

Antigua's Donkey Sanctuary



Male donkeys in the Sanctuary

The Donkey Sanctuary is a place for formerly stray or misused donkeys to live out their lives grazing contently, entertaining the visitors that provide bread-and-butter finances for the operation.

Roaming free, donkeys can be pests to society. For example, **one farmer, having lost his entire crop of carrots to 13 stray donkeys, called the Sanctuary to collect the stray animals** in an act of compassion.

Through such rescue operations, and because a donkey can live up to 50 years, the Sanctuary is home to 150 animals and has reached maximum capacity.



Donkeys grazing in front of the petting zoo, which is closed to let the vegetation re-grow

Feeding this number of donkeys goes to show how much vegetation the animals consume. The once-used petting zoo is now closed in order to let the overgrazed vegetation re-grow. Wild donkeys, along with other feral livestock—such as the 44,000 goats on Antigua as estimated by the Livestock Division—overgraze public land and prevent young trees from growing to replace older ones. Exposed soil leads to erosion and land degradation, so enclosing the donkeys can help reduce grazing pressure on public land.



Donkey Mary Ann inspecting her portrait painted by artist Dina De Brozzi

The Sanctuary has developed some creative ways of self-financing its operations. Visitors can adopt a donkey for EC\$65, and the number of ‘adoptions’ nearly doubled between 2011 and 2013, rising from 284 to 487. The Sanctuary also sells a postcard of the donkey Mary Ann inspecting a painting of herself and former owner, Jacko, by acclaimed Italian artist and Antiguan resident [Dina de Brozzi](#).

With operations estimated at EC\$300 per day, a funding gap remains despite ongoing efforts. As the Government is legally responsible for impounding stray animals, manager Karen Corbin hopes to see more support from the Ministry of Agriculture in the future.

The Sanctuary is using the small grant from GEF to install solar electricity for fences and a pump, and to expand and line a pond to store water onsite for irrigating feed crops.



It's not only foreigners who succumb to the donkey's charisma. Brenda Thomas Odlum (left), Lia Nicholson (middle), Ruth Spencer (right).