkeys.

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## CASE STUDY 2: A BETTER LIFE IN EGYPT'S BRICK KILNS

“In the El Saf area near Giza, around 200 kilns produce 100 million bricks every month for use in Egypt’s construction industry. The kilns use over 1,600 donkeys and 31 mules to transport the bricks via carts. Work starts at 6am and might continue until 1pm or 3pm without a break.

Working conditions are very harsh for both donkeys and people at the brick kilns. Donkey welfare issues include beating and harness wounds, lameness and foot problems. In some kilns people see the donkeys as machines, and others believe that donkeys cannot feel pain or need to be beaten to make them work. Through The Donkey Sanctuary’s work, however, we are seeing gradual change in attitudes and tangible changes in management practices.



Brick kilns in Egypt. Photo supplied by ESPWWA.

We found that most brick kilns had very bad stables, without enough space for the donkeys. This means there is no opportunity for the donkeys to express their natural behaviour. In addition, bad ventilation, constant close contact, and standing for long periods of time on urine-soaked bedding can lead to the spread of skin diseases and other health problems such as thrush in the hoof. Also, stressed animals are prone to injuries from biting and kicking.

We encourage the different stakeholders in the brick kilns to improve the welfare of the donkeys. After we talk to them, many owners choose to extend the space of their stables by building external yards where donkeys can roll. Now, more than 80% of the kilns we have worked in up to 2015 have built an external yard, which extends the stable space and allows the donkeys to roll on the ground naturally.

It’s very easy for me as a vet to say what the advantages for donkeys are in building an external yard, but it is important to go back to the community to ask, listen, and understand what they think. I asked owners and stakeholders in five kilns about how building an external yard improved the lives of donkeys and they said it allowed more space for feeding and watering, it was more comfortable, and meant the donkeys were freer to walk and roll. They remarked on the disappearance of biting and kicking, fewer wounds and an improved performance of the donkeys at work.

The building of 130 external yards is a small step but makes a long standing improvement in the lives of thousands of donkeys. It is a starting point for collective action in the brick-kiln community.”

Dr Shabaan Fayez Farhat, Veterinary Development Coordinator for Egyptian Society for the Protection and Welfare of Working Animals (ESPWWA).

*This work was fully funded by The Donkey Sanctuary.*

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**Abandonment:** once a donkey is too old or too weak to work, it may be simply discarded by the roadside, let loose in the desert, or abandoned in a garbage dump to fend for itself. Welfare organisations across the Middle East report regularly rescuing such cases, but for many animals it is already too late to be saved.

Newborn donkeys may face the same fate. “People want their donkeys to work but if they have young [foals], the babies want their mother's attention and she doesn't want to work. So they tie the babies to a post in a way that they can't survive,” explains SHADH founder Lucy Fensom in a 2014 interview with the Daily Mail.<sup>23</sup> SHADH has rescued many such abandoned foals. Some young ones are simply let loose far from their mothers. Writing of an incident on his visit to the village of Marda in Palestine in May 2015, a London-based blogger named Tom mentions passing by a farm where a donkey had just given birth: “Murad [an accompanying farmer] helped the new donkey to its feet and pushed her closer towards her mother, who was tied up to a nearby tree but just out of reach. The next day we saw the same donkey, working, but not the infant. As another mouth to feed and a distraction to his working donkey, the owner, an old guy, chucked the new jenny away. This upset Murad, more out of waste than sentiment, but Murad cares. He understands the important roles animals have.”<sup>24</sup>

Stray or abandoned donkey populations can also be at risk of being culled. According to Dr. Sulaiman Tamer Saed, President and Founder of Kurdistan Organization for Animal Rights Protection (KOARP), government officials in Iraq are known to use a 1986 law that allows control of stray dog populations through poison or guns to also control increasing numbers of stray donkeys.

**Road accidents:** abandoned, loose-grazing and stray donkeys in urban spaces are highly susceptible to road accidents. There are frequent news reports of accidents from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and parts of the UAE. In once such recent incident, a donkey named Mosaad was hit by a taxi in El Mounib, Egypt, fracturing a hind leg. Its owner took 1,000le (about £80) as compensation from the taxi driver, but abandoned the animal in a rubbish dump.<sup>25</sup> In some parts of the UAE, where commercialisation has led to many farm donkeys becoming redundant and being turned out into the desert, the animals are often victim to traffic accidents. “Many in the northern emirates get hit by cars as there is no fencing along the highway,” says Laura Glanfield of Posh Paws Dubai, a charity that has rescued six donkeys to date from the Ras Al Khaimah region. The Bahya Sanctuary in Abu Dhabi shelters five donkeys that were picked up from the side of a highway.

**Bait for predatory animals:** while not a widespread practice, there have been reports from Egypt, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Iran of old donkeys and foals being used as live bait for pet or zoo-owned lions. A video that emerged online in April 2014 shows a group of Saudi men taking a donkey to a desert area and unleashing their pet lion on it, reportedly for fun.<sup>26</sup> Another video from 2012, posted by Iran S.P.C.A, shows an old donkey being pushed into the lion enclosure of a private zoo in the northern Iranian city of Sari as a crowd films the scene. The lion and lioness, lacking hunting experience, take almost an hour to kill their prey.<sup>27</sup> The zoo reportedly did this every Thursday in order to

attract visitors. Reza Javalchi, president of the Iranian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, writes on France 24's website: "While there were very strong reactions to the videos on Facebook, the state radio and television showed no interest in reporting on this. We asked the head of the zoo to put an end to the feedings. He argued that this was what happened in the wilderness. We explained that in the wild, lions kill their victims in a matter of minutes, while these zoo lions had no hunting experience, and so it took them about an hour to kill a donkey. He finally agreed to halt these feedings for the time being."<sup>28</sup>

The most recent incident was reported from the UAE in March 2015, when a dog and ten donkeys, including a pregnant mare and a six-month-old foal, were shot and killed allegedly for use as feed on an illegal tiger farm. Dr Louise Mitchell, co-founder of The Animal Welfare Project in Umm al-Quwain, the charity that had been sheltering these animals, says it wasn't the first such incident. "Sadly, 25 of our donkeys were hunted and shot on two separate occasions for a tiger farm...two full families killed," she says. The case generated media coverage and in June the organisation was gifted 90,000 square metres of fenced land by the Emirate's ruler to provide a secure shelter to rescued animals. In this case something positive came out of a bad event.

