

Editorial

Working equids play a fundamental role in human society, strengthening the human livelihoods and improving the resilience capacity of communities through their contribution to economic, environmental, and social capital. Donkeys, horses and mules facilitate access to vital resources including water and health care. Furthermore, their use in traction, cargo and transportation can be regarded as a significant clean and renewable energy resource, providing a wider, systemic contribution to the sustainability of agroforestry-based economies in a wide variety of ecosystems, such as mountain regions.

Despite playing multiple roles, these animals are largely disregarded, predominantly ignored by decision and policy-makers and seemingly by the scientific community given the minimal number of peer-reviewed publications focused on working equids' health and welfare, especially when compared with research focused on sport equids. That said, this Special Issue is centered on gathering the latest studies and findings regarding this matter, as well as human-equid interactions, which will, undoubtedly, impact positively on the future of these animals, cementing their contribution to human health and livelihood.

On the one hand, El-Hage *et al.* (2023) and Duran *et al.* (2023) present the most common health and welfare issues of working ponies and horses visiting veterinary clinics in Indonesia and Chile. Azelhak *et al.* (2023), on the other, highlight the effects of chronic encircling hobbling in donkeys, a specific management practice with important health and welfare consequences still practiced in many regions of the world.

Working practices, including the type of work, equipment selection and working hours can have important effects on equids' health and welfare. Rodrigues *et al.* (2023) provide important details on the effect of different designs of collars used for logging work over heart rate and include the use of technologies such as dynamometers to assess the force exerted by donkeys while working. Secondly, Lagos *et al.* (2023) incorporate thermography and pressure sensors in the assessment of the impact of different loads on the back of mules doing pack work.

In order to establish successful intervention strategies that can improve the welfare of both, equids and humans, it is pivotal to understand the complex interaction between human and equids, considering and including the perceptions of the caretakers. Here, Watson *et al.* (2023) highlight the importance of incorporating a multifaceted approach that allows building human capacity and empowerment of owners and other stakeholders involved with working equids. Finally, Cousquer (2023) provides a new approach on how we can encourage attitudinal shifts that allow the formation of positive human-equid relationships through partnership and dialogue.

We hope you enjoy the Vol. 55 N° 1 Special Issue of *Austral Journal of Veterinary Sciences* and find within this several studies the critical contribution working equids have made through our history developing societies, which leads us to encourage its health and welfare.

Guest Editorial Committee

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Dr. Joao B. Rodrigues – Research and Operational Support Department – The Donkey Sanctuary

Dr. Fiona Cooke – Research and Operational Support Department – The Donkey Sanctuary

Dr. Rebekah Sullivan – Veterinary and Research and Operational Support Department – The Donkey Sanctuary

Dr. Eduardo Santurtun – Latin America and the Caribbean Office – The Donkey Sanctuary.

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM)

Dr. Tamara Tadich – Facultad de Ciencias Veterinarias – Universidad Austral de Chile