



Persian Onager (*Equus hemionus onager*) EEP

Participation of non-EAZA members

Introduction:

The Onager is a subspecies of the Asiatic Wild-ass native to the deserts of Iran. Actually there are two remaining populations in Iran covering about 500 animals altogether: one is restricted to the Bahram-e Goor Protected Area and the other one is found in the Touran National Park. The IUCN categorizes the Persian Onager as “critically endangered” (CR).

Tierpark Hagenbeck officially took over coordination of the Onager EEP in 2003. The population developed quite good in the last few years. In December 2011 the European studbook listed 82 (28,54) animals.

A major problem we currently have to deal with, is, that more and more institutions stop keeping Onagers, - at the end of the year we'll remain only 11 active institutions. Since the Onager is surely not a flagship species, it seems to be more and more difficult to find new holders among EAZA-members. We now have an urgent problem to find new institutions to keep these beautiful and highly endangered equids. The main reason is the building/planning of mixed-species enclosures with “more attractive” species in many zoos, where Onagers don't have space any longer.

For this reason we decided to work together with non-EAZA-institutions as well. The EAZA accepts this, if the receiving institution fulfills the EAZA standards of welfare for the species and only surplus animals are placed in non-EAZA participant zoos.

Animal data:

Shoulder height:	1,20-1,40 m
Weight:	220-290 kg
Sexual maturity:	approx. 2 years
Seasonal parturition:	May-July
Gestation period:	approx. 12 months
Birth weight:	15-20 kg
Life expectancy:	25-30 years
Diet:	
Mainly roughage of relative low energy-content; in the summer grass; in the winter hay; woody plants, branches, etc.; some carrots/apples; pellets/concentrates as necessary	



Photo: Onagers at Tierpark Hagenbeck
©Götz Berlik

Husbandry:

Onagers are social animals that shouldn't be kept alone. Usually they are kept in breeding groups, consisting of one adult stallion and adult mares with their juvenile offspring. Also bachelor-groups can be a solution, if an institution doesn't want to breed.

It is important, that Onager enclosures are not in the vicinity of other equids, because they can get highly aggressive, if they are permanently or periodically in sight of other equids. Moreover, it is recommended not to keep them in mixed-species exhibits unless the enclosure is very large and well-structures with the ability for individuals to avoid each other.

The following aspects are recommended for Onager enclosures:

- Size: minimum space of 300 m²/adult animal; one side of the enclosure away from the public; no angles < 90 °
- Fences: wire-mesh or several strands of plain wire connected by spacers; mesh-size < 5cm or larger than an animal's head; height approx. 1,60-2,00 m; alternatively water- or dry moats
- Ground: hard, non-slippery, dry and permeable to water; frequently used sites should be well-drained, to prevent them becoming muddy during wetter times of the year; sandy areas should be provided for rolling and resting
- Feeding site/Watering place: roughage can be provided on elevated, dry and hard ground; water should be provided permanently (e.g. non-freezing automatic water bowl)
- Shelter: trees, bushes; if natural shelter is missing a shed (draught-free, insulated roof) is sufficient
- Facility for separation: for medical treatment, mother and foals, removing of single animals (e.g. stallion; approx. 150 m²) etc.; an adjacent enclosure or the facility to partition the existing enclosure meets all these needs
- Stable: open-fronted shed is sufficient; wind-proof; insulated roof; non-slippery ground; floorspace/animal approx. 8 m² (for pregnant mares and mares with foals 12 m²); smallest side of the stall 2 m; if there are single-boxes visual contact is needed; if stabled overnight, the animals need free access to water; heating is not obligatory

Altogether, an appropriate Onager enclosure can be made up with relatively little means. The animals are robust against cold weather and can be kept in outdoor-enclosures all over the year. More and more institutions keep Onagers in a very "extensive" way, e.g. in large areas (rough pastures, grasslands) with minimal management effort and costs. Without additional feeding an area of 5000 m²/animal is recommended.

Contact:

If you are interested in keeping this species, please contact the EEP:

Dr. Stephan Hering-Hagenbeck (hering@hagenbeck.de) & Dr. Adriane Prah (prahl@hagenbeck.de)

Tierpark Hagenbeck gem.GmbH
Lokstedter Grenzstraße 2
22527 Hamburg
Germany