**Bestiality:** A few instances of sexual assault on donkeys are also documented. In August 2014, news agencies reported that a Saudi man had died after he was kicked by a donkey that he was allegedly trying to sodomise. In January 2015, Tamuz and his team at Pegasus discovered a one-year-old donkey abandoned in freezing cold in Lod, a city located a few kilometres southeast of Tel-Aviv. Or, as the donkey was named, was found to have been physically and sexually brutalised. While her physical recovery was quick and left only a few scars, she continued to be in shock and suspicious of humans for much longer.

**Physical abuse:** owners may resort to brutal physical measures to force a donkey to work harder and longer or in frustration at its inability to do so. Examples include repeatedly hitting with a stick on the same spot until the skin splits, or by hitting it on the face with a stone or rock.

A German blogger reports an incident that she witnessed in Petra in 2013, near the steps of the monastery. "What I saw was just horrible. A young kid, I think 12 [years] of age, was pissed off at his donkey because the donkey refused to transfer some tourist. The kid took a (large) stone and beat it into the head of the poor donkey. Then, the kid got aggressive when we looked shocked and screamed very aggressively: 'It's my donkey and my business, not yours'."<sup>29</sup>

Allen gives the example of Bella, one of two permanent donkey residents on the charity's farm in Doha. "Bella is a 15-year-old female, who we have had for 10 years, and she still doesn't trust humans – she was very badly abused and came to us heavily pregnant and covered in sores."

An extreme example is reported by S.P.A.R.E on its website: When his donkey collapsed on the roadside due to exhaustion, one owner resorted to setting some hay on fire and placing it near the animal's stomach to force it to get back up.



Penile injury likely caused by a string tied tightly to suppress sexual activity. Photo supplied by Egypt Equine Aid.



A donkey with its ears cut off. Photo supplied by CHAI, Israel.



**Torture:** In its most extreme form, abuse takes on the form of unexplainable torture. Donkeys rescued by SHADH include Joseff, who belonged to a drugs gang and was covered in knife wounds when found, and Burnie, who was doused in petrol and set on fire after he strayed onto someone's land in Immaten in 2007.

Pegasus reports a similar case from June 2013 from the city of Rahat, calling it “one of the most difficult stories we have come across”. A group of teens draped a nylon sheet over the donkey and set it alight, then covered its wounds with another sheet and rode it until it was rescued.

A series of videos posted on Iranian video-sharing website Aparat show various men wrestling or bodily picking up and slamming donkeys onto the ground in what can only be described as a show of strength. Sounds of laughter are heard in the background. The countries of origin of the men could not be confirmed and it is not known whether and what kind of injuries the donkeys in these videos sustained.

Another video posted on YouTube in June 2014 (but which has since been deleted) showed a man allegedly from Saudi Arabia loading a donkey onto the back of a truck parked in a desert. He reverses the vehicle at high speed and then brakes suddenly, causing the donkey to slide violently out of the truck and fall onto its back.

A particularly horrific case that Animals Lebanon describes as “one of the most disturbing and repulsive stories of abuse we have heard” emerged from the Lebanese village of Mtein in December 2014, when six municipal guards captured a stray donkey and, for the sake of amusement, tied her to a moving car and dragged her to a petrol pump. There the badly injured donkey was doused in motor oil, tied to another vehicle and driven around in circles, then beaten on the head with clubs, before finally being hanged to death by a rope from a pole. A case was filed against the men in January and at the time of writing this report they were awaiting trial.<sup>30</sup>

