

Minutes of the 18th Annual General Meeting of Eseltjiesrus Donkey Sanctuary

held on Wednesday, 13 August 2025 at 6 pm

The meeting was held virtually by means of Zoom

1. Present:

There were 31 people at the Zoom meeting: 24 were members of Eseltjiesrus Donkey Sanctuary and 8 were visitors. A total of 27 members were counted (24 were present on Zoom and 3 participated via email). (A quorum requires at least 20 members, so a quorum was present.)

2. Apologies and Proxy Votes:

Ten apologies and four proxy votes were received.

3. Welcome:

Joe Samuels welcomed everyone to the 18th AGM of Eseltjiesrus Donkey Sanctuary.

4. Minutes of the previous AGM held on 14 August 2024:

The minutes were circulated via the website and were distributed with the agenda for the meeting via email. They were considered by the Board on 6 November 2024, which had acted upon matters arising. The minutes proposed by Mirah Ranchod and seconded by Marinda Weideman were accepted by the meeting.

5. Matters arising from the minutes: No matters arising.

6. Chairperson's Report – presented by Joe Samuels

"Centre of Excellence: Advancing Donkey Care, Welfare, and Sustainability Locally, Nationally, and Internationally"

Friends, supporters, colleagues, and fellow champions of donkey welfare — good evening and thank you for being here.

It is a privilege to address you at our Annual General Meeting. This is not just a statutory gathering — it is our moment, once a year, to reflect honestly on where we have been, to take stock of where we are now, and to look forward together to where we are going.

Acknowledging a Challenging Year: Since our last AGM, Eseltjiesrus Donkey Sanctuary has navigated a period of significant change. We saw the departure of senior staff — a moment that could have shaken the foundation of our work. But the Board, together with committed staff and volunteers, stepped up decisively to stabilise the situation. Our priority was clear: maintain the welfare of our donkeys without compromise, keep the organisation steady, and prepare for the future. I am proud to say we achieved that.

Leadership Renewal: From this challenge came an opportunity to strengthen our leadership. In April this year, we appointed Tony Saddington as Executive Manager. Tony's deep knowledge of our organisation, gained over many years of dedicated service, ensured immediate stability and continuity. In May, we welcomed Stan Davidoff as our new Donkey Care, Welfare and Farm Manager. Many of you will know that Stan had already been stepping into leadership duties during a gap, demonstrating exceptional care for the donkeys and excellent operational skills. His decades of experience in animal welfare and farm management are now part of our core strength.

Mission in Action — Despite Change: Even as leadership changes unfolded, our mission never faltered.

- Our team has continued to provide exemplary care for the donkeys at the Sanctuary, with regular farrier, dental, and veterinary care, improved feed management, and ongoing rehabilitation of our grazing lands.
- We extended our outreach beyond the Sanctuary. Through Donkeys for Africa, we strengthened continental collaboration, advocacy, and the sharing of knowledge on donkey welfare challenges.

- At Onderstepoort Veterinary Faculty, we delivered guest lectures to veterinary students, planting the seeds of understanding and compassion for donkeys in the next generation of animal health professionals.

Financial Stabilisation: I am pleased to report that we have not only stabilised our leadership but also our finances. Through disciplined management, transparent governance, and the continued generosity of our supporters, the Sanctuary's funds are now on a secure footing. We have also adopted an ethical approach to investing that ensures our fundraising and reserves are managed in a way that aligns fully with our values — specifically, that we do not support companies or activities that harm animals, and certainly not donkeys. This ethical investment policy means our financial decisions now reflect the same principles of compassion and care that guide our daily work with the donkeys.

Key Challenges for Donkeys

In South Africa:

- There is limited public awareness of donkey welfare needs.
- Overloading, poor harnessing, and inadequate veterinary care in rural areas.
- Vulnerability to theft and slaughter for the skin trade.

Globally:

- The donkey skin trade is devastating populations, especially in Africa.
- Climate change impacts — droughts, reduced grazing, and water scarcity.
- Habitat loss and growing demand for donkeys in low-income communities, without parallel welfare measures.

