

ASSESSING FOR **QUALITY OF LIFE**

For the professional.

 28 April 2020  [Read on The Donkey Sanctuary website](#)

Decisions surrounding euthanasia are largely based on an animal still having an acceptable 'quality of life'. A good quality of life is something that we want for all (animals) donkeys, it means a life free from pain and discomfort that is enriching and enjoyable.

According to the model for the five domains a donkey should have a 'life worth living'.

Although it remains the ultimate responsibility of an owner, vets often play a large part in helping owners to come to this difficult decision, through honest discussions about their animal's condition.

Donkeys can be a very challenging species to work with if you are unfamiliar with their unique behaviour. They are naturally stoic animals and often effective in hiding overt signs of pain or illness. This can make it particularly difficult when it comes to deciding if the animal under your care still has a decent quality of life.

END OF LIFE STUDY

The Donkey Sanctuary took part in a three-year study that looked at donkey and horse owner attitudes towards end of life. The study was coordinated by Advancing Equine Scientific Excellence (AESE) and was supported by The Donkey Sanctuary and World Horse Welfare.

The project found that:

- The key influence in owners' end-of-life decisions was their own assessment of quality of life, but many felt they needed more support in doing so

- Owners believe vets play an important role in supporting them when making the decision to euthanase their donkey at the most appropriate time
- Owners and vets often conduct quality of life assessments on an informal basis. However, without recording this information, they cannot refer back to it when monitoring ongoing health conditions
- Not all animals with a poor quality of life are elderly.
- Many equine owners do not have any plans in place for their equines end of life: for further information on this you can refer owners to our factsheet: dealing with death.

QUALITY OF LIFE ASSESSMENT PACK

The Donkey Sanctuary has produced a tool to help guide quality of life assessment in donkeys and to provide support for owners in assessing their donkeys.

The pack contains two pads of assessment forms; one pad for the owner, and one for the vet, farrier or dental technician. The vet pad is self-duplicating so you can give a copy of your assessment to the donkey's owner, which can be used for reference. It is often the case that owners are not able to take in, or remember, conversations had during the visit, especially if some of the messages are upsetting. This gives an opportunity to record those messages so that they can sit and read them when they are ready.

The forms are designed to be used regularly so that changes in health or behaviour can be monitored on an ongoing basis. The pack also contains information that owners will find useful when talking to vets or other animal health care professionals, along with laminated sheets (such as a body condition score chart). These can be purchased from The Donkey Sanctuary's [online shop](#)

It can be challenging in practice when owners have conflicting perceptions of their donkeys health and welfare status, this tool will help provide some objective evidence of decline (or improvement) in a donkeys quality of life.

It is important that both the owner and the vet complete the forms. For owners making observations themselves can make them to feel empowered and realise quality of life issues themselves, so that they are able to make informed decisions when the time comes.

QUALITY OF LIFE ASSESSMENT **RECORD CARD**

Quality of Life Assessment Record Card - Professionals
46.07 KB PDF

Donkey Body Condition Score Chart 71.53 KB PDF

Donkey Weight Estimator Chart 61 KB PDF

MORE **INFORMATION**

If you need clinical and dental veterinary advice contact our [veterinary team](#) or telephone 01395 578222 and ask to be put through to the veterinary department.