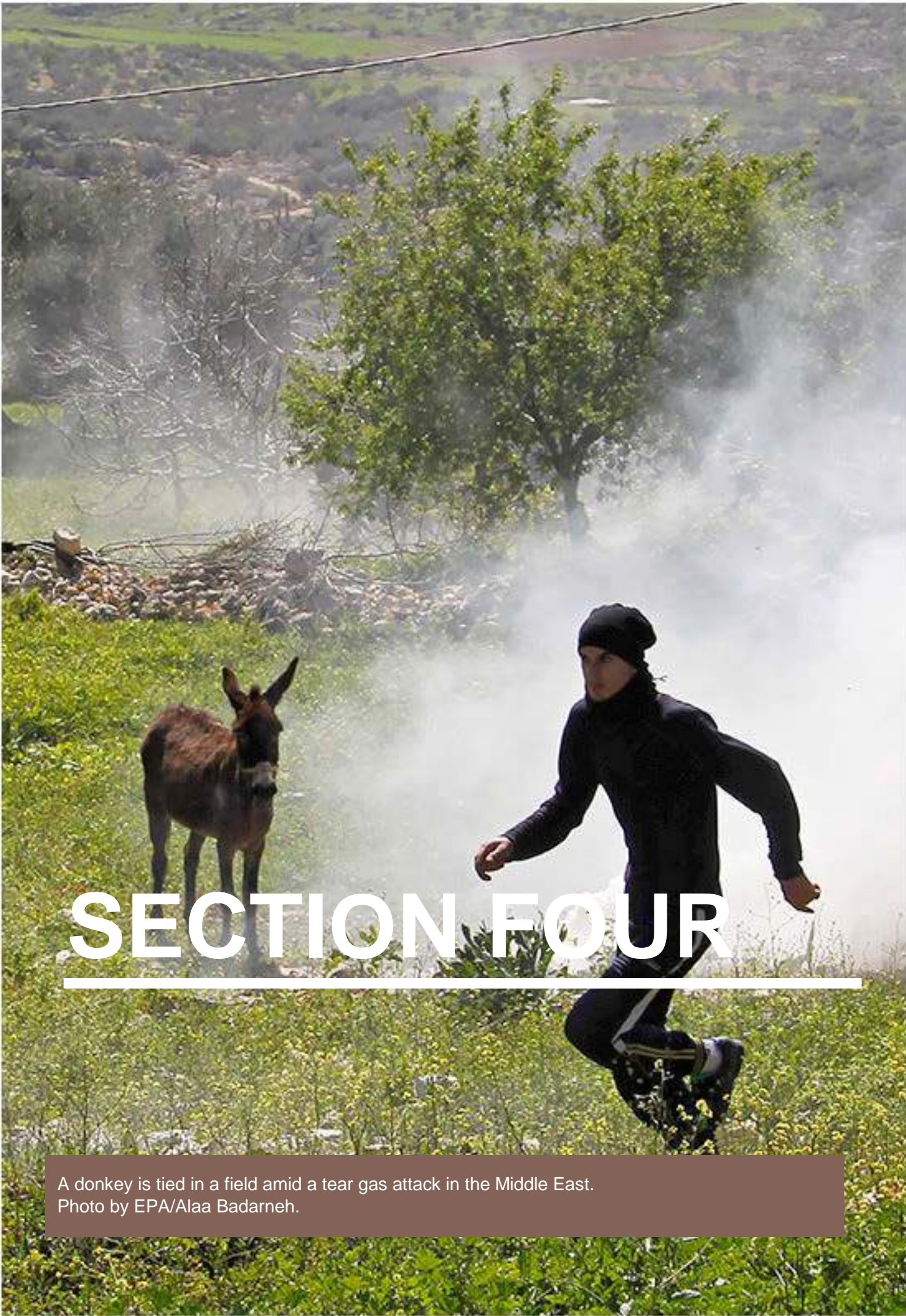


A donkey that was tortured and hanged in Mtein village, Lebanon, in December 2014. Photo supplied by Animals Lebanon.



Burnie was set alight after he strayed onto private land in Immaten, Israel. Photo supplied by SHADH.





# SECTION FOUR

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A donkey is tied in a field amid a tear gas attack in the Middle East.  
Photo by EPA/Alaa Badarneh.

## WOUNDS OF WAR

In December 2010, what has been called the Arab Spring led to unrest in various countries across the region, a situation which continues today. The impact on these countries' economies and resources, especially fuel, water, and electricity, has been substantial. As a result, donkeys are being increasingly used to fill the gaps.

In Gaza City, where municipal garbage vans are out of circulation to save fuel, donkey-drawn carts have been put into service to collect garbage or war debris. One such donkey-cart owner, Maisera Khouli, is able to sell three or four loads every day, each for about 80 pence. "With food for the donkey costing \$2.50 [£1.6] a day, there's little left over," he tells an Associated Press reporter in a June 2015 article.<sup>31</sup> Similarly in late 2013, 430 horse and donkey-drawn carts were called into action to collect 1,700 tons of rubbish in the city every day.<sup>32</sup> "Donkey breeders and solar panel dealers are the only ones making any money at the moment," Salim, a resident of Sana'a, Yemen, tells CounterPunch website, referring to the fact that most of the country has been without gasoline and electricity since early 2015. "We are back to using donkeys to move supplies."<sup>33</sup>

As mentioned in Section 1, donkeys were also being used in early 2015 by the World Health Organization to deliver vital aid in Yemen's western province of Hodeidah. "It is a flat and rural governorate so it makes sense to use donkeys," says Salah al-Homaidi, the executive manager of the National Center for Freedoms and Development, in an article published by Middle East Eye. "It is sad though, seeing people use donkeys to transport wheat, rice, and sugar from the market to their houses. We've gone back a century."<sup>34</sup>

The turmoil has also resulted in a drastic decline in tourism. Egypt, for instance, saw a 41% drop in tourism revenues in 2013 as compared to the previous year.<sup>35</sup> "It has meant a lack of income across the board, which means less is spent on things like feed, housing, new harness or maintaining carts, etc.," says Jill Barton of Egypt Equine Aid. In mid-2013, a number of animal welfare organisations, including ESPWWA, Humane Society International, Egyptian Society of Animal Friends and SPANA stepped in to provide emergency aid to starving equines and camels. Over a four-week period in July and August they fed and tended to 1,857 horses and donkeys and 94 camels.<sup>36</sup>

In Saqqara, guide Adel Abdel Hadi has had few clients coming to visit the Djoser step pyramid since the 2011 uprising. Speaking of his donkey to a Middle East Online reporter, he says with sadness: "If I eat, he eats. If I don't eat, neither does he".<sup>37</sup>

Angela Robinson, UK Managing Trustee, Animal Welfare of Luxor (AWOL), adds that even donkeys not directly involved in the tourism industry have been affected. "[The donkeys we treat] work on the land and supply local produce to the hotel kitchens and to the markets which provide for the self-catering visitors. They are also used in the building industry, which is now stagnant due to the lack of demand for hotel builds and refurbishment. The locals are extremely poor, many of the men have left their families to find work in the Red Sea area so the animals and the people have suffered immensely," she says, adding that the downturn in tourism has also meant that there are no

longer foreign visitors who would otherwise see the poor state of the animals and then return home wanting to help.

In some regions of conflict, donkeys have also become a means for transporting weapons. In Iraq, for instance, the ISIS organisation has become “heavily dependent” on donkeys to transport weapons, gear and explosives between the groves of north Muqadiyah villages, according to a local source in an interview to IraqiNews.com.

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### **CASE STUDY 3: WAR'S PSYCHOLOGICAL TOLL**

Blogger Omar Ghraieb writes of a hard-hitting exchange with a little boy in Gaza recently, which shines a light on how war affects humans, animals and the relationship between them.

“Yesterday I asked a little boy about the reason behind his torture to a helpless injured black puppy in the street. I thought the boy was 13–15 years old but later found out that he was younger, but sounded and looked older. He looked at the sky and had no direct answer for me. When I pushed for an answer he started laughing and being sarcastic but when I pushed some more and acted serious, he just looked down. He kept playing with a rock by passing it between his hands until he answered me back with a question: ‘What else do you expect from me? I see people dying every day here in Palestine; animals are killed too, so why should I care? Why can’t I just do like everyone else and torture that dog? So what if he dies? Who cares? Why isn’t his mother protecting him?’