These challenges make our work more urgent than ever, and they connect our local mission to a much broader global struggle for the dignity and welfare of donkeys everywhere.

Strategic Context and Direction

Our 2025–2030 Strategic Plan positions EDS to respond with purpose:

- *Advocacy & Outreach* — Expanding partnerships, influencing policy and supporting responsible donkey ownership.
- *Financial Sustainability* — Diversifying income, exploring eco-tourism opportunities and growing our adoption programme.
- *Innovation* — Using appropriate technology to improve donkey care and sanctuary operations.
- *Values in Action* — Embedding equity, diversity and inclusion in every aspect of our work.

Looking Ahead: In the coming year, we will:

- Deepen our role as a Centre of Excellence for donkey welfare in South Africa.
- Expand our educational reach to schools, communities, and professionals.
- Strengthen our volunteer programme to support both animal care and visitor engagement.
- Continue our fundraising drive for essential infrastructure, including the new feed store and multi-purpose facility.

Friends, the past year has challenged us, but it has also demonstrated our resilience. We have stabilised the ship, strengthened our leadership, secured our finances, and kept our mission alive and active. Eseltjesrus remains a place where compassion is not just a value, but a practice — for donkeys, for people, and for the communities we serve — “a donkey heaven” *“From our sanctuary to the world — we’re raising the bar for donkey care, everywhere.”*

7. Executive Manager’s Report – presented by Tony Saddington

Every bray you hear from our paddocks tonight is a thank you for your care, your time, your donations and your belief in what we do. Since last year, we’ve broken adoption records and visitor numbers, welcomed new donkeys into safety, said gentle goodbyes to old friends, and strengthened our team. We’ve faced change head-on and turned it into an opportunity. And none of it would have happened without you. This report covers the work of the Sanctuary since the last AGM in August 2024.

Funding:

A key challenge for EDS is finding the necessary funds to cover annual operational costs, continue developing and improving the facilities, and allocate funds for new donkey welfare projects. We have three main avenues of funding:

Adoptions – in the last financial year, this brought in over R1.9 million (the highest ever). The figures for the period March to June this year show a record amount raised of R633,013, which is the highest total for the four months ever.

Bequests – always an uncertain annual amount, yet they continue to surprise us. Last year saw the largest bequest we have ever received (R10.4 million). This enabled us to build substantial reserves in a portfolio account and to fund key capital projects. On Monday this week, we received a bequest of R252k and know of a further large bequest that will be coming later this year.

Donations and grants – Last year, we received just under R1 million of these, for which we are very grateful.

MyPlanet continues to bring in an average monthly income of R6,000. Woolworths has now taken over MyPlanet, and all MyPlanet customers will need to migrate to the “My difference” platform before the end of 2025. Woolworths will communicate this to all MyPlanet givers over the next few months. The beauty of this scheme is that it costs you nothing, yet earns funds for EDS.

Key changes in management and staffing: As Joe mentioned in his report, we have been through a period of staffing change. At the management level, we saw the departure of three managers: Juanita Lourens, Leonard Jordaan and Lydia Plaatjies. Also, Annemarie van Zijl moved from the Executive Committee to the position of Donkey Ambassador at the beginning of December 2024. She will share news of her new and exciting role with you later in this meeting.

This period also saw the arrival of Stan Davidoff, first as the Donkey Care Officer from November 2024 and now as Donkey Care, Welfare and Farm Manager from May this year. He took over from Juanita Lourens and has enabled us to remain a Centre of Excellence in donkey care and welfare. We welcome him to this role and are confident that he will bring new thinking to our work.

As Joe mentioned, we have weathered the period of change and are now on a firmer footing as we look to the future.

Communications: This was a portfolio held by Annemarie until December last year. It consists of two areas: adopter communications and public awareness.

Adopter communications ensure that both old and new adopters are kept up-to-date about the donkeys they have adopted through six-monthly reports and our quarterly newsletter. Reminders about renewing adoptions also fall under this umbrella.

