

Three donkeys die of neglect at LVV pen

ST. EUSTATIUS—Three donkeys have died of neglect in the pen of the Department of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Fisheries LVV. They were not given enough food for a long time and apparently died of starvation.

Spokesperson of GreenFound/Donkey Nursery St. Maarten Laurens Duiveman said that when he came back from vacation last Saturday, he found a donkey which could not stand up. "I fed it and gave it water, but Sunday it was worse. I called the vet to euthanize it, since it had no chance of survival, considering my experience from last time. It did not make sense to let it suffer more." On Monday, another two dead donkeys were found in the pen.

Since last week Saturday, GreenFound is feeding the donkeys in the government's pen with two bales of hay per day.

"We got money from DierenLot and Animal Protection in Holland when we addressed the issue. I am telling government since 2013, when 20 donkeys died, that a plan has to be made," said Duiveman.

According to him, former Commissioner Carlyle Tearr "never did anything," nor did

former Head of LVV Robert Henson. He said the contact with new LVV manager Anthony Reed, who started in June, is good. "He is very cooperative."

GreenFound and Donkey Nursery St. Maarten are soon to close a Memorandum of Understanding for all donkeys on St. Maarten. GreenFound has asked help from the largest donkey-rescue organisation in the world. A representative of Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue is to visit St. Maarten on August 22. "They are going to assist the Donkey Nursery with a plan for growing our own fodder hydroponically," Duiveman stated. There are currently 56 donkeys in the LVV pen and 25 more in the Nursery's care.

Duiveman said the problems started when the roaming-animal project was stopped at the beginning of this year, because money had run out. "The new Director of LVV Mr. Hooker found it sufficient when one person at LVV was responsible for feeding and taking care of the animals. I told him then I expected problems. Still it was done like this. Allen was the only one, but I do not believe that the animals were fed every day with a sufficient supply of grass. There

was no money budgeted for buying feed, so that was it. I warned them several times it did not look good. There is grass at the airport that could be cut."

Duiveman said the problems have only become worse after the island government was put under higher supervision. Since June 10, all government expenditures have to be approved by the Dutch Government Representative Gilbert Isabella.

"We are sensitive to the fact that at the moment there is a higher supervision in place and all spending has to be approved by Kingdom Representative Mr. Isabela, and funds for the agricultural sector are less than minimal. But we find that all resources had to be used to take care of the donkeys since they are penned by the Agricultural Department," it is stated on Save St. Maarten's Donkeys' Facebook page.

As usual, one government worker is cutting grass with a weed whacker to gather feed for the animals. However, Duiveman does not know if government knows how much feed the animals need if there is nothing for them to eat in the pen, as is currently the case in the persistent drought.



One of dead donkeys in the LVV pen. (Save St. Maarten's Donkeys photo)

"LVV never started a project to grow animal fodder, which originally was in the roaming-animal budget of US \$450,000 in 2014," Duiveman claimed.

Vicky Brooks of St. Eustatius Animal Welfare said it does not appear that government has shown any concern pertaining to this serious matter. In the meantime, she is calling on residents to take trimmed palm, banana or mango tree leaves to the

donkey field for them to eat, or to have them collected and taken to the field.

Save St. Maarten's Donkeys said the new government, new management of agriculture and the Directorate of Economy and Infrastructure have shown willingness to work out a form of cooperation with GreenFound and the Donkey Nursery.

However, the organisation has a shortage of manpower and resources. "Hopefully we

can get help to write a business plan for a sustainable solution...The plan is needed to get DierenLot, Donkey Sanctuary UK and Stichting Waardig Dier on board to finance the infrastructure of a permanent Donkey Nursery for all the donkeys on St. Maarten... The donkeys have no current use and are forgotten and neglected," it was stated.

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