

## The Myths and Truths about Donkey Castrations

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Castration of all equine species is simply the removal of the male sexual organs, the testicles. The purpose of this procedure depends upon the owner of the animal. The number one reason for castration is to remove the male sex hormones to control behavior and aggressive tendencies brought on by high levels of testosterone in the blood stream. These aggressive tendencies can cause erratic behavior in a normally calm animal if there is a female in heat near by. This could lead to trauma to the male, female or anyone else who comes between them. Other reasons for castration would be to eliminate unwanted offspring or even the chance for testicular tumors.

The procedure can be performed by multiple techniques depending upon the facilities, time of year, and preference of the veterinarian. This is a common procedure performed in the field as long as both testicles are descended into the scrotum. If the donkey is a cryptorchid (one or both testicles retained in the flank or abdomen), the surgery must be performed in a sterile facility to eliminate possible contaminants from entering the abdominal cavity. This cryptorchid surgery is more costly and runs a greater risk of complications.

Depending on the facilities, this minor surgery can be performed with the animal standing in some type of restraint under sedation and local anesthesia. In most cases these restraints or stocks are not available on the ranch. More commonly the animal is completely anesthetized in a clean area and the procedure is completed while the donkey sleeps. Because most donkeys are only one step removed from the wild, their flight instincts are still very strong. Because of this instinct, they are sometimes more difficult to keep asleep with injectable anesthetics. Knowing this information ahead of time, one can anticipate and be prepared.

The time of year is important because of the fly population. If there are a large number of flies, these insects can lay eggs in the open wound after castration and create an infection with possible maggot infestation. Just remember cooler weather is better.

The greatest myth about castrating a donkey that I hear is that a donkey should never be castrated when greater than two years of age. This is because a mature donkey will bleed to death from the castration site. There is a partial truth to that statement. As mature adults, donkeys either have a greater blood supply to their testicles or at least greater pressure exerted through their testicular arteries. When the castration is performed via the same procedure as in the horse, donkeys tend to bleed excessively more often than horses. The simple way around this problem is to add one more step to the procedure.

Typically in the field, a donkey is anesthetized via injectable anesthetic drugs. The animal is completely asleep, lying on the ground. The scrotal area is disinfected and surgically scrubbed to reduce contaminants. 1 or 2 skin incisions are made to exteriorize the testicles. The testicles are isolated and an emasculator is placed around the spermatic cord and accompanying blood vessels. The emasculator is a unique instrument that cuts on one side, severing the testicle from the spermatic cord and vessels, and crushes the tissue on the body side. In horses, this crush of the blood vessels is sufficient to create an adequate clot so that only minimal bleeding occurs. In the mature donkey, typically this

crush is not sufficient to stop excessive bleeding so an additional step is taken to ligate or tie off the spermatic vessels using absorbable suture prior to removing the emasculator. This second step, if performed correctly, virtually eliminates the worry of excessive blood loss. Once both testicles are removed and ligated, the surgical site is left open to allow drainage of the small amount of blood, which can accumulate. Once the donkey is asleep the procedure should only take approximately 20 minutes.

With careful preparation and advanced knowledge of the donkey anatomy, castration can be performed in the field on all ages without complication.

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*John Roueche is the official Donkey Doctor of the Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue of Acton, CA. Dr. Roueche has performed this technique on numerous donkeys at the rescue ranging in age from 6 months to 18 years. To learn more about the work of the rescue or to receive a copy of this document along with the pictorial accompaniment, please visit our website at [www.donkeyrescue.org](http://www.donkeyrescue.org) or call 661-273-0402.*