Public awareness focuses on social media (Facebook and Instagram), our website, newsletter, and event adverts. An essential part of the communication portfolio is ensuring that our contact points are operational seven days a week. Calls or emails concerning donkey welfare are always referred to Stan for his input and response.

We have been very fortunate to have Jackie Wernberg (a professional photographer who moved into McGregor last year and offers her photographic skills to us as a volunteer) working on our social media posts. The fresh new look of the posts has had many spin-offs, including increased visitor numbers to the Sanctuary. The updating and reworking of our website is still a work in progress due to other calls on our time and resources. The website redesign will be driven by Jackie and me in the coming months.

Donkey Reports and Newsletters: During the past year, we have issued the regular six-monthly reports to adopters and produced our quarterly newsletter to adopters and friends of the Sanctuary.

Visitor Centre: The Sanctuary continues to attract large numbers of visitors. On average, we have over 3,200 visitors each year (3,907 in 2024 – the highest in nine years). As of the end of July 2025, the number of visitors (2,887) is the highest for this period (January to July) over the past ten years. As mentioned, one reason is the high standard of the social media posts. In addition, we have had numerous school visits and visitors who have participated in the Fossil Hills Wine Walks, which all culminate at the Sanctuary.

We continue to engage with schools and other groups to arrange visits. Through these, we educate the broader public about the work that donkeys do and raise the status of donkeys more widely.

Donkey Gift Shop: We have removed all non-donkey items from the shop, adjusted prices and increased the stock available, thanks to generous donations of artwork, knitted donkeys and scarves. We are planning to add various new items in the coming months, including mugs and keyrings. We have re-organised the shop, providing a better display of items, including our wines.

Wine sales: We have removed wine sales from the website, as this facility was seldom used, and wine sales and consumption at the Sanctuary remain the mainstay of this trading item. We have increased the price per bottle of our wines to cover the real costs, including an annual liquor licence fee of over R10,000 (on- and off-site). The wine label for the wine we purchased now includes our logo and website address.

Coffee Shop: Our coffee shop attracted over 2,340 customers from January to July. Although this figure is not the highest in the past decade, it is higher than last year. On average, we have 3,774 customers annually. The main reasons for this are visitors and adopters coming to see the donkeys, social media posts, and word of mouth. Regrettably, the coffee shop continues to operate at a loss. Currently, one of our Board members serves as a consultant to explore how we can reverse this trend. We hope that within the next three months, this situation will improve and the coffee shop can start to turn a profit.

“Book Fair” becomes “Book Sales”: We decided not to hold a Book Fair in June 2025 due to a shortage of human resources and the rising costs of running the Annual Book Fairs (e.g. R11,900 for the hire of the hall in McGregor), but rather to focus on a series of 4-day Book Sales at the Sanctuary. The first of these was held in June this year. We will hold further Book Sales in September & December 2025. The result from the first Book Sale was: Amount raised: R17,370; Books sold: 688; and number of payment interactions (a measure of quantity) made: 100. This result, given the very cold and rainy weather, was a good start to this project. We are hopeful that these book sales will increase the year-end book sales income.

Feed Store and Solar Project: This R2.3 million capital project is now well underway. In the past financial year, we raised just over R800k for it, and donations continue to come in from our adopters and through the Benevity and “forgood” fundraising channels. The Langeberg Municipality approved the Feed Store and Solar Project at the end of May, and building commenced in June. As of last week, we have reached the wall plate height of this 250-square-metre building. This will enable us to store over a year’s worth of feed and move all feed mixing and preparation to a purpose-designed venue. We will lay approximately 480 metres of armoured cable to connect the solar panels and inverters to our electricity supply, which is anticipated to reduce our electricity bill by at least 50%. This project is envisioned to run for another four months.

