

Dear Pam,

Thank you for your inquiry. I was sorry to hear about the death of your paint filly by a donkey jack. You have every reason to be concerned about future problems.

Donkeys are very affectionate and cuddly creatures for the most part, but there are times when their instincts can take over and they can become dangerous. The jennets are calm until they have a foal, at which time they become protective of the foal and can be quite aggressive towards anyone or anything that they perceive to be a danger to the foal. They will kick, bare their teeth and chase the intruder. If they catch the intruder, they will take them to the ground and stomp them.

The jacks will behave in much the same manner as the jennets, but they will continue a chase where the jennet will only go as far as she deems necessary for the safety of the foal. If jacks are not taught to behave polite when they are very young, they are more dangerous than one who has been trained, but they both have the propensity to become dangerous in a split second as their instincts take over. They are very strong and they are much like a pit bull with the teeth and jaws. Once they lock onto something, their jaws do not let go easily. It is their intent to bring the victim into submission by grabbing it by the neck or throat.

When teaching jacks to breed in hand, it becomes necessary to use a drop noseband around the mouth to prevent them from grabbing mares and jennets in this manner to prevent injuries. One cannot predict when or where their instincts will take over and become dangerous, but you can be relatively sure that you should be extra cautious throughout the breeding seasons.

Donkeys, in general, do like to chase and kill smaller animals in this same manner. If you have smaller animals around the farm, you can introduce them in a controlled way and they can learn to respect each other's space, but they will never really buddy-up.

Donkeys are also very perceptive characters and have very definite likes and dislikes towards humans. Jennets are more tolerant, but jacks will act aggressively towards people that have a masterful attitude towards things. They do seem to appreciate and adore people who are humble, caring, and giving sorts. However, they do not care who you are if you get between them and the object of their attention and can make an attempt to get you out of the way!

If you are not using a jack for breeding, it is advisable to have him castrated. Geldings seem to make the best and safest companions.

When a jack is young, a lot of the behaviors he exhibits appear to be comical and cute. He will chase, throw his head around and pretend to nip at you. But you must realize that this play is only a rehearsal for his ability to protect and kill later. It disturbs me that the people who own the jack that you describe are comfortable with him "playing" with their grandchildren. This jack is only four years old, but in the next few years he will reach

adulthood and his play will get more serious. At this time, he will play harder and he could conceivably kill one of these children. Donkeys are very strong and very intelligent creatures, so they should not be taken lightly. General rule of thumb is to never turn your back on them completely.

Fencing for jacks should be sturdy and hot wire should be run around the inside of the fence as an extra measure of precaution. Training for ground manners is also paramount, though a lot of people just don't take the time.

If you need any more information, don't hesitate to contact me. We also have information available in our book, DONKEY TRAINING, and in Tapes #9 and #10 of our video series. Visit our website at www.luckythreeranch.com or call 1-800-816-7566 for ordering information. Hope this helps.

Best wishes,

Meredith Hodges