

DEALING WITH DEATH/EUTHANASIA

Death and possibly a decision on euthanasia are a sad yet inevitable part of owning a pet. In many instances, for example due to a serious injury or a terminal medical problem, it is clear that euthanasia is the only reasonable course of action. However, in an increasing number of instances, particularly with older donkeys who require nursing, their quality of life gradually deteriorates. It is understandably difficult in such circumstances to decide when euthanasia is the correct option.

Your veterinary surgeon will be able to help and advise, but the final decision has to be taken by the owner. It is often a good policy to discuss all aspects of euthanasia well in advance. By doing this you are not only prepared but also it ensures that the donkey's welfare comes first. A timely and considered decision on euthanasia should be seen as the final responsible act in the care of an animal.

There are two methods of euthanasia: either an overdose of a lethal drug given by intravenous injection or by use of a pistol specifically designed for humane destruction of livestock. Take time to discuss this with your vet, not forgetting that you will need to plan how you will deal with the carcass afterwards.

It is certainly the experience of the Donkey Sanctuary and elsewhere that surviving companions must be allowed time with the body of their deceased friend. Ignoring this advice can lead to significant distress and anxiety amongst any surviving donkeys. They may show persistent wandering and pacing, with braying, as they look for the missing donkey. Some individuals may even become ill if their appetite is depressed by this repetitive behaviour. As a guide, an hour is usually sufficient, or the time it takes for the surviving donkeys to return to their normal calm behaviour and feeding pattern.