Closing thoughts: The past year has been a period of change at EDS. Transitions like these are not easy and require careful management. Staff need to be involved in these processes, and we must ensure our team is committed and ready to face new challenges and adopt new work practices. What we now need is a stable and clear structure that will ensure the ongoing success of all aspects of EDS. The change of focus that the new role of the Executive Manager brings to my work is slowly translating into new areas that I need to develop and be involved in. One key one is fundraising. Whilst we have succeeded to a limited extent, there is much more work to do in this area. We have a new Strategic Plan for the period 2025 to 2030,

and I look forward to working with my colleagues on the ground at the Sanctuary, with the Board and consultants as we begin to work on this strategic plan for the next five years.

The year ahead will challenge us: More donkeys to help, more awareness to raise, more funds to find and new areas of work to develop. But together, we can do it. At Eseltjesrus, we're not just saving donkeys, we're fostering a culture of caring that extends well beyond our fences. Thank you for walking this path with us, one hoof print at a time.

- 8. Donkey Care, Welfare and Developments at the Farm** – presented by Stan Davidoff
Our donkeys: The last few months of 2024 saw the arrival of Fienie and Vytjie from Velddrift. An elderly lady, who could no longer care for them, surrendered them to EDS. After a brief time alone, they were integrated with the Sonop and Granny group and are very happy there.

Our donkeys were all vaccinated against AHS (African Horse Sickness), dewormed, had their feet trimmed, and received a visit from the dentist. During this time and through to March 2025, we built up hay feed stock to last through winter.

In January, we had some water issues; two of the boreholes stopped producing water and needed to be replaced. One borehole had to be re-drilled. We had sufficient water for the donkeys and the visitor centre, as we brought in water by tankers. In no time, they were up and running, and we were back to irrigating paddocks, lawns and topping up the dam.

The farm maintenance is ongoing, daily; there is always something that requires our attention, and no day goes by that the guys are not busy. This is the nature of a farm. The condition of the farm, lawns, buildings, paths and walks is all thanks to the hard work of our staff.

The guys who attend to farm work and maintenance are also the carers of the donkeys, which, first and foremost, are the most important.

I arrived at the Sanctuary in November 2024 and took over the responsibility of caring for the donkeys. I fell in with the current staff, working with them daily, getting to know them and the donkeys. They were evaluated and gradually made changes to nutrition, care, and handling, with the welfare of each donkey in mind.

Pasture management and rotation are always a priority; this enables the donkeys to have a constant source of grazing and keeps them busy.

The other nutrition comes from feeding hay, and some donkeys get supplemented with meal and mineral blocks.

Donkeys get dewormed twice a year, and their hooves are trimmed every few months. This was done by the Cart Horse Protection Association (DHPA), but due to their workload, they are unable to continue, and John Gatt Farriers has taken over.

Donkey care is done every day, grooming and handling, which enables us to have contact and evaluate them individually. This way, we know who is eating and whether anyone is sick or has an ailment.

Working together with the guys also enables me to assist them in training and expose them to new and different ways of working and handling the donkeys. Plans are in place to support training and education for carers, helping them grow in their roles and better care for the donkeys.

EDS was contacted last year regarding a donkey at a housing estate in Agulhas that was standing alone and in need of rehoming. After many months of planning, she arrived with us in April. Elizabeth was timid and never handled; luckily in excellent condition. She was integrated into a small herd and is doing very well, eventually taking treats from your hand.

Two donkeys (Pepe and Sheila) were euthanised this year, due to complications from laminitis and illness stemming from when they were young. This decision is always very difficult, but doing so shows love and respect, kindness to the donkey.

EDS has recently had the Performing Animals Protection Act (PAPA) License renewed. The state vet was impressed and very pleased with the care and the facility that we offer.

Coming up soon: a farrier visit, AHS in Sept, and the dentist in October.

The age of our donkeys ranges from mid-teens to a couple nearing 30. Considering this, They are doing really well. With care, we monitor them closely, as with older donkeys, some with predisposed issues, health can change quickly.

We are fortunate to have Vets close by and always available for consultation. We actually owe our vets a huge debt of gratitude for always being there for us and for the discounted rates for the donkeys.

Our mission in the future is to continue giving our donkeys the best care available.

