

NATSOP-DON001 NATIONAL STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE: GROUND SHOOTING OF FERAL DONKEYS

Voluntarily adopted by the Vertebrate Pest Committee 2012 with the Invasive Plants and Animals Committee endorsing minor updates September 2017.

BACKGROUND

Feral donkeys (*Equus asinus*) can damage native vegetation, contribute to soil erosion and compete with stock for pasture and water. Control methods include ground shooting and shooting from helicopters, sometimes aided by the use of a Judas animal, and also exclusion fencing.

Ground shooting is best suited to accessible and relatively flat areas where there are low numbers of problem donkeys. It is also used for euthanasia of sick or injured donkeys. It involves the shooter approaching a group of donkeys on foot with the intention of culling all the animals in the group. Shooting from a helicopter is considered a more humane control method as mobile wounded animals can be promptly located and killed. It is also a more effective method of quickly reducing feral donkey populations. Refer to [NATSOP-DON002 National Standard Operating Procedure: Aerial shooting of feral donkeys](#).

Shooting can be a humane method of destroying feral donkeys when it is carried out by experienced, skilled shooters; the animal can be clearly seen and is within range; and, the correct firearm, ammunition and shot placement is used.

This National Standard Operating Procedure (NATSOP) is a guide only; it does not replace or override the legislation that applies in the relevant state or territory jurisdiction. The NATSOP should only be used subject to the applicable legal requirements (including OH&S) operating in the relevant jurisdiction.

APPLICATION

- Shooting should only be used in a strategic manner as part of a coordinated program designed to achieve sustained effective control.
- Ground shooting is time consuming and labour intensive, and is therefore not considered an effective method for largescale control.
- Ground shooting as a means of population control is not suitable in inaccessible, wooded or rough terrain where sighting of target animals and accurate shooting is difficult or when wounded animals cannot easily be followed up and killed.
- The optimal period for ground shooting is during dry seasons or droughts when many groups of donkeys are forced to congregate around areas with limited access to water and feed. Shooting during drought reduces the number of donkeys that would otherwise die slowly of hunger or thirst.
- Sporadic shooting from the ground may teach donkeys to avoid certain areas, making overall control difficult.
- Shooting of feral donkeys should only be performed by skilled operators who have the necessary experience with firearms and who hold the appropriate licences and accreditation.
- Storage and transportation of firearms and ammunition must comply with relevant legislative requirements. Manufactured PAPP baits can only be obtained through authorised state government agencies responsible for vertebrate pest control such as Local Land Services in NSW.

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ANIMAL WELFARE CONSIDERATIONS

Impact on target animals

- The humaneness of shooting as a control technique depends almost entirely on the skill and judgement of the shooter. If properly carried out, it can be a humane method of destroying feral donkeys. On the other hand, if inexpertly carried out, shooting can result in wounding which may cause considerable pain and suffering.
- Shooting must be conducted with the appropriate firearms and ammunition and in a manner which aims to cause immediate insensibility and painless death.
- Shooters should not shoot at an animal unless it is clearly visible and they are confident of killing it with a single shot.
- Only head (brain) or chest (heart-lung) shots must be used. Shots to the head are preferred over chest shots as they are more likely to cause instantaneous loss of consciousness. Chest shots do not render the animals instantaneously insensible and are likely to result in a higher incidence of wounding. Shooting at other parts of the body is unacceptable.
- Wounded donkeys must be located and killed as quickly and humanely as possible with a second shot preferably directed to the head. If left, wounded animals can escape and suffer from pain and the disabling effects of the injury.
- Culling programs should be timed to minimise the risk of orphaning dependent foals or causing abortion when females are in late pregnancy.
- If lactating females are shot, efforts should be made to find dependent young and kill them quickly and humanely with a shot to the brain.
- Dogs should not be involved in any phase of donkey culling programs. Donkeys are easily distressed and frightened by dogs and may injure themselves by running into fences and other obstacles.

Impact on non-target animals

- Shooting is relatively target specific and does not usually impact on other species. However, there is always a risk of injuring or killing non-target animals, including livestock, if shots are taken only at movement, colour, shape, or sound. Only shoot at the target animal once it has been positively identified and never shoot over the top of hills or ridges.

