

Breaking In Water Buffalo to Lead

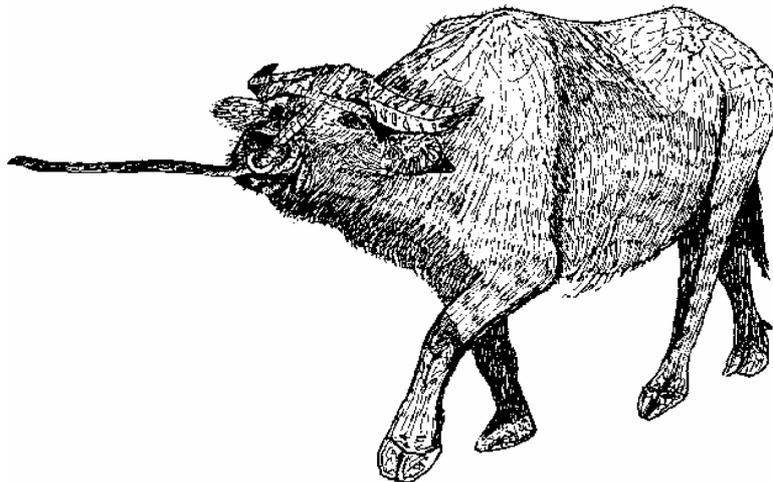
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INTRODUCTION

In intensively managed situations, such as for showing and semen collection, it is necessary to handle buffalo bulls and cows individually. It is important therefore, that they are taught to lead reliably on a halter. The easiest way to develop this ability is by handling a calf from birth. However, this may not always be possible. Mature animals will be more difficult to handle and take a longer time to train. It is better to start when buffalo are between one and two years of age. The earlier the training is commenced, the easier will be the training when the animal is still small and young.

The following points are a guide to the best method to use in training a buffalo to a halter.

- First, insert a nose ring as early as possible before breaking in, to allow enough time for the nose hole to heal. A couple of months will be necessary.
- Hose down animals. One of the key tools in buffalo domestication is a water hose. Hosing down is very important. Get the animals used to a hose down during the heat of the day. Hosing can be useful when a bull becomes agitated or distressed, and it will generally help to calm a buffalo at any time of the day, especially during hot weather conditions.



STEPS IN HALTER BREAKING BUFFALO

1. It may be necessary to put the animal in a race or crush to fit the rope for the first time. The rope should go around the horns with the noose at the top of the poll behind the horns. Ensure that the noose does not become loose and fall down around the eyes. Have the rope sufficiently long so that it can be wrapped around a post or rail and gradually shortened. Once snug, the noose can be locked with a half hitch so that it does not continue to tighten further around the base of the horns.

2. Tether the animal and gradually shorten the lead until it has about 2 or 3 metres of rope, about enough so it doesn't stand on it or become tangled in it. Leave it tied until you observe the animal standing with no pressure on the rope. It is best to observe at a distance rather than adding extra pressure by being close. Some animals learn in an hour or so, some take all day. Hose the animal down regularly during this process. Release the animal at the end of the day and repeat this process daily, depending on how much time you can afford. If the rope is seen to be cutting into the hide at the back of the horns, the tightness should be relieved and petroleum jelly applied to the area. After the initial tethering, the noose can be tied off to prevent it slipping and tightening. When the buffalo is relaxed whilst tied up, rub around the base of the tail. If the tail lifts up it is generally a sign that you can start rubbing the whole body. Buffalo rarely kick rearwards as cattle or horses do but there have been some exceptions.
3. Once you can get to the animal's head without being hooked, release the rope from the post or rail and use your body strength to exert pressure. The animal should begin to walk forward as you increase the pressure on the rope. Only expect it to take a few steps at a time and reassure it as it cooperates. Gradually increase the distance in increments, patting and rubbing down the animal repeatedly.
4. Begin to lead it over short distances and stop and calm it from time to time. Increase the distances until you can lead the animal around the yards with only the rope on its horns.
5. When you are satisfied that it is leading regularly, put the rope through the nose ring and lead it, still within the yards. The rope should come from mid way behind the horns over the top of the poll, under the front part of the noose and then through the nose ring. Take care to ensure that the eye of the noose or any knots do not catch in the nose ring.
6. When the animal becomes used to leading through the nose ring, you can start to lead it outside the yards; but ensure it is tethered to start with and have plenty of rope to wrap around something solid when you move around in case it tries to bolt. A vehicle can be used as a movable post at this stage. If you have trouble with the animal trying to escape, return it to the yards and lead it around inside again for a while.
7. Extensive walking with the animal in various situations and over different terrain should continue for a couple of weeks. It is important to ensure the animal does not get away during any part of the breaking-in process as this vice is very difficult to correct once it has been rewarded with success.
8. Once the buffalo is successfully leading, a halter can be used instead of the rope around the horns, with a check rope clipped onto the nose ring and some pressure to the nose ring applied only when required to steady the buffalo down if it becomes excited.
9. Buffalo should never be tied up by the nose ring – always tie from the base of the horns or from a halter.

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