“The questions never ended... ‘I saw my cousin, his wife, and all of his kids and neighbours die in 2009, so why should I care about a lousy animal? People die and you care about your damn dog? I don’t care if he dies right then and there’. He was very angry and decided to leave, running in the opposite direction.”<sup>38</sup>

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## WELFARE IN CONFLICT ZONES

Apart from the commonly seen forms of suffering mentioned in Section 3, donkeys and mules, like all animals, fall victim to various additional consequences unique to regions of war and civil unrest.

**Collateral damage:** as with war's human casualties, donkeys and mules too are killed or wounded by bombs and gunfire, whether through deliberate or unintended actions. In one such incidence, eight donkeys were killed and two badly injured when a UN school in Jabaliya housing hundreds of Palestinian refugees was hit by Israeli tank shells in July 2014.<sup>39</sup> In June 2015, Saudi-led coalition jets in Taiz, Yemen, attacked donkey carts carrying wood to the market, resulting in seven civilian and three donkey deaths (as per photographic evidence). A stray donkey became the target of gunfire when it ventured into an ISIS stronghold northeast of Baquba, Iraq. The militants mistook him for a 'surprise attack' and opened fire for thirty minutes. A newspaper source said about the aftermath of the attack: "Militants of ISIS found the stray donkey after sweeping the agricultural orchards near the defensive lines; its body was torn with dozens of bullets".<sup>40</sup>

Direct impact aside, animals caught in war zones are also obliquely affected, mainly by being cut off from food or water. In a reply to a Facebook post by Pegasus in August 2014, a woman named Rotem May narrates the suffering that her boyfriend, a soldier, witnessed in Gaza during the war [date unknown]. "He told me that he saw lots of horses and donkeys out there. Some of them were tied and suffered from the noises of the bombs and mortars. My boyfriend and his 'brothers in arms' helped those horses and donkeys by untying them and of course they gave those animals food and something to drink." Photos uploaded on Twitter on July 28, 2015 by Dirêj Nûrhaq show Kurdish Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (YPG) soldiers offering water to an emaciated donkey standing amidst the rubble of a building in the newly liberated Syrian neighbourhood of Haseki. According to the post, the animal had probably been without water for more than 20 days.<sup>41</sup>

**Improvised explosives:** donkeys have been used in war zones for some years as improvised explosive devices, and the trend continues. In May of 2010, for example, a Syrian-backed militant group in the Gaza Strip blew up a donkey cart laden with 200 kilograms of explosives close to the border with Israel. The animal was killed in the blast, but no human injuries or damage were reported. In July 2014, Hamas militants attempted to attack Israeli troops in Gaza in a similar manner. IDF forces operating in the Rafah area near the Gaza-Egypt border saw the donkey suspiciously approaching their position and opened fire at it, causing the explosives to detonate.<sup>42</sup>

**Political protests:** sadly, donkeys are used to carry messages of mockery in political demonstrations; for example, painted with flags of the opposition or have plaques with messages of protest hung around their necks. One such donkey is Jordy, a rescue at SHADH, who was painted with the Israeli flag and used in a Palestinian demonstration; his ears and tails were then chopped off. In Syria in 2011, after a statue of former president Hafez al-Assad in President's Square was dismantled by the government, a man put his donkey on the pedestal

and crowds gathered around it, laughing, and clapping mockingly. According to local residents, the donkey was shot by security forces a few days later.<sup>43</sup>

Other instances include Israeli squatters in Gaza and Syrian rebels killing or maiming donkeys belonging to the opposition to send across a message, while the IDF is reported to have arrested or detained donkeys to hassle owners.

In the Roboski and Uludere villages on the Turkish side of the Turkey-Iraq border, where cross-border movement of goods is common, scores of mules used by villagers to smuggle goods into Iraq have in recent months become accessories to what is being seen as a show of political strength. In January 2015, 97 mules were killed in Hakkari by a court order since they were considered to pose a health risk. Kurdish political leader Semdinli-Derecik told a reporter that he also witnessed mules being killed on December 25, 2014, this time by the order of a prosecutor, adding that at times the mules were shot when there were people riding them. Soldiers also killed eight mules on March 23, 2015 and in another instance, six mules died when they ran off a cliff after being scared by the gunfire.<sup>44</sup>

**Effects of forced displacement:** the mass movement of families out of conflict regions results in forced displacement for their donkeys, who are used to carry people and entire household goods across long distances. As with people, migration can result in stress and vulnerability to injuries, and may cut them off from veterinary care. Violence against animals as a result of forced migration is “costly, intersectional and complex,” according to Piers Beirne and Caitlin Kely-Huber in *Forced Migration Review*. They write: “Most of the animals that migrate with displaced peoples are considered as subsistence and/or work animals. Often carrying people or laden with the personal belongings of displaced people, these animals can develop injuries from the weight of and prolonged friction from their cargo. Furthermore, they often have inadequate access to food and, especially in arid climates, to water. Consequently, many animals die from exertion or deprivation during migration”.<sup>45</sup> Dr Saed of KOARP points out that donkeys brought in to Kurdistan by thousands of refugees from Mosul and Sinjar are in need of crucial veterinary assistance.