HEALTH AND SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

- All participants in the culling program should stand well behind the shooter when an animal is being shot. The line of fire must be chosen to prevent accidents or injury from stray bullets or ricochets.
- Firearm users must strictly observe all relevant safety guidelines relating to firearm ownership, possession and use.
- Firearms must be securely stored in a compartment that meets state legal requirements. Ammunition must be stored in a locked container separate from firearms.

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- Adequate hearing protection should be worn by the shooter and others in the immediate vicinity of the shooter. Repeated exposure to firearm noise can cause irreversible hearing damage.
- Safety glasses are recommended to protect the eyes from gases, metal fragments and other particles.
- Care must be taken when handling feral donkey carcasses as they may carry diseases such as meliodosis, ringworm and mange that can affect humans and other animals. Routinely wash hands and other skin surfaces after handling carcasses. Carcasses can be heavy, so care must be taken when lifting/dragging.

EQUIPMENT REQUIRED

Firearms and ammunition

- Large calibre, high powered, centre-fire, bolt action or semi-automatic rifles should be used, with cartridges of .308 Win performance being minimum. Rifles should be fitted with quality telescopic sights of at least 4 X magnification. Soft-point ammunition with heavily constructed, controlled expansion projectiles eg Winchester Fail Safe, Barnes X, or Nosler Partition. Minimum weight is 150 grain for .308.
- Shotguns are NOT recommended for use on feral donkeys. If they must be used in an emergency situation, rifled slugs are to be used as ammunition and the animal must be no more than 30 m away.
- The accuracy and precision of firearms should be tested against inanimate targets prior to the commencement of any shooting operation.

Other equipment

- lockable firearm box
- lockable ammunition box
- personal protective equipment (hearing and eye protection)
- first aid kit
- appropriate maps identifying access trails and land tenure

PROCEDURES

Notification and warning signs

Neighbour notification and signage requirements may vary from state to state, therefore it is essential that bait users familiarise themselves with the requirements specified by the relevant state/territory authority.

All adjoining landholders must be notified of a baiting program at least 72 hours in advance and a record of the notifications must be kept.

- Donkeys must NOT be shot from a moving vehicle or other moving platform as this can significantly detract from the shooters' accuracy.
- Ensure you are in a firm, safe and stable position before taking a shot.

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- The objective is to fire at the closest range practicable in order to reduce the risk of non-lethal wounding. Accuracy with a single shot is important to achieve an immediate and, therefore, humane death.
- A donkey should only be shot at when:
 - It is stationary and can be clearly seen and recognised
 - It is within the effective range of the firearm and ammunition being used
 - A humane kill is probable. If in doubt, do NOT shoot.
- Ensure there are no other donkeys behind the target animal that may be wounded by the shot passing through the target.
- Although donkeys are large animals, the vital areas targeted for clean killing are small. Shooters should be adequately skilled ie be able to consistently shoot a group of not less than 3 shots within a 10 cm target at 100 m. Shooters should also be able to accurately judge distance, wind direction and speed and have thorough knowledge of the firearm and ammunition being used.
- The shooter must aim either at the head, to destroy the major centres at the back of the brain near the spinal cord or, at the chest, to destroy the heart, lungs and great blood vessels. This can be achieved by one of the following methods (see Diagrams 1, 2 and 3):

Head Shots

Frontal position (front view)

The firearm should be directed at the point of intersection of diagonal lines taken from the base of each ear to the opposite eye. The bullet should be directed horizontally.

The flat facial conformation and the extensive sinus structure of the mature donkey skull can make penetration of the projectile into the brain difficult with this shot. It is therefore more suited to younger animals and instances where there is only a short distance between the shooter and animal.

Temporal position (side view)

The donkey is shot from the side so that the bullet enters the skull midway between the eye and the base of the ear. The bullet should be directed horizontally.

Chest Shot

Side view

The firearm is aimed horizontally at the centre of a line encircling the minimum girth of the animal's chest, immediately behind the forelegs. The shot should be taken slightly behind and below the shoulder at the point immediately behind the elbow.

- Shooting of individuals should stop when the flight response of the herd limits further accurate shooting.
- In family groups containing a mature jack with jennies and foals, the jack should be shot first. This tends to confuse the rest of the family group, slows their retreat and

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increases the chances of culling them. Unweaned foals should be the next targeted to prevent them being separated from the mob and therefore making them difficult to find.

