

A month with Animal Care in Egypt (ACE), Luxor.

ACE provides free veterinary treatment for over 150 animals per day and employs two full time Egyptian vets and eight lay staff. The shelter is well designed with eight large stables for any animals which require hospitalization: animals which are too ill to work or whose owners refuse to rest them.

There is a large sand area for rolling, and all the animals are showered and offered water. I considered this facility to be the keystone of ACE because it allows people to bring their animals in daily for washing and if a problem is noticed it is dealt with swiftly and discreetly. In this way, the owners are not harassed about the condition of their animals (unless the condition is unacceptable) and more readily seek us for help. The showering facility educates the people as to how to care for their animals and I noticed a huge improvement in the condition of the animals since my last visit in 1999 and compared to those in other areas of Egypt where this facility is not available.

I noticed that the animals routinely presented with the same problems: wounds, lameness or dental problems.

Wounds were usually due to poorly fitted harness, especially in donkeys, and were debrided and dressed with alleyvn. Many owners accepted that the animal must rest until the wound heals, but some animals required hospitalisation. We also padded out tack where necessary and educated the owners about tack care to avoid wound recurrence. The worst items were substituted or modified. A recurring problem was the use of wire as a noseband, which I covered in cotton wool and Vetwrap. It was encouraging that word spread and owners would come in voluntarily to have their noseband covered.

Firing is still common, but is actively being discouraged and education appears to be making advances.

Following an appeal in the press, I brought over many dog collars and leads, which replaced leads fashioned out of tight twine, cable flex or barbed wire.

Lameness was a daily burden, with appalling farriery and lack of understanding about foot and leg care: one horse walked in 9/10 lame and upon examination I removed a 1.5 inch nail from the sole. Often the hind feet are very upright and the hooves left long and many horses present lame due to broken shoes. The shelter employs an excellent farrier and pays for the worst horses to be reshod. One mare had been brought in to shower and I noticed she was lame, having not had her feet filed for 8 months because she was "difficult to handle". The hooves were very irregularly worn and split. I sedated her with Rompun and the farrier filed the feet: the lameness improved greatly. Further rest and a revisit a week later saw a sound, comfortable horse and a happy owner, who will be quicker to ask for help next time.

Trotting and cantering on the roads was actively discouraged and owners were taught when to rest the horse and cold hose the legs if needed.

Dental problems were also a great concern to me and an area in which we could make huge advances rapidly. Many animals presented unable to eat and losing condition and I noted that all, without exception, had huge enamel points, with varying amounts of cheek and tongue damage. In some cases, the problem was so chronic that the animals were now too thin to work and I was forced to euthanase one horse whose condition was unacceptable. The shelter only has one unused large gag and a poor rasp, which can be used on horses but not donkeys. I am actively fundraising to purchase a gag and rasp set, and have taught the basics of rasping to the staff who are now competent and will hold a rasping clinic once a week. In this way, the animals will present sooner and need not starve to death.

The Egyptian view of euthanasia provides a barrier to improving welfare; the belief is it is better for the animal to die than be euthanased. However, if the animal cannot work it will not be fed and will die of starvation. ACE attempts to overcome this by paying a strictly fixed nominal purchase fee (LE100 for a horse and LE40 for a donkey; a new horse costs about LE3000) so that the owner can say he has sold his horse, rather than ordering its euthanasia. This idea has made headway in that there were several people during my visit who came in unasked appropriately requesting euthanasia, which was encouraging. However, this is an area which still offers substantial difficulty.

Education and encouragement is still the way forward and I handed out four rosettes to the best animals (no wounds, good feet, well conditioned, sensible tack). Word travels fast and competition for rosettes encourages good husbandry. I consider it especially important to praise the children and prizes of chocolate makes animal health improve dramatically!

I have made posters for the shelter to detail essential ideas on animal care, and have produced leaflets for tourism groups to distribute regarding care and selection of carriage horses.

I greatly enjoyed my trip and believe I was able to offer a significant contribution, which I will continue to do. The trip was hugely educational both academically and culturally and I plan to revisit next year.

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