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Donkey, *Equus asinus*, belongs to the genus *Equus* within the order *Perissodactyla* in the equine family.

Recent studies at the University of Grenoble, showed that the domestic donkey has two origins: one in Africa and one in Asia. It seems that domestication started about 5.000 years ago and that the original animals in Africa came from Namibia. The spread of donkeys was mainly due to merchants, especially Hebrew, that brought the animal around Northern Africa.

There were many different breeds, in different Continents, but some of these went extinct over the centuries. There are still some wild breeds in their original areas:

- *Equus africanus somalicus*
- *Equus hemionus onager*
- *Equus hemionus kulan*
- *Equus hemionus khur*
- *Equus hemionus kiang*

Donkey: an ancient asset for today and tomorrow

- ***Equus hemionus lueus***

Donkey is an animal that has been gradually introduced in all the continents of the world where the climate allowed breeding. The African continent has been breeding donkeys for hundred of years. In many countries they are still raised to be used in agriculture and transportation. In Americas, donkeys were introduced only in the nineteenth century and they immediately became widely used in agriculture and transportation as well.

In Asia and Oceania donkeys have been often used for the meat production and they still are.

After the decline that has rushed in XX century especially in highly industrialized countries, today we are witnessing a renewed interest about this animal. The main reasons is [milk](#) but donkeys are now often kept as pets.

Here some basic information about breeding donkeys :

- They can be bred in groups of 20-30 animals, in semi-wild state, inside large fenced areas that should be equipped with night shelters. The sustainable animal load, in grazing areas, changes depending on the environment (grass, grass-grazing, wood). Recent studies claim that a good quality pasture can support loads up to 4-6 adult per hectare.
- Donkey is a herbivorous mono gastric, whose digestive system has the capacity of about 120 liters. The stomach is quite small(8-10 liters) while the gastrointestinal tract measures 18-20times the length of the entire body, the cecum, where the digestion of cellulose takes place, is the most capable area.

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The donkey's feed needs to change according to age, race, and the work done. [The daily ratio should have adequate quantities of:](#)

- **Protein** contained in the grass, grain, hay, straw
- **Lipids:** mainly available in pasture and hay grasses
- **Carbohydrates:** tubers, roots, grains such as barley and oats
- **Minerals:** Calcium, Phosphorus, Sodium, Potassium
- **Vitamins**
- [Donkeys become sexually active very early.](#) Reproductive behavior in males is shown as early as between 18 months and 2 years from birth, while females between 15 and 18 months. Breeding is still conducted mainly through natural mating. Males are sexually active all year round, but females have a periodic appearance of heats that typically occur in early spring throughout the summer. Pregnancy lasts on average 12 months.
- Milking, for human consumption, can be conducted manually. The average quantity of milk obtained at each milking session may vary from 300 to 750 ml with peaks of 1500 ml, depending on the size of the animal and the stage of lactation. The mean daily production is about 2-3 liters depending on the number of milking sessions per day. Literature suggests to perform 2 milking sessions (morning and evening) per day after having separated the mother from the foal for about 3-5 hours.