- The target animals in a group should be checked to ensure they are dead before moving on to the next group of animals. Always approach the animal from the dorsal (or spinal) side to prevent injury from kicking legs. Death of shot animals can be confirmed by observing the following:
 - absence of rhythmic, respiratory movements
 - absence of eye protection reflex (corneal reflex) or 'blink'
 - a fixed, glazed expression in the eyes
 - loss of colour in mucous membranes (become mottled and pale without refill after pressure is applied).

If death cannot be verified, a second shot to the head should be taken immediately.

See shooting diagrams on the next page.

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Recommended shot placements — Donkey

Diagram 1

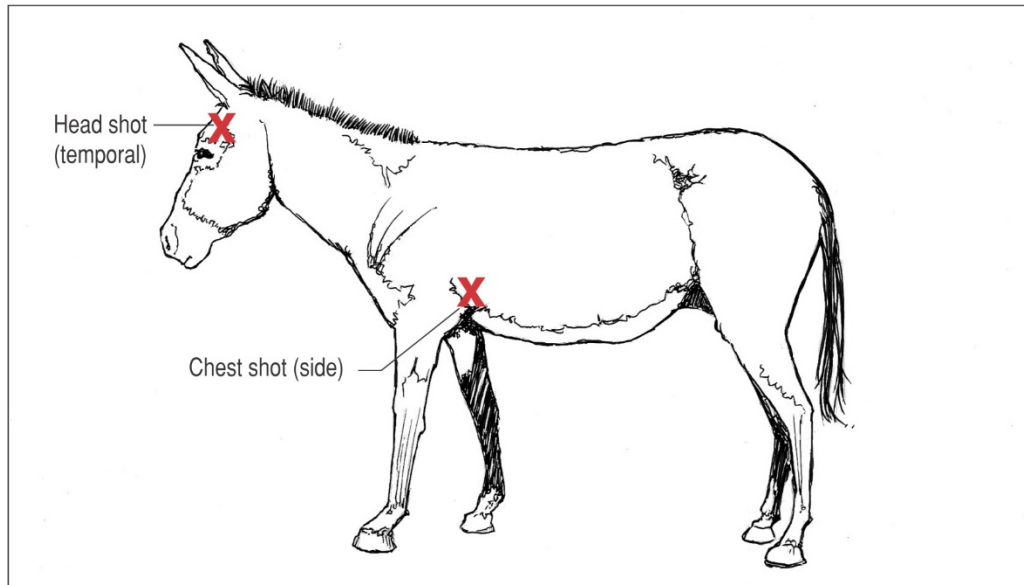


Diagram 2 — Side view (skeleton)

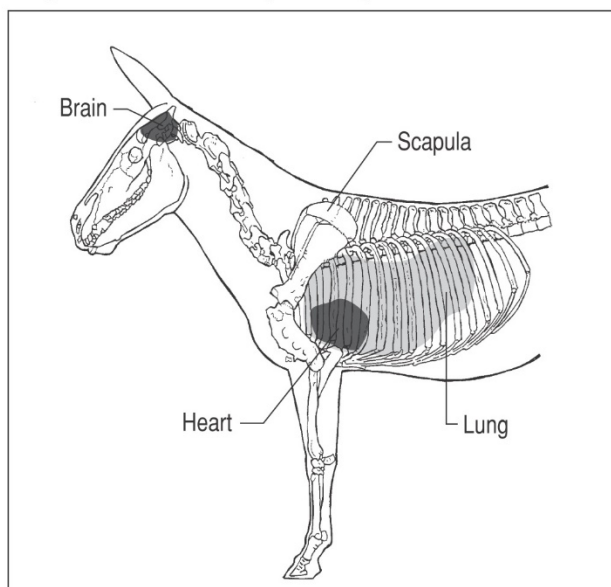
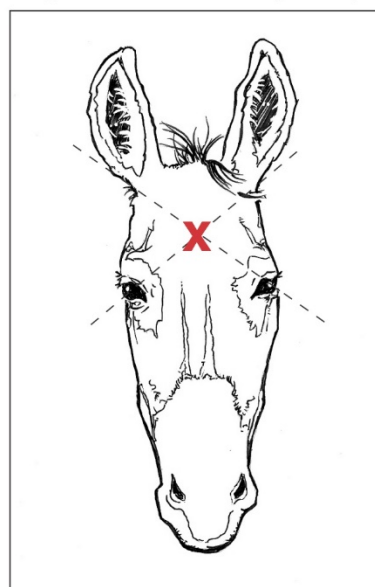


Diagram 3 — Head shot (frontal)



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