

Editorial

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The special edition of the Brazilian Journal of Veterinary and Animal Science Research, with 15 articles, dedicated to donkeys is a timely publication.

The tragic nature of the abandonment of such a symbolic animal, in Brazil, met the 21ST century covid-19 pandemic, when in March, 2021, newspapers, in Brazil, reported an accident with an airplane carrying covid-19 vaccines hitting a donkey at an airport in the town of Ibotirama, Bahia, in the Northeast of Brazil.

Donkeys came to my attention in 2010 when we wrote the successful proposal for the European VII Framework Program, the Project AWIN. The European Union commissioned our team to develop an animal welfare assessment protocol for donkeys. I am happy to see the protocol in this special edition, in two articles: Dalla Costa et al. and Farias et al. Soon after launching the project in Edinburgh, in May 2011, I realized that people, around the world, do care about donkeys, in a very significant way. Very quickly, people interested in donkeys and stakeholders joined our project and we achieved tremendous progress bringing together a global network to protect this important animal.

I accepted a position, at the University of São Paulo, in 2013, focusing my program, initially, on production animals. When we hosted the final meeting of the AWIN Project, in Brussels, in April of 2015, a collaborator from an important NGO dedicated to donkeys, alerted me about the situation of abandoned donkeys in Brazil. The scenario that he described, in confidence, got me truly concerned, I invited the NGO partner and other collaborators, to visit us at the University of São Paulo and in September of 2015. Donkeys started to be part of our program, when we gave attention to the situation in the State of Ceara, especially to the Paula Rodrigues Farm, in Santa Quitéria, where the DETRAN-CE, housed donkeys collected on public roads, part of this work is reported in the article by Queiroz et al. An exciting development to prevent road accidents involving donkeys is reported by Sato et al., with a proposal for a computerized system to detect the presence of animals on roads, which is an exciting idea, piloted already at the University of São Paulo.

The paper by Bório et al., estimates the costs to keep donkeys, which is a very complex matter. The serious issues associated with abandonment, are often blamed on the mechanization of agriculture and with the arrival of inexpensive motorbikes in the Northeast of Brazil. The articles by Lima et al. and Raw et al., give a very much needed new dimension, that overrides the simplified economic argument, addressing the externalities that favored the long-lasting, presence of donkeys in rural areas in the world and in Brazil, intertwined with social, cultural and economic attributes rarely featured in traditional economic models.

Never in my career have I encountered such passionate stakeholders and interested parties for an animal species as we were able to interact with when bringing together colleagues from Mossoró, Fortaleza, Sobral, Salvador, Maceió, among other places who created the National Donkey Task Force, in 2016. These colleagues volunteered to create a solid network to improve donkey welfare in Brazil. As we tried to develop strategies to reframe the opportunities to keep donkeys in the Northeast of Brazil, recognizing that they are unique to the region, immortalized in songs, books, paintings, sculptures, a tsunami did head to our direction, represented by the global donkey skin trade, reported by Skipen et al., that already had plagued the African and Asian continents, caused by the unsustainable demands of China, for eijao, made from a collagen, extracted from donkey skin, used in traditional medicine. Tatemoto et al., presents strong evidence corroborating the unsustainable nature of the exploitation of donkeys to meet the Chinese eijao demands. This unsustainable business model is masked by euphemisms such as the promise to rid the Northeast of poverty, offering jobs to a region where enormous economic challenges are present. The self-proclaimed entrepreneurs killed donkeys, with little or no concern for their welfare, after buying very cheaply, or robbing them from the caatinga scenery, where they are indissociable of the resilient nature of the local population. Brandão et al., gives a comprehensive account of the nature of the fake entrepreneurs, financed

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by money of dubious origin who did run a cruel network, that assaulted the Northeast of Brazil, capturing donkeys, buying donkeys, robbing donkeys, and crossing state lines, in journeys from Açailândia, in the State of Maranhão to the South of Bahia, for example, creating a sanitary nightmare that put at risk animal and human lives, as a result of lack of proper sanitary control to prevent the spread of glanders, and several zoonotic diseases to areas where the conditions were not present as reported by Fonseca et al. and Brandão et al. Gameiro et al. reviewed the official data, from the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture, tracking down the export route, that we were not familiar with. Molento and Vilela, in this edition, offer protocols to understand parasitic challenges in donkeys, a topic that Santos et al., give an account of the consequences of bringing animals from different sources, to an illegal farm, in the area of Euclides da Cunha and Canudos, on endoparasites. We saw, in person, the death camps in Bahia, in the holding areas where donkeys were kept, to create false documents to allow their slaughter, in Federally inspected abattoirs, in order meet the demands to export skins to China, mentioned by Brandão et al. Tremendous learning opportunities did arise in a property situated in

the border between the town of Euclides da Cunha and the historic town of Canudos, in Bahia, where, in February of 2019, when slaughter was temporarily banned, a Chinese business person abandoned 800 donkeys, in a holding farm, which was strategically, placed away from slaughter houses, in order to hide from the official surveillance system the irregularities associated with such illegal practice. The tragic history, brought together the University of São Paulo, the Federal University of Bahia, the Federal University of the Semi-arid, the Federal University of Alagoas, the Forum Nacional de Proteção e Defesa Animal and The Donkey Sanctuary, in an effort to find a solution for the situation. Farias et al., Brandão et al., Fonseca et al., and Santos et al., all give evidences of the Euclides da Cunha/Canudos situation. Thanks to the leadership of the University of Bahia, the Canudos saga had some positive outcomes, and Bório et al., accounts for what was learned in order to find a home for the animals. The relocation of the donkeys was only possible after resolving the sanitary chaos, when infectious anemia and glanders positive donkeys were identified and this situation limited our ability to relocate the animals.

Alonso et al., with the publication on protocols to maintain sperm viability, gives hope that genetic resources, which are at risk with the massive slaughter of donkeys, as reported by Gameiro et al., and Tatemoto et al., may be preserved with the help of advanced reproductive techniques.

The Euclides da Cunha/Canudos saga, brought together scientists, civil society, NGOs, official authorities, and it is fair to credit this special edition to all collaborators who are still committed with the very ambitious goals to re-signify donkeys in Brazil in order to address the serious issues associated with abandonment. Thanks to the Brazilian Journal of Veterinary and Animal Science Research for such unique opportunity.