

## CHAPTER 15

### **A veterinary visit to the Island of Hydra, Greece, October 2010**

Elisa Geskou [Greek Animal Welfare]

On car-free Hydra the equines do all the transportation work and many people depend on them for their livelihoods. So it is especially vital that we should visit Hydra and treat its many working equines, while we use the opportunity to pass on knowledge and skills that allow the owners to go on keeping their animals in good health once the team has left. Elisa Geskou and Aris Vlahakis visited Hydra between 19 and 21 October 2010. The GAWF team was invited by the local welfare group “Hydra’s Ark”, which did all the organising.

During the three days 91 equines were brought to Hydra’s football field. There were 58 mules, 10 donkeys and 23 horses. They all received a veterinary check and had their teeth rasped, and most of them had their feet trimmed as well.

The teeth of 87 equines were rasped in order to remove the sharp edges that injure the cheeks and tongue. 25 animals had hooks, 6 had ramps, and 3 had slightly overgrown teeth. Various animals were found with misplaced and missing teeth, a few with parrot mouths, and tartar was removed from the canines of some of the older animals.

Hooves that don’t wear down naturally, have to be trimmed so that a correct shape is maintained. This means the animal can walk in balance and without pain. This is why 56 equines had their hooves trimmed. Where they are fitted, shoes must be the right size and the nails must be correctly positioned. Four animals were shod, in order to demonstrate the correct way to fit a shoe. Aris removed the shoes of a mule whose feet were in pain because not only were its shoes too small but also some of the nails had been placed inside the white line. He explained to the owner what was wrong.

We were glad to offer treatment to all the animals that we saw during our three days on Hydra, but three cases stood out for us. If the team hadn’t been there at the time, one would certainly have died (a 3 year old mule with impaction colic), another would have been in danger (an aged mule with a subcutaneous infection) and a third one would have become severely lame in the future (a horse with acute laminitis).

The 3 year old mule appeared with colic in the morning of the second day, after having rolled and injured itself during the night because of intense pain. Medicines and fluids were given intravenously over 12 hours of treatment. The equine team remained with the owner and his mule until 22.30 at night, monitoring the situation and administering fluids. Elisa told the owner to call her in the night if the animal was again in distress. Fortunately the fluids worked, and the owner, who was at his mule’s side all night, reported that it had passed faeces and had recovered by the morning. It was a difficult case to deal with, because the small island’s pharmacy could supply neither vein catheters of the right size for horses nor fluids in the quantities we needed. So we improvised, and luckily things worked out.

The old mule was found with subcutaneous emphysema to one side of the head, possibly due to injury, and medicines were given to prevent the infection spreading through its whole system. It was a very lucky animal, as its owner had released it onto the hillside three days before, intending to leave it there to graze over the next months; however he caught it again the day we came, in order to bring it to us for attention to its teeth and feet. Only then did he notice the problem. We are hoping that the treatment will be successful.

Finally, we diagnosed acute laminitis in a horse whose owner had not noticed the condition. He only reported that the horse had seemed reluctant to walk that morning. The horse was overweight – in fact we had assessed the same horse as obese the year before and we had warned the owner not to feed it so much precisely because he was risking laminitis. Although the horse had “fallen” from condition score 5+ last year to 4 this year, it was still overweight, so the laminitis hadn’t been avoided. Treatment was given to the horse, and advice to the owner, who was very interested to learn more about the disease and do whatever possible to save his horse.

Various old animals were found with arthritic hip and carpus joints. One mule was found with opacity in his cornea and was given treatment. One mule was found to be blind in one eye, which the owner had not noticed. One mule had stepped on a nail the morning we arrived. The hole on the frog was cleaned and anti-tetanus serum was administered. A donkey was found with a sialolith in the size of walnut.

Most of the animals were in good body condition, varying from 3 (ideal) to 4 (overweight). However there were some cases of thinner animals, most of them due to dental problems associated with old age.

Many animals were found with gasterophilus fly eggs laid on the hair of their legs and chest. These eggs become fly bots in the equine’s stomach and a wormer is needed to kill them. Some of the owners – including the ones we had given information to last year – worm their animals 1-2 times per year; the ones who don’t, were given information and advice this time.

Markos, the mule that had been bitten by another mule last year, arrived with the injury completely healed. The owner had used the medication we had given him and had successfully been bandaging the wound as we had shown him. There wasn’t even a scar!

(See photo and see what it was like last year at:  
[www.gawf.org.uk/index.php?page=seminars](http://www.gawf.org.uk/index.php?page=seminars) )

One of the owners who had brought us a very thin mule last year whose overgrown tooth we had cut, told us that the mule had now reached an ideal body weight. Unfortunately he had let it onto the mountain and hadn’t been able to catch it and bring it to us to get its picture taken.

The GAWF Equine Project team and Hydra’s Ark are hoping to organise another visit in 2011. All the owners expressed their desire for us to come back.

We would like to thank the Donkey Sanctuary for funding the programme, Hydra’s Ark for organising the visit and for providing our meals. Kerry, Valerie, Jennifer, and Maria, did their best to make us feel at home. We would also like to thank the municipality for offering us accommodation and we hope that they will offer further support for future visits. 325 euros were donated by the owners, which we in turn passed on to Hydra’s Ark.

Also, many thanks to Ed Emery, who came to see us working and made a nice video of our visit in order to promote our work.

A first draft version of the video has been made, and can be viewed here:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJoOoH7ejt8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJoOoH7ejt8).

The Report from the Veterinary Team can be viewed here:

[www.gawf.org.uk/index.php?page=hydra-visit-october-2010](http://www.gawf.org.uk/index.php?page=hydra-visit-october-2010)

**E-mail:** [lisageskou@yahoo.gr](mailto:lisageskou@yahoo.gr)

---