**Smuggling:** donkeys and mules are used to smuggle arms in Egypt and Iraq; alcohol in Iran; cigarettes and fuel on the Turkey-Iraq border; and narcotics from Jizan in Saudi Arabia over the Yemen border. It can be a dangerous business; for instance, the Yemeni donkeys risk getting arrested or killed by border guards. These donkeys, known as 'Chlah' or 'training donkeys', command a large sum of money and are specifically trained for smuggling narcotics. As per a report by Middle East Online: “When arrested, these humans’ companions are thoroughly searched. Those who try to escape are killed outright...Those Chlah who manage to arrive safely go back reloaded with sacks of smuggled flour, which are sold at golden prices in Yemen.”<sup>46</sup>

“Many criminals and smugglers take advantage of war time, when the security apparatus is too busy to pay much attention to their trivial crimes, to get away with their mischief,” Saudi border guard head

Col Ibrahim Shrahili is quoted as telling the Saudi Gazette recently, with reference to smuggling activities on the border with Yemen.<sup>47</sup>

Donkeys have even been used for smuggling news out of Syria to journalists waiting on the Jordan border. In 2011, following political upheaval and consequent clampdown of internet in Syria, the Jordanian town of Ramtha, some 80 kilometres from Amman, “became a virtual switchboard for news coming out of Syria,” as activists risked their lives trying to get video files across.<sup>48</sup>

**Killed for consumption:** war displaces both humans and domestic animals, and in times of humanitarian crises, the latter are at risk of being killed and eaten. A well-publicised example is the rebel-held Yarmouk refugee camp in Damascus, Syria, where food has been in constant short supply. In October 2013, the imam of Yarmouk's largest mosque issued a fatwa allowing people to eat cats, dogs and donkeys trapped in the camp. This was the second such fatwa in Syria, after a similar one was issued in Homs.<sup>49</sup>

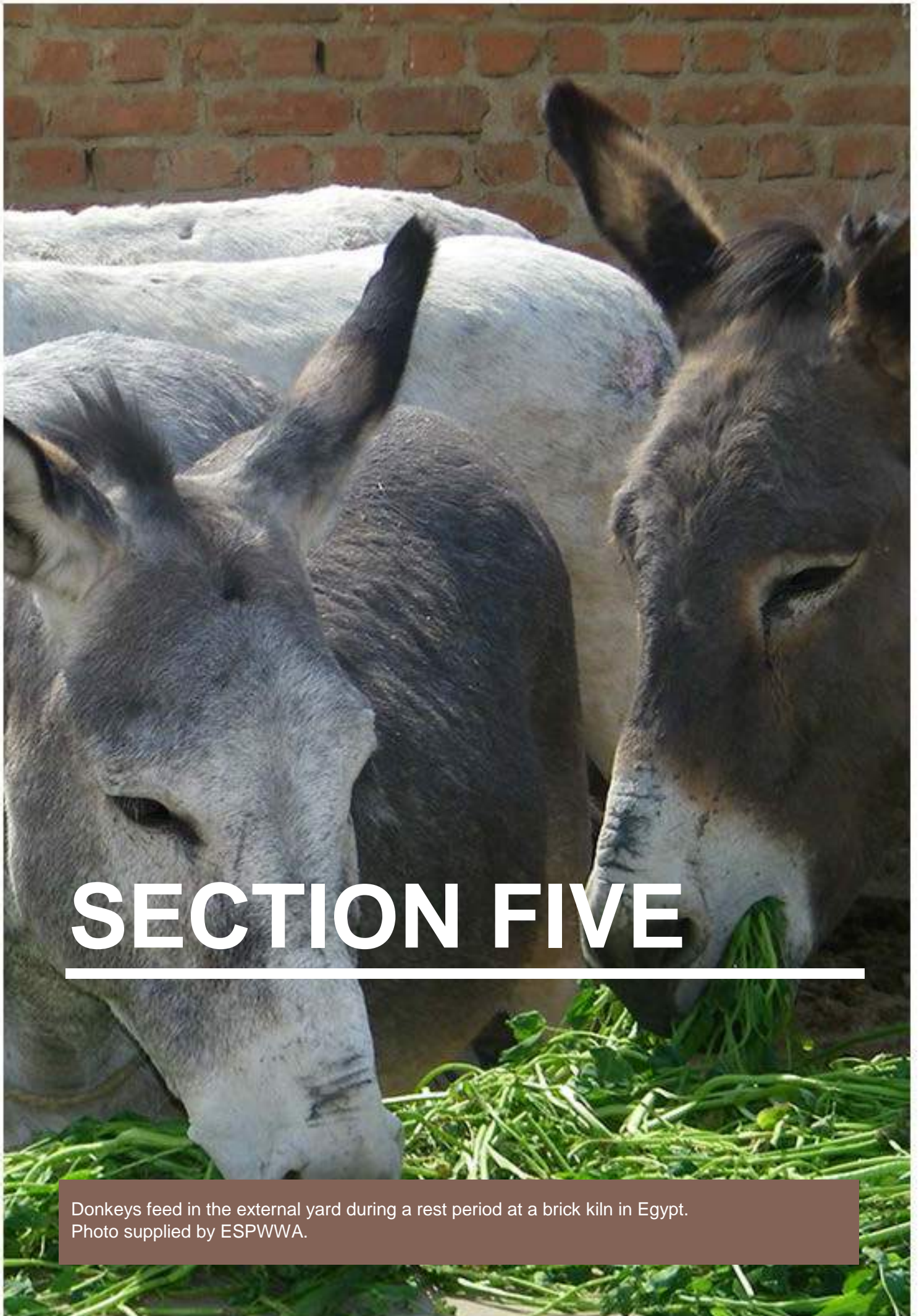
**Executions, target practice, and brutality:** reports from Syria and Israel give evidence of militants using donkeys for gun target practice. A video uploaded on YouTube in June 2013 shows a group of armed gunmen in Syria shooting about ten donkeys and horses one by one, with the camera focusing on the animals as they die.<sup>50</sup>

In 2014, graphic videos emerged that showed Islamic jihadis in Syria slaughtering donkeys for consumption. It has been pointed out by one observer that although killing for meat is common, “what is notable about these videos is the ‘supremacist’ demeanour of the jihadis towards the donkeys — as if the animals are also ‘infidels’ to be treated with contempt and brutality...In one video, ‘Allahu Akbar!’ — a common war-cry by supremacists while ceremoniously beheading ‘infidels’ — is heard while a donkey is being decapitated.”<sup>51</sup>

