



## Donkey Shelter Project

### Introduction

The donkey (*Equus asinus*) is a medium sized equine, closely linked to the identity of this region.

In the Portuguese traditional rural economy, of small scale agriculture, with low levels of production and small enclosed properties, farming communities have been dependent on the use of the donkey for their livelihood. These animals used to be the main method of transport, in various agricultural tasks and general beast of burden, as well as being used for the breeding of mules.

However, the growing mechanisation of agriculture and the development of modern methods of transportation deprived the donkeys of their traditional role. Unfortunately, seen as second rate in comparison to the horse, these animals have been ignored by protection policies and these days they are an endangered species in most parts of the country.

The *Saloia* region (the name given to this part of the Western area of Portugal) is renowned for its unique features. The donkey carrying sacks of flour for the miller or transporting the farmer's wife and her fresh produce on her way to the market was once a common sight in the tradition of this region. Today it is part of its heritage, one of the most indisputable symbols of the *Saloia* region.

In fact, the importance that the donkey played in the makeup of the local livelihood is often ignored, and now almost forgotten. Since the times when every single farming family used to possess its donkey, now they are only a distant memory of the past, on the verge of disappearing.

It was in the face of the adversities that donkeys are faced with that the *Association for the Preservation of Donkeys - 'Burricadas'* was founded. *Burricadas* is a non-governmental organisation, created in March 2007, working to protect this rare animal, which aims to preserve the donkey and its traditional role in Portugal, with particular reference to the above mentioned region. Its headquarters are located in the county of Mafra, where the Donkey Shelter '*Abrigo do Jumento*' is also located.

The Donkey Shelter's main aim is to become a rescue centre for some old, abandoned and ill-treated animals, in need of a well-deserved retirement after a long hard working life. Currently the project shelters 15 donkeys, 1 mule and 1 native pony.

In order to finance the running of the shelter, namely paying for the animal's feed, hoof trimming, veterinary care and maintenance of the facilities, *Burricadas* runs a sponsorship scheme, whereby any person interested in supporting the project, but unable to keep one of these animals, may symbolically sponsor one of our donkeys for a year, therefore engaging in the work of the association, ensuring their welfare.

Aiming to promote the activities of the association, as well as raising awareness for the donkey, *Burricadas* conducts a whole series of educational activities with all kinds of public, like guided visits and school visits to shelter, walking trails along the old country paths, birthday parties, seasonal theme initiatives, amongst others.

In the future, we are aiming to develop work in the area of therapy for the disabled using the donkeys, so that these animals will fulfil the noble task of supporting the rehabilitation of children and people with special needs.

## The current facilities



At present, the Shelter is situated in rented facilities that



comprise a large and old stone built stable; a small storage building where feed, bales of hay and various equipment are kept; two wooden field shelters (built by *Burricadas*) and a large paddock with 9.000 m<sup>2</sup> approximately, fenced off by wire fencing and electrical bands. There is no water mains or electricity. Due to the number of animals and the size of the paddock, the animals are fed on appropriate feed and hay, as there is no grazing available.



As a result of the daily use of the place and the expected wear caused by the presence of large animals, the current facilities are showing signs of becoming derelict, in need of urgent repairs.

The main problems are as follows:

- The electric fencing is no longer in working order and the wire fencing is



bent - falling or even fallen in some parts along its length. This could be hazardous to the animal's safety and many could easily force their way out, putting themselves in jeopardy.

- The masonry manger is broken, making feeding time a problem. Some of the animals now don't have their rings and they cannot be tied at feeding time, which means that they wander and eat their neighbours' food.
- There is no running water. Drinking water for the animals has to be bought at high cost from local neighbours, filling a tank by a hose every 5-6 days. This arrangement is also a major difficulty whenever a donkey needs veterinary care and a hose pipe with running water is needed.
- In the Winter, access to the main stable is boggy, with accumulated mud, making the feeding task extremely hard as the wheelbarrow cannot be moved easily. This is also a deterrent to visitors in the Winter months, causing a further drop in donations.
- There are no WC facilities, which is rather an inconvenience, especially with groups of children.
- The surrounding area presents further difficulties to the success of the project; presently there is no parking available for visitors and access is restricted to cars, which prevents school buses to come and unloading lorries a painful task.



Due to the deficient installation but also to the fact that this current place reached its full capacity in terms of the number of animal residents, it is no longer suitable to host the Donkey Shelter.



However, there is a strong possibility of moving to better and bigger facilities. Considering all the repairs that the current facilities urgently need, it would make sense to invest funds in the improvement of these new facilities instead, in order to give the animals a safe, wider and better equipped place to live and visitors, a much pleasant and healthier environment.

Moving to these future facilities is of paramount importance for the survival of the project and its expansion, reaching more animals in need.



### The future facilities



This property comprises a much larger area, approximately 25.000 m<sup>2</sup>, professionally fenced with wire mesh, water from a borehole, electricity and a wooden log cabin. In the inside there is an area reserved for parking and for public circulation, a wide paddock designated for the donkeys and a small paddock to be used as a quarantine area. Access to the place is done by a country lane surfaced with grit.

The foreseen development of the future facilities entails building several



wooden log structures, namely a large stable for the animals with a restricted feed storeroom, 3 or 4 field shelters, a wooden log cabin to function as the public's reception and toilet facilities and a picnic area with a



shelter and several tables and benches.



Unfortunately, due to the present financial situation that Portugal faces; all forms of public support have declined considerably, which put a stop to the completion of the future Shelter.

As a reference, in 2010 there were 157 donkey sponsorships, in 2011 there were 105 and in 2012, so far, we've had 75, a huge drop by comparison to the previous two years. In the present, the Shelter's financial situation is cause for concern, as the income resulting from public donations is barely enough to feed the animals.

Consequently, there are no funds available to carry on the necessary works in turn to move to the new place, improving the donkeys' welfare in every sense.

Realistically, to aid the project and guarantee its continuity, to raise the public interest and support, it is essential to offer various activities and a place where visitors enjoy staying, but before these facilities need to be concluded.

Hence, Donkey Shelter project presents four areas of needs:

- Financial Funds – to build the remaining structures in the future facilities, especially the animal's stable and shelters, as well as installing electric band in the existing fence.
- Veterinary Care – professional care is one of the upmost needs. The majority of the donkeys Shelter are very old animals, with very poor teeth, in need of regular dental care. In the past, the Shelter used the services of a veterinarian specialised in donkeys and teeth, but due to the current situation it is no longer viable to pay the exorbitant costs of his visits. In the meantime, many of the animals dropped in weight this year. Hence, an Equine Dentist is urgent.
- Equipment and vet-medical supplies – like headcollars and fly fringes. Dewormers, anti-bacterial wash, bandages, medication like bute, antibiotics, anti-inflammatory, eye drops, ivomectin are always in the most need.
- Transport – the Shelter does not have a vehicle suitable to transport donkeys. This has been one of the Shelter's handicaps, and as a direct result, over the years, whenever it was necessary to transport a donkey, *Burricadas* always had to resort to a professional transporter and because



of the costs involved, animal rescues have become very expensive. Besides, many donkeys were faced with death, sold to the slaughterhouse by their owners, as we were not able to attend their requests to collect and re-home those animals. A vehicle to transport donkeys would be vital to carry on the mission of rescuing more donkeys, extending our current range of activity.

On behalf of the donkeys, any form of support in any of these areas of need would be most welcome.

Association for the Preservation of Donkeys- *Burricadas*

[www.donkeyshelter.org](http://www.donkeyshelter.org)

[burricadas@sapo.pt](mailto:burricadas@sapo.pt)

Tm. +351.965462296

