



#PERSPECTIVE

Confessions of a donkey enthusiast

For millennia, donkeys have befriended humans. Traditionally used as load carriers, they still serve as pack animals in parts of Africa, Asia, even Europe and the Americas. This is the story of how a philatelist and animal lover combines his two interests — donkeys and stamps — to create a curious narrative.

A casual Google search started it all. Apparently, the number of people “killed” by donkeys is greater than the number of lives claimed in plane accidents annually!

It is, of course, a myth, like many others, surrounding the donkey. Further investigation showed that there are over 40 million donkeys globally and still a major contributor to

Night’s Dream gave a different feel to the human perception of the animal, and brushing up on mythology to find donkey references took me back to my childhood.

I watched Shrek for the umpteenth time and laughed at the subtle jokes, some of which made sense for the first time. Not that I had any intention of breeding animals, but there I was going through veterinary articles in the pursuit of unravelling all things donkeys!

The donkey population of Bangladesh is perhaps confined to zoos as historically, there was no need for their use in this riverine land but as a simple

by women to finish chores like carrying drinking water.

If we start to compare the lives of donkeys with the lives of horses in the present scenario, one may easily relate to the cruelty that these animals endure.

Often termed “stupid” and “stubborn,” donkeys are in fact, extremely intelligent creatures. Their stubbornness is a misinterpretation of their carefulness, which they nearly always exercise to assess their surrounding environment before making a move. Once they establish a relationship

Mining during the Californian gold rush perhaps could never have happened without the help of donkeys and mules. It was Christopher Columbus who introduced the animal to the Americas during his second voyage, and they had a profound impact in building the local economy. Speaking of mules, it serves as an interesting anecdote that George Washington, the first US president made a handsome living, upon his retirement from politics, by breeding mules!



the rural economy in many countries.

Days and countless hours spent on Wikipedia later, I found myself spiralling down the proverbial rabbit hole!

Amid the COVID-19 lockdown, I started buying books, from nursery rhymes to scholarly works on the social contribution of donkeys; re-reading A Midsummer

animal lover, I was intrigued by the nature of these neglected animals and moved by the plight of donkeys and mules across the world.

Biologically speaking, they are distant cousins of horses and zebras. As early as 4000 BC, donkeys were domesticated in North Africa and Egypt for meat and milk. While horses were tamed for hunting by men, donkeys were predominantly used

with their human custodians, donkeys start behaving like the perfect animal companions.

It is also a little-known fact that donkeys have helped humans conquer hostile territories — from creating habitats in remote islands to moving the mail and other loads across deserts and jungle terrains. Humans probably could never have survived on remote islands like Ascension and Tristan da Cunha had there been no donkeys to help them carry water.

Now, the question may arise, how does philately come into donkey matters? Well, one of the popular ways of collecting stamps is by themes, where one attempts to collect stamps and other postal materials on a chosen subject.

The goal is to narrate a story. Thus, a thematic collection on “lions” not only comprises stamps with the animal in the design but, for instance, also a section on the philanthropic movement, Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF).

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