We will expand our efforts to help where we can, with the public's assistance, by educating people about donkey care and their needs. The more individuals who are aware of donkeys in their area or when they travel, the better they can watch out for and report anything unusual. I take calls regularly and offer assistance whenever possible. The SPCA and other organisations are available to help.

We will continue with workshops as soon as we can coordinate dates and locations. Our primary mission is the care and welfare of donkeys; this would not be possible without the fantastic people who adopt, donate and bequest money to us. The donkeys, staff and I are eternally grateful.

9. Donkey Ambassador's Report - presented by Annemarie van Zijl:

Ten months ago, I stepped down from my role as the Communication, Outreach, and Advocacy Manager. The Board offered me a new position as Ambassador and Mentor, which involves overseeing the *Donkeys for Africa* (DfA) initiative and managing our relationship with the Onderstepoort Veterinary Faculty (OP) at the University of Pretoria. These responsibilities are proving to be highly rewarding, and I believe they are vital for EDS in its efforts to reach its goals.

Ambassadorial role

It is essential for EDS to be effective and focused in its work to maintain the trust and confidence of you, the public, who make our efforts possible. Every opportunity is seized to act on behalf of Eseltjesrus and to promote our work and donkey welfare in general. Existing friendly relationships with like-minded organisations are nurtured. I recently visited two donkey sanctuaries in Gauteng: the Donkey Dairy and Rest Ur Ass. EDS is held in very high regard by each of these.

Publications

AgriProbe, the research and news magazine of the Western Cape Department of Agriculture published an article on the *One Health, One Welfare* workshop that we presented in Oudtshoorn in April 2024, written by a vet who attended.

Two articles with donkeys as a focus were published in successive issues of *Paws for Thought*, the professional magazine of the Vet Nurses Association of SA. They were entitled *What can we learn from donkeys?* and *Compassionate handling*. In this way, we reached a wider professional audience who might not have been aware of donkey welfare.

Onderstepoort Veterinary Faculty, University of Pretoria

OP, as it is known, is the only Veterinary Faculty in South Africa and has an excellent reputation, not only throughout Africa but also worldwide. The campus north of Pretoria is a

large farm. On the campus, there are numerous live examples of different animal and bird species studied in the curricula – but no donkeys. Donkeys are not studied intensively in the mainstream curricula because they are not viewed as production animals or as companion animals.

The Companion Animal Department recognised the importance of teaching students about donkeys. They invited Eseltjesrus to deliver guest lectures to students in the BVetNurs degree course, as well as to second and third-year BVSc students. The lectures align with curriculum topics but specifically focus on donkeys. BVetNurs is a three-year degree in Veterinary Nursing, while BVSc is a six-year degree required to qualify as a veterinarian. My co-presenter is Del Jones, a registered Inspector and McGregor resident, with many decades of experience as an animal welfare Inspector. To date, we have delivered five lecture sessions at OP. The lecture facilities are excellent – spacious venues with superb technical visual and auditory systems. We are warmly welcomed by staff and students and provided with coffee and muffins during the sessions. Recently, the longest session extended from 8am to 1pm.

First of all, we give an introduction to EDS and our work to each group of students. Students frequently ask about volunteering and employment opportunities at the Sanctuary, and both lecturers and students show strong interest in the practical application of their work on donkeys, as illustrated in our lectures. Additional topics include One Health, One Welfare, Donkey Behaviour, Husbandry and Nutrition, and Welfare of Donkeys in SA. Our existing workshop, *'One Health, One Welfare,'* has been presented to 200 BVSc students and has been downloaded electronically 144 times.

Training manuals

Two manuals were created specifically for these lectures and produced in both hard copy and interactive electronic formats. Each student attending the lectures at OP receives a hard copy of the relevant manual. The manuals are also available for download on the DfA website. This effectively makes information about donkeys and their needs accessible to a wide audience. *Welfare of Donkeys in South Africa* was downloaded a total of 350 times by BVetNurs and BVSc students, downloaded 328 times.

Donkey Behaviour and Husbandry to 50 BVetNurs students, downloaded 90 times. A further presentation on *Donkey Behaviour and Husbandry* for 200 BVSc students is scheduled for October.

