



## UNIVERSITIES FEDERATION FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

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### PRESS RELEASE

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## Participatory Theatre Demonstrates Potential to Boost Awareness of Donkey Welfare in Kenya

A [new study](#), published in the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW) journal *Animal Welfare*, published by Cambridge University Press, presents an innovative approach to promoting animal welfare through community engagement. Conducted on Lamu Island, Kenya, this research is the first of its kind to evaluate the use of theatre as a method for promoting donkey welfare, showing promising results.

Researchers from the University of Portsmouth, in collaboration with The Donkey Sanctuary and the Lamu Arts and Theatre Alliance (LATA), successfully used forum theatre as an educational tool to raise awareness about the welfare needs of working donkeys. Titled "*Forum Theatre as a Tool to Promote Positive Donkey Welfare on Lamu Island, Kenya*," the study highlights how participatory theatre effectively engages communities and disseminates animal welfare messages.

Forum theatre, an interactive form of theatre, was used to raise awareness about donkey welfare issues such as overloading, beating, inadequate nutrition, and the dangers of plastic ingestion. The performances took place in public locations across Gadeni Village, Mkomani Village, and the Lamu Cultural Festival, reaching approximately 600 people in areas where donkeys play a crucial role in everyday life.

Additionally, a child-friendly version of the play was performed in four secondary schools on Lamu Island, engaging 120 young people. The adaptation featured a donkey puppet character to emphasise how donkeys feel in various scenarios, making the message accessible for younger audiences.

Impact of the Performances Audience feedback from adults showed a high level of engagement, with 93% of respondents strongly agreeing that they enjoyed the performance and 85% agreeing it raised

their awareness about donkey welfare, particularly their health and welfare needs, and appropriate loading. Notably, 74% of respondents preferred theatre over other communication methods, such as talks, leaflets, or radio.

For young people, pre- and post-performance surveys demonstrated significant improvements in attitudes towards donkeys, particularly in recognising that donkeys feel pain and identifying how donkeys feel. These findings suggest that theatre can be effective in raising awareness of donkey welfare in youths, as well as promoting empathy.

**Commenting on the findings, lead author Dr Emily Haddy Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Portsmouth said:**

*"Theatre is unique in its ability to connect with people in a fun and engaging way and it was exciting to see significant positive changes in attitudes towards donkeys, especially a greater awareness of donkey sentience, after the performance."*

**Joint Editor-in-Chief of *Animal Welfare*, Prof Bas Rodenburg, added:**

*"This study is an excellent example of how innovative engagement techniques can make a real difference in promoting animal welfare in communities where conventional approaches may not be as effective. It opens up new ways to connect with communities and foster greater awareness for donkey welfare."*

The research highlights the potential of forum theatre as a powerful tool for promoting animal welfare awareness in hard-to-reach communities. The authors aim to expand this initiative to other donkey-reliant communities with the hope of improving welfare outcomes for both animals and people.

The full study is available to read open access [here](#). Reference: Haddy E, Proops L, Bradley T, Bowyer C, Sing'Oei O. Forum theatre as a tool to promote positive donkey welfare on Lamu Island, Kenya. *Animal Welfare*. 2025; 34: e16. [doi:10.1017/awf.2025.12](https://doi.org/10.1017/awf.2025.12)

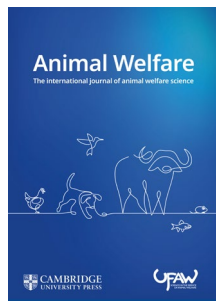
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**Notes to Editors:**

**About the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare:**

[The Universities Federation for Animal Welfare \(UFAW\)](#) is an international, independent scientific and educational animal welfare charity and membership organisation. UFAW's vision is a world where the welfare of all animals affected by humans is maximised through a scientific understanding of their needs and how to meet them. UFAW promotes an evidence-based approach to animal welfare by funding scientific research, supporting the careers of animal welfare scientists and by disseminating animal welfare science knowledge both to experts and the wider public.

UFAW offers an extensive resource on genetic welfare issues in companion animals, designed to inform prospective pet owners. These webpages are being actively revised and updated to reflect the latest science-based information. To view the current content, click [here](#).



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### **About the UFAW Journal - *Animal Welfare***

[Animal Welfare](#) is an international scientific journal. It publishes the results of peer-reviewed scientific research, technical studies, surveys and reviews relating to the welfare of kept animals (eg on farms, in laboratories, zoos and as companions) and of those in the wild whose welfare is compromised by human activities. Papers on related ethical and legal issues are also considered for publication. The journal also includes letters to the editor, opinion papers, horizon topics and commentary on topical issues such as developments in legislation and codes of practice relating to animal welfare, as well as book reviews.

*Animal Welfare* is published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of UFAW.

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