Elie Chalala suggests that such brutal incidents are a consequence of a “culture of death” and violence in Syria. He gives the example of a widely circulated video from late 2011 to early 2012 (he doesn't link to it but the description matches what one sees in a YouTube video posted on September 15, 2011), which shows 10–12 donkeys being rounded up into a group and then showered with bullets in turn by a group of soldiers.<sup>52</sup> Only one ‘cute’ donkey is shown mercy. The soldiers seem to take pleasure in the event, even posing for photographs before the killing begins, “as if everyone wanted to bear the badge of honor of being a donkey-killer,” says Chalala. He adds: “Even though the audio is not entirely clear, I could hear them using the term ‘execution’ in Arabic or ‘A'daam’. Immediately I thought, since when are donkeys executed? Isn't this language a product of the dominant culture of death?”<sup>53</sup>

This culture of death doesn't appear to be limited in scope to Syria, however. Another recent video identifies two members of Iraqi militia torturing a young donkey by repeatedly shoving it against a wall and flipping it over their shoulder and onto the ground on its back. Several times when the donkey is unable to get up, either because of shock or injury or both, he is beaten with a metal stick and kicked repeatedly. The 3.49-minute video ends with the animal being viciously kicked on its flank.<sup>54</sup>





# SECTION FIVE

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Donkeys feed in the external yard during a rest period at a brick kiln in Egypt.  
Photo supplied by ESPWWA.

## CHANGING ATTITUDES, ONE STEP AT A TIME

Amidst the bleakness and suffering that define the lives of thousands of working donkeys in the Middle East, the hard work of various animal welfare charities has lit a flicker of hope by facilitating a gradual change in people's attitudes. Table 2 on Page 36 lists some of the many organisations surveyed by The Donkey Sanctuary during the course of this research, who are working to make a difference in these difficult circumstances.

The Donkey Sanctuary's major partner in Egypt, The Egyptian Society for the Protection and Welfare of Working Animals (ESPWWA), established in 2002, works with local people who rely on donkeys in villages, brick kilns and other areas to raise awareness of donkey welfare and improve the situations in which donkeys live and work. To do this, ESPWWA is working with a variety of stakeholders including government vets, school children, harness makers, farriers and donkey barbers to improve their access to training and skills development. Over the years, progress has been made towards creating sustainable welfare improvements in these communities. In June this year, for instance, donkey-themed festivities were organised at a village in Beni Suef Governate. After a day of activities that featured a one-act play promoting compassion towards donkeys and a donkey welfare competition, villagers were overheard discussing welfare assessment with great enthusiasm and emphasising the important role donkeys play in Egyptian society.

Continuing in Egypt, Barton reports that she has noticed a change in mindset towards preventive treatment and care since Egypt Equine Aid started operating in July last year. She says: "Owners will now bring animals to us rather than keep them working even though they are lame. They are also keen to have their donkeys wormed, their feet trimmed, and given fly preventions. We have also noticed owners learn a better way to handle their donkeys when they see them respond well to us treating them with kindness." Amina Abaza notes that people on the street have begun speaking up if they see an equine owner mistreating his animal.

Kim Taylor and Angela Robinson have seen a similar positive change since ACE and AWOL respectively began work in Luxor. "We have been educating school children, which has changed some mindsets regarding animal cruelty. We have encouraged poor owners to regularly wash and maintain the donkey, creating positive regular habits. We see owners now rushing immediately to bring their animals to our hospital as soon as a problem arises rather than waiting for 'God' to fix the problem or for a travelling vet to visit them," says Taylor. Robinson adds, "It used to be commonplace to see dead donkeys on the side of the road and although this is still sometimes the case, it is less frequent than a few years ago. Donkeys are still considered a working utensil but there does seem to be a little more understanding of the need to treat animals with more care, if only to keep them healthy enough to work."

In her 2014 interview with the Daily Mail, Fensom mentions that people in Israel have started leaving money in their collection boxes, a "huge change" from when they started. And just by treating both people and animals kindly, she finds herself increasingly encountering small acts of appreciation. "In Bethlehem, a man came

up and started gesturing to his little boy who was only four or five. Then he opened a locket which was around his child's neck and there was a picture of me from one of our educational leaflets. Through a translator he said that he believed that because I cared about the animals, I must care about children too...Because they are used to such hatred, when they see you doing something good for them they want to give back.”<sup>55</sup>

Mier believes that what welfare organisations such as Animals Lebanon have done is give animal lovers who were otherwise acting alone a sense of confidence and legitimacy about their work. “When Animals Lebanon was founded people would laugh at or put us down, and people who cared about animals were seen as being extreme or silly,” he says. “There is certainly a significant increase in animal welfare in the last five or ten years — more animal welfare clubs and groups formed daily or weekly media coverage, and individual people working to improve animal welfare.”

As an example of his organisation's impact, he mentions a caricature referring to Animal Lebanon's work that appeared in a newspaper. The background text states that the Council of Ministers has approved a new animal protection and welfare law and the donkey is telling a poor, downtrodden man an Arabic phrase that roughly translates to 'hopefully you next'. “It is basically announcing that animals have welfare or legal protection but people do not,” Mier says. “When the media starts to do caricatures about our work, I guess people are paying attention.”