Clearly, our guest lectures are raising awareness among future veterinary professionals about the challenges faced by donkeys and their needs, especially regarding working donkeys they are likely to treat during their Compulsory Community Service appointments and in Welfare and Outreach projects. The timing of these lectures is fortunate, aligning with the growing global emphasis on holistic animal health and the One Health, One Welfare concept. These lectures were also delivered to EDS staff in two training sessions, including a presentation on OP which staff found very enlightening, offering them insight into what is happening elsewhere.

We anticipate repeating the series of lectures annually, for each new intake of students for the foreseeable future.

Donkeys for Africa (DfA)

DfA is a communication portal that promotes donkey welfare across Africa. The website features a comprehensive and relevant reference library, a Harness Help page, and all newsletters issued since its inception in April 2017: 45 issues to date. It is important to note that 85% of the content originates from correspondents in Africa. The newsletters are sent directly via email to individuals and organisations in 22 African countries, spanning from South Africa at the southern tip of the continent to Morocco in the north, and from The Gambia in the west to Somalia in the east. Additionally, the newsletters reach contacts in the USA, UK, Switzerland, Germany, Australia, India, Peru, Sri Lanka, UAE, and Jamaica. These contacts further share the newsletters through their networks, and they are also available on the DfA website. DfA is a member of the *Donkey Network*, a closed international group sharing updates on the donkey skins trade, and maintains regular contact with the *Donkey Collective*, an

international assembly of donkey experts. Our influence and work on donkey welfare are continually growing: an international funding body has invited DfA to serve as a reference for grant applications. DfA provides information, moral support, and encouragement to organisations and individuals working on donkey welfare challenges at grassroots level throughout Africa. I thank the Board of EDS for the opportunity to establish and develop this important and exciting initiative.

- 10. Music for everyone** - Johan van Zijl invited members to attend the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra concert in Robertson on 13 September. Members can also support this event by donating tickets to those who might not be able to attend otherwise.

11. Approval of audited annual financial statements

Andrea van Lille presented the Audited Annual Financial Statements for the period 1 March 2024 to 28 February 2025. The Board approved these on 10 July 2024. Total assets amount to R13,854,338, of which R13,399,683 are fixed assets. The Surplus for the year was R9,469,498, mainly due to the bequest received, which totalled R10,702,625. The complete audited annual financial statements are available on the website. The audited annual financial statements were duly adopted by Members - proposed by Andrea van Lille and seconded by Tony Saddington.

12. Appointment of auditors:

Andrea van Lille recommended the re-appointment of Barnard as our auditors for the next financial year. Barnard Chartered Accountants were re-appointed as auditors for the next financial year by Members - Proposed by Rika Cilliers and seconded by Louise Matschke.

13. Nominations and Election of Board Members

Tony Saddington thanked all members of the Board for their work over the past year. To ensure continuity, a rotation of members is in place. This year, Lorna Fuller is standing down. Andrea is available for re-election.

Lorna Fuller, Director of *Project 90 by 2030*, is proposed for re-election as a non-executive member of the Board by Mirah Ranchod and seconded by Marinda Weideman.

In addition, one new member was proposed:

Gavin Hatherely: Seasoned Hospitality and Tourism professional; General Manager at *Montagu Springs* and Chair of the *Montagu Volunteer Fire & Rescue Association*, is proposed as a non-executive member of the Board by Louise Matschke and seconded by Tony Saddington.

There were no further nominations.

The meeting agreed to re-elect Lorna Fuller and elect Gavin Hatherley to the Board.

14. Any other business:

No other business.

15. Closure:

At the end of the AGM, Joe Samuels thanked everyone for attending and commended the presenters on their reports.

Meeting closed at 7.28 pm.

Signed as a true and correct record at the Board Meeting on 5 November 2025.

These minutes will be confirmed as an accurate record at our next AGM in August 2026.

Chairperson
Joe Samuels

Secretary
James Anthony (Tony) Saddington