

# DONKEY, DOMESTIC

(and asses)

## RANGE:

**Wild:** Onagers, or wild asses, in northwest India. In Africa, there is only one species: African wild asses. There are three wild ass subspecies (from which the domestic donkey is descended.)

1. Nubian wild asses: distributed from Egypt to eastern Sudan (they may be extinct)
2. North African wild asses: found south of the Atlas Mountains (they may also be extinct)
3. Somali wild asses: a few hundred in Somalia and a few thousand in the Danakil desert of Ethiopia.

**Domestic:** Europe, Italy, Greece, South America (Andes of Peru and Chile), North America, Africa and Asia.

## HABITAT:

Semi-desert areas.

## SIZE:

**Wild:** 46-57 inches at the shoulder.

**Domestic:** 49 inches at the shoulder (the Sicilian is somewhat smaller)

## LIFE EXPECTANCY:

**Wild:** 20-25 years.

**Domestic:** 25-30 years

## REPRODUCTION:

Mares are sexually mature after two years, while stallions require five years. When a mare comes in season, she separates from the herd and spends two or three days alone with the stallion. After a twelve month gestation, the mare bears her young in the immediate vicinity of the herd. After four months, foals are weaned; although they will continue to nurse for the first year.

## DIET:

**Wild:** mimosa, thorny brushes and coarse grasses

**Zoo:** dairy chow, horse chow, carrot surprise and timothy.

## BEHAVIOR:

- Live in herds numbering 10-15 animals which are usually led by a cautious old mare.
- During the first months of life, the foal may not drink any water. They usually begin drinking water at about six months of age. Even adults can survive without water for long periods.

## POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Wild: Very little is known about their life habits of wild asses in the wild since their numbers have become so small.
- These unusually shy animals withdraw into remote regions as soon as they detect danger. When a herd recognizes that it is surrounded by enemies, it does not hesitate to ascend nearly vertical walls in escape.
- Since their hooves are very hard and grow quickly, they must be trimmed (in zoo animals) twice a year, even if the ground is hard.
- The wild ass can reach a speed of 30 miles per hour.
- Domestic: The ass was domesticated long before the horse (about 12,000 years ago). Domestication took place in Africa. Hybridization between the Somali and Nubian asses resulted in what later became the domestic donkey.
- Domestic donkeys are not "dumb" as many believe. On the contrary, they can be very clever and very stubborn.

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COMING  
SOON

Order:	<b>Perissodactyla</b>
Family:	<b>Equidae</b>
Genus:	<b>Equus</b>
Species:	<b>asinus</b>

## DONKEY, DOMESTIC (AND ASSES)



- There is probably no other domestic animal that requires so little food in relation to the amount of work it performs. Donkeys are highly resistant to disease, and they work well into old age.
- Donkey milk, which contains more sugar and protein than cow's milk, was once considered valuable for infants.
- Donkey meat is still eaten in China and the Middle East.
- Its skin was used to produce parchment, and at one time donkey parchment was more valuable than any other kind.
- Sicilian donkeys are small. On Pantelleria Island they are the only form of transportation. They are trained to move at a walk so people can easily ride them. These are thought to be the donkeys in the Bible at the time of Christ.

### **STATUS:**

Most African asses have become rare (and to some extent even extinct). The Somali wild asses are under protection and may not be legally hunted, but wandering Bedouins still hunt them.