

A WEEK IN LUXOR

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Foreword

Luxor was the ancient city of Thebes (capital of Egypt) and is currently a very popular tourist resort. In addition Luxor has a huge sugar cane industry, and sugar cane is one of Egypt's largest exports.

However, this is not a holiday review! This is an account of the amazing work done at ACE (Animal Care Egypt) where I was privileged to spend a week working at the equine hospital, with other members of the Healing Animals Organisation, headed up by Liz.

What is ACE?

ACE is a registered charity that offers hospital facilities in Luxor (both outpatient and inpatient), houses a small animal clinic and also works to educate the local community in animal welfare. The centre is the brainchild of Kim Taylor - who visited Luxor several times and was heartbroken at the sight of so many starved, beaten and overworked horses and donkeys. Her aunt Julia Wartenburg was instrumental in providing the finance for setting up the charity and in July 2000 the centre in Luxor first opened its doors. Martin Clunes is the patron.



Kim with Snowy (a resident cat)

In July 2006, after much fundraising, land was purchased and a new building was erected; the current centre has sand pits (for rolling), washing stalls, and an outpatients department staffed by qualified vets. Here, owners can bring in their animals and wash them (to prevent sores forming under harnesses and tack) and can receive simple preventative advice - such as worming or advice on small injuries.



Washing facilities



Outpatient facility

The inpatient facilities include 25 stables and a large treatment area. A mattress is used out in the open for inpatient surgeries - soft grass being the best surface for recovery from anaesthesia.

Patients often arrive in the back of open trucks and this seems to be the typical animal transport in Luxor.



Horse and donkey transport

Inside the building there is a spacious reception area, an education room, a small animal consulting room and an operating theatre. Upstairs houses accommodation for visiting volunteer vets - many of them coming from countries all over the world.



ACE building

ACE currently sees between 3,000 and 5,000 animals a month, giving free veterinary care and advice.

So What Does ACE Actually Do?

The veterinary service (both outpatient and inpatient) is run to a very high standard notwithstanding the fact that many things that we take for granted here in the UK are not readily available in Egypt - some medications, bandages such as "vet wrap" and even head collars.

The Egyptian vets:



Dr. David



Dr. Assma



Dr. Hannah

On a typical day, the vets can see numerous animals on an outpatient basis - as well as tending to the inpatients who need on-going care and treatment. During the week that I spent at ACE, we saw horses admitted with wounds and injuries (often as a result of road traffic accidents as the roads are very busy and somewhat hazardous), donkeys with colic, donkeys with laminitis, one donkey with rabies; in outpatients we saw horses and donkeys coming in with sores from ill-fitting harnesses and tack, horses and donkeys requiring worming and a host of minor injuries.

The small animal clinic is also kept very busy with a constant stream of dogs and cats - again some have been injured on the roads, some are ridden with fleas and ticks and some come in for neutering and spaying.

The educational programme at ACE aims to reach every school child in Luxor; the programme teaches the children that animals do have feelings and can suffer, and that the old superstitious ways of treating animals have no place nowadays. Approximately 300 children a week attend the educational programme.

Why So Many Horses and Donkeys?

As stated earlier, the tourist industry and the exportation of sugar cane are the two main sources of income in Egypt. Donkeys are used to transport huge loads of sugar cane and are often hugely overloaded due to ignorance more than cruelty. The horses are used to pull carriages, called caleches, used by tourists all around the city. Unfortunately, these horses are often not well looked after - they tend to be worked hard all day without a drink and a rest in the shade, drivers use their whips unnecessarily and the horses are often galloped; added to this, harnesses and tack are often badly fitting which causes sores to develop.

Our group of healers saw a constant stream of horses and donkeys coming in to ACE all day. The more fortunate ones were being brought in for a cool wash-down and a maintenance check by one of the vets. The less fortunate were

being brought in on the back of open trucks - some standing and with their feet hobbled and some so sick or in pain that they were lying down.

Because the Moslem faith decrees that animals shall not be put to sleep, ACE actually buys the animal to be euthanized from the owner, and sometimes owners need to be persuaded that this is the best course of action for the animal in question.

In addition, animals cannot be hospitalised if the owner does not wish it, and so inpatients are collected when the owner returns for them, and not necessarily when ACE feels that they are fit to leave.

So What Did Our Group Actually Do?

Looking back, it is clear that every member of the group contributed to the welfare of the animals that we saw - both singly and as a group. The group consisted of nine healers - including Liz and an octogenarian retired vet; each member of the group automatically played to their skills, with some feeling more comfortable assisting in the small animal clinic and others preferring to deal with the constant stream of horses and donkeys arriving in inpatients or outpatients.

At times, smaller groups automatically formed to deal with whatever was the presenting situation - at times the most we could do was offer love and healing to a donkey that was being euthanized, to help he or she pass over peacefully. In quieter times, we would observe the horses, donkeys and foals out in the paddocks and again, offer some maintenance healing.

Liz was constantly busy with other alternative therapies and we learnt much as a group about basic massage techniques for horses and donkeys; about the various aromatherapy oils and about the animals self-selecting the macerated oils. We were then able to put these techniques into practice ourselves.

As a group, we spent time visiting the inpatients (with everybody quite naturally having their favourite horses and donkeys) and were able to offer healing from outside the stable doors - all of it very well received and appreciated by the animals.

The group, plus the ACE staff, also benefited from two presentations by our wonderful retired vet - who also practices homeopathy and acupuncture.

At times, singly or in twos and threes, we would just observe the ACE vets as they worked. I was struck by how patient, how resilient and how humane they were - at the same time as interacting with owners who were often quite impatient or ignorant of the best way to treat their animals.

So Was It All Depressing and Distressing?

The answer to this is a resounding "NO!" - the hospital is a place of hope, education and many success stories. Without exception, everyone in the group enjoyed being able to help in a small way and everyone would like to return.

We did have some time to ourselves and thus we were able to rest and recuperate, and return to a long day's work feeling re-enthused and revitalised.

It was gratifying to do so much "hands on" work with animals, as well as interacting with local people who were bringing their animals in. Where horses and donkeys were clearly loved and cared for, we offered praise and where this was not the case, we tried our best to be non-judgemental and just do what we could for the animal.

So What Next?

Healing Animals Organisation has a programme of fundraising events planned over the coming months. ACE has given HAO a "wish-list" of items needed - some quite simple and others being more expensive pieces of equipment.

One of the things that I personally feel quite strongly about is educating tourists to be wary of which caleches they choose; whilst we were out and about in Luxor we saw many lame and/or poor condition horses pulling carriages with tourists riding inside them. I feel that over time, if tourists were only choosing horses that looked well-fed and cared for, this would be an incentive for owners and drivers to pay more attention to their horses. However, this "education" work could be something that holiday companies play a part in - our own holiday representative (when we were picked up from Luxor airport) gave us a potted sightseeing guide but did not mention anything about the ever visible caleche horses. (This is something that I intend to give further thought to!!!)

Bibliography:

www.ace-egypt.org.uk

Learning Outcomes:

Over and above the standard equine learning outcomes, I learnt the following:

- To respect the local Egyptian culture
- To "stand back" from my English beliefs about how horses should be looked after
- To respect the advice and diagnosis of the ACE vets - particularly when euthanasia was the only viable option
- That healing can be visibly beneficial in every situation, even when the animal is in the act of passing over
- That the group love and energy is MORE than the sum of its parts
- That I am living my life's purpose - JOY!!!!!!!

Written by Jane Fisher Healing Animals Organisation Graduate Small Animal and Equine Healer.