Table 2: An Overview of Charities Surveyed

ORGANISATION	SCOPE OF ACTIVITIES
The Egyptian Society for the Protection and Welfare of Working Animals (ESPWWA)	<p>Country of work: Egypt.</p> <p>The Donkey Sanctuary's partner was founded in 2002 and through its base in Giza, runs mobile clinics, conducts community education programmes and does advocacy work.</p> <p><a href="https://m.facebook.com/SPWDME">m.facebook.com/SPWDME</a></p>
The Brooke	<p>Country of work: Egypt and Jordan.</p> <p>Founded in 1934 in Cairo as a hospital for ex-war horses, it today reaches 200 communities in seven regions: Cairo, Luxor, Aswan, Edfu, Alexandria, Mersa Matruh and the Nile Delta—through mobile clinics, veterinary services, skills training, welfare assessments and research.</p> <p>In Petra, Jordan since 1988, it is currently working along with the Petra Development and Tourism Regional Authority for community work in Um Sayhoun and driving the Care for Petra campaign to educate tourists about working equines.</p> <p><a href="http://www.thebrooke.org">www.thebrooke.org</a></p>
Al Bahya Sanctuary	<p>Country of work: UAE.</p> <p>Started in 2011, it's an Emirati owned private farm in Abu Dhabi that provides a sanctuary to various animals, among them 2 ponies and 5 rescue donkeys.</p> <p><a href="https://www.facebook.com/BahyaSanctuary">www.facebook.com/BahyaSanctuary</a></p>
Animal Care in Egypt (ACE)	<p>Country of work: Egypt.</p> <p>Founded in 2000, it's a working veterinary hospital in Luxor with a walk-in clinic, a hospital to perform crucial surgeries and 25 stables. It also has a dedicated classroom to impart humane education to more than 150 different school children each week.</p> <p><a href="http://www.ace-egypt.org.uk">www.ace-egypt.org.uk</a></p>
Animals Lebanon	<p>Country of work: Lebanon.</p> <p>Set up in 2008, the charity rescues companion animals and endangered captive wildlife. It has also drafted a comprehensive national law for animal protection and legislation and is working with the government to get it enacted.</p> <p><a href="http://www.animalslebanon.org">www.animalslebanon.org</a></p>
Animal Welfare of Luxor (AWOL)	<p>Country of work: Egypt.</p> <p>Founded in 2007 and worked as a mobile veterinary unit till 2012. In 2013 AWOL opened a purpose-built medical centre on the Nile's west bank to provide free veterinary treatment to all animals in need, including donkeys.</p> <p><a href="http://www.awol-egypt.org">www.awol-egypt.org</a></p>

ORGANISATION	SCOPE OF ACTIVITIES
Animal Welfare Project Umm al Qawain	<p>Country of work: UAE.</p> <p>A voluntary organisation that feeds, helps and rescues stray and abandoned donkeys, dogs, cats and camels in the Umm al Qawain emirate. It was recently awarded land to build a sanctuary.</p> <p><a href="http://animalwelfareprojectuaq.blogspot.co.uk">animalwelfareprojectuaq.blogspot.co.uk</a></p>
Concern for Helping Animals in Israel (CHAI)	<p>Country of work: Israel.</p> <p>Started in 1984, CHAI, along with its sister organisation Hakol Chai, helps animals in Israel through legislation, education, and direct veterinary support. It has also designed an extensive humane education curriculum for schools and initiated an innovative humane education program in Arab schools. In the Negev region, Hakol Chai runs the Save the Donkeys project to provide medical care to working donkeys.</p> <p><a href="http://www.chai-online.org">www.chai-online.org</a></p>
Egypt Equine Aid	<p>Country of work: Egypt.</p> <p>Founded in 2014, it works mostly in the Giza area providing veterinary help through static or mobile clinics in Abu Sier and Nazlet El Samman. The charity aims to eventually build a teaching hospital.</p> <p><a href="http://www.facebook.com/eea.egypt">www.facebook.com/eea.egypt</a></p>
Four Paws	<p>Country of work: Jordan.</p> <p>Founded in 1988 in Austria, Four Paws recently launched a project to improve the health and working conditions of equines, primarily horses, in Petra, along with partner organisation the Princess Alia Foundation and the Petra Development and Tourism Regional Authority.</p> <p><a href="http://www.vier-pfoten.org/en">www.vier-pfoten.org/en</a></p>
Kurdistan Organisation of Animal Rights Protection (KOARP)	<p>Country of work: Iraq.</p> <p>Established in 2009 in Duhok, it provides veterinary help to stray or abandoned animals in Duhok, Erbil, Sulaimia and Kirkok and also runs an education programme for school children. KOARP is working with the government to get an animal rights law approved.</p> <p><a href="http://Koarp.org">Koarp.org</a></p>
Pegasus	<p>Country of work: Israel.</p> <p>Founded in 2007 with support from the World Society for the Protection of Animals, it works towards the rescue, rehabilitation and re-homing of abused and abandoned horses and donkeys at its Susita sanctuary.</p> <p><a href="http://www.eng.pegasus-israel.org">www.eng.pegasus-israel.org</a></p>
Posh Paws Animal Sanctuary and Petting Farm	<p>Country of work: UAE.</p> <p>It has provided shelter to 6 rescue donkeys at its farm in Dubai since being set up in 2009.</p> <p><a href="http://www.poshpawsdubai.com">www.poshpawsdubai.com</a></p>

ORGANISATION	SCOPE OF ACTIVITIES
Qatar Animal Welfare Society (QAWS)	<p>Country of work: Qatar.</p> <p>Started in 2003, it has a purpose-built shelter in Doha for rescue animals. It currently houses two permanent resident donkeys.</p> <p><a href="http://www.qaws.org">www.qaws.org</a></p>
Society for the Protection of Animal Rights in Egypt (S.P.A.R.E.)	<p>Country of work: Egypt.</p> <p>Founded in 2001 and located in Shobramant, Sakarra, on the outskirts of Cairo, S.P.A.R.E runs dog and cat shelters as well as a donkey sanctuary and operates static and mobile clinics. It has presently stopped sheltering more animals and is instead focusing on awareness and education campaigns and working on stronger animal protection legislation.</p> <p><a href="http://www.sparelives.org">www.sparelives.org</a></p>
Safe Haven for Donkeys in the Holy Land (SHADH)	<p>Country of work: Israel and Palestine.</p> <p>It was set up in 2000 and has a sanctuary near the Israeli town of Netanya, where it currently cares for around 220 rescue donkeys. It also runs regular free veterinary clinics for working donkeys in 20 locations in Palestine.</p> <p><a href="http://www.safehaven4donkeys.org">www.safehaven4donkeys.org</a></p>
Vafa Animal Shelter	<p>Country of work: Iran.</p> <p>Started in 2003 to rescue and shelter injured and homeless animals, primarily dogs, in two locations — Hashtgerd New Town, Alborz Province, and Qazvin city. It has rescued 4 donkeys since 2011 and aims to develop the first clinic and shelter for donkeys and mules in Iran in the future.</p> <p><a href="http://www.vafashelter.com">www.vafashelter.com</a></p>

## PLANNING FOR A KINDER FUTURE

Charities have a long road to travel still when it comes to changing attitudes and misconceptions about animal welfare in the region, and educating children is seen as an important step towards sensitising future generations. Various organisations have dedicated time and resources towards this end. KOARP runs programmes in schools and kindergartens that teach children the importance of loving and respecting animals. CHAI is concentrating on three educational projects at present: preparing a book of more than a hundred lesson plans and fact sheets for all grade levels, a book of lesson plans for Jewish schools, and a programme for Arab schools. “Children are not afraid to show us where animals are kept or to tell us what they have seen,” says Natelson. The organisation had also got permission from schools to have older Bedouin students teach the younger ones, under supervision.

