Abstract

Donkeys live for 30 years. The average life span of a donkey is 11 years (Blackeway, 1995). Donkeys subsist mainly on the dry grass. They also feed on prosopis or reeds near cultivations. Donkeys are generally healthy and frequently seen in several villages either as solitary, in pairs or in herds of varying sizes. Nibbling, biting, kicking, stamping of fore and hind feet, twitching of tail, local spasm of skin and dust-bathing are common behavioural patterns of donkeys. They spend the night as well as the day time partly feeding, drinking, dust bathing and resting. They apparently drink at least once every third day. Donkeys are very alert and agile and can speed up to 60 kilometers an hour. The backward kicking with both hind legs is the commonest fighting technique. The hooves, legs and teeth are the common weapons of defense.

In recent years, the population of donkeys is steadily decreasing day by day. Less than 20 years back more than 1000 donkeys were present in Coimbatore Town. It has now declined to 95. Similarly, in rural areas, the picture is not rosy. Among the 86 villages where we conducted the census, the population has alarmingly depleted. In nearly 21 villages no donkey was sighted on any day.

There are many reasons for their dwindling. Formerly, in every village, these animals were daily used to carry the dirty cloth bags to a pond or a lake. Thanks to the introduction of cycles and mopeds, these animals are no longer necessary and are left to darkness. Except in some isolated hill areas where these animals are still helpful to carry sand bags and other materials, nowhere these animals are used to perform any duty As a result, they are left at the mercy of the environment. If the current trend of depletion continues, then in the next 10 to 15 years, the donkey will no longer be seen in our countryside.