Another way to promote the subject of animal rights in political and public discourse is to showcase the crucial link between animal and human welfare. “I would find it insulting as a citizen if I can't get the most basic needs met while the government is passing a law about animals, so it's not that people are against the [proposed] law, but [a question of] why can this move forward when efforts for people are so often hindered,” Mier explains, referring to the draft animal welfare law Animals Lebanon is trying to push through the parliament. “We try to use phrasing more often to illustrate why animal welfare can improve human welfare.”

However, limited resources are a major hurdle for almost all charities. In response to The Donkey Sanctuary's questionnaire, animal welfare organisations in the region that are working to rescue donkeys have identified a need for more finances, proper equipment, awareness programmes, and veterinary and farrier services. In Egypt, many reported a lack of veterinary treatments, including first aid. They also reported a need for farrier skills and harness training. In Israel, organisations reported a need for more education in schools and the community, as well as physical resources such as vehicles for mobile clinics, to enable a proactive rather than reactive response to welfare concerns.

Despite these limitations, welfare organisations have plans in place for building upon their current work. Vafa Animal Shelter, which works mostly with stray dogs and cats at present, hopes one day to develop the first clinic and shelter for donkeys and mules in Iran. S.P.A.R.E has stopped sheltering for the moment and plans to continue focusing on community education programmes and working more on sterilisation and a strong animal protection law. Egypt Equine Aid hopes to establish a teaching hospital which, Barton says, “will provide free treatment to equines belonging to poor people and a place where local and foreign vets, vet students, farriers and grooms can come together to train and teach”.

Amidst the frequent reports that cause despair and discouragement, there seems to be reason for cautious hope for donkeys and mules in the Middle East.

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**CASE STUDY 4: CREATIVE ADVOCACY**  
**— “THE MEDITERRANEAN PEACE DONKEY”**  
**PUBLIC ART PROJECT 2015**

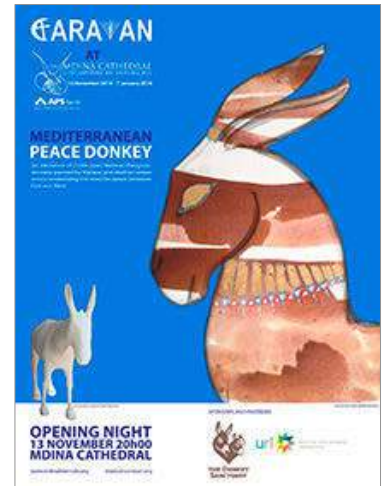
In order to raise awareness about the difficult conditions and challenges facing working donkeys in the Middle East region, and to launch The Donkey Sanctuary’s Middle East Report and our enhanced focus on the plight of donkeys caught up in human conflict, The Donkey Sanctuary is sponsoring a major public art exhibition titled ‘The Mediterranean Peace Donkey’ in November 2015. The exhibition will be showcased at the Mdina Contemporary Art Biennale in Mdina, Malta: a city that historically represents the diversity of culture and the East-West nature of the Mediterranean region.

The project, curated by CARAVAN, an East-West peace-building arts NGO, centres on the exhibition of 21 life-size fibreglass donkeys painted by premier Mediterranean and Maltese artists symbolising the need for peace. The aim through this unique public art exhibition is to bring a special focus on donkeys, raising their status from exploited animals to ones that should be treasured for playing an essential role in local economies.

Additionally, The Donkey Sanctuary is sponsoring Egyptian artist Miriam Hathout to come to Malta to paint one of the fibreglass donkeys for this art initiative. Miriam is known in the Middle East and throughout Europe for her colourful and poignant paintings of donkeys in Egypt.

The Mediterranean Peace Donkey project hopes to capture the imagination of a wide audience around the Mediterranean basin and globally, bringing the plight of working donkeys in the Middle East and North Africa to the fore and also creating opportunities for change through education.

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A poster announcing the launch of the Mediterranean Peace Donkey Project 2015 in Malta. Photo supplied by CARAVAN.

Twin foals feed from their mother in Wardan, Egypt, during a visit by Stephen Blakeway and staff from The Donkey Sanctuary partner ESPWWA.





## AFTERWORD

The Donkey Sanctuary commissioned this report on the condition of donkeys in the countries of the Middle East to raise awareness of their continuing importance to people often living in difficult circumstances, but also to highlight the terrible treatment they can receive when caught up in human conflict. As ever throughout history, donkeys in this regard find themselves carrying a message not only about their own situation but about the situation of other animals and of many children and adults similarly affected.

The Donkey Sanctuary plans to follow up this report with a networking meeting to be held in the region attended by those already involved in donkey welfare work and others who would like to help make a difference. The aim of the meeting will be to help develop small projects across the region, wherever possible, that help donkeys and people — including through donkey-assisted therapy for children and adults — that shine some light and help to bring some healing.



A painting by Egyptian artist Miriam Hathout.



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A painting of a donkey with her foal by Miriam Hathout.

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The Donkey Sanctuary was founded by Dr Elisabeth Svendsen MBE in 1969.

The Donkey Sanctuary (registered charity number 264818) and its sole corporate trustee, The Donkey Sanctuary Trustee Limited (Company number 07328588) both have their registered office at Slade House Farm, Sidmouth, EX10 0NU. Linked charities: The Elisabeth Svendsen Trust for Children and Donkeys (EST); The International Donkey Protection Trust (IDPT).

OUR JOURNEY CONTINUES...



[www.thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk](http://www.thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk)