

Why Does My Horse . . . ?

Paul McGreevy (1996). Souvenir Press Ltd: London. 243pp. Hardback. Obtainable from the publishers, 43 Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3PA, UK (ISBN 0 285 63312 0). Price £15.99.

Unfortunately for horses, human understanding of horse behaviour requires not only practical experience but a learned appreciation of the horse's natural history. In the last decade several excellent books relating modern domestic horse behaviour to its ancestral origins have been written, although the appeal and likely usefulness of these to the 'average' horse owner has, in reality, been fairly minimal. The advantage that McGreevy's book has over previous texts is that it is 'reader-friendly'. The book is a combination of easily digestible facts, case studies, advice and humour but, most importantly, it is presented in immediately accessible, clearly labelled, concise sections – a strategy likely to appeal even to less motivated readers.

The aim of the book, according to the author, is to minimize the prevalence of behavioural problems 'by reducing human frustration and equine fear'. He states 'we have a moral obligation to understand the needs of horses and treat them with compassion. Only by understanding what motivates them can we alter their behaviour'. The book is divided into three parts. Part one, entitled 'Behaviour therapy for horses' is composed of two chapters, the first of which, although short, is possibly the most important part of the book. The chapter explains how the fear and frustration that horses experience can form the basis of the varied equine behavioural problems referred to later in the book.

Using example situations the author illustrates how horse and human can perceive events entirely differently leading to human misunderstandings and inappropriate actions, frequently in the form of punishment. McGreevy points out that attempts to discipline the horse in this way can lead to learned aggression as horses tend to associate punishment with the presence of the human delivering it rather than the 'wrong' behaviour. In fact, of the problem cases that the author deals with almost a third involve horses that show, amongst other characteristics, learned aggression. I am sure many horse owners would agree, if they were really honest, that punishing horses is usually an expression of their own frustration sometimes provoked by wrongly assuming malicious intent on the part of the horse. Sensibly, the author reminds us that horses do not attempt to humiliate their equine companions so there is no reason to imagine that they reserve this for us!

Chapter two discusses how horse behaviour is affected by genetics, gender, experience, management and current conditions. The information presented is appropriately simple with numerous analogies and examples which should maintain the interest of the book's predominantly non-scientific target audience. The section on management, in particular, provides a useful, if brief, summary of the restrictions that intensive husbandry systems and equestrian sports can impose on the physical and behavioural needs of horses.

Part two of the book consists of an A to Z reference of normal horse behaviour, relating 26 features of feral horse behaviour to domestic equivalents. Each section provides an informative, entertaining and succinct summary of up-to-date research and general observations on a specific behaviour including points of conjecture or controversy. The randomized order of the topics according to the progression of the alphabet removes the usual predictability of chapters of this sort. The subject of 'vision' is followed by 'weaning', then 'xenophobia', for example, and essential facts are possibly easier to retain as they are not lost in continuous tracts of closely related text.

Part three forms the main portion of the book and is dedicated to tackling common queries regarding horse behaviour, hence the title of the book (and this part). Again the format is alphabetical, consisting of explanatory text describing a particular behaviour (eg coprophagia) or an owner question followed by the author's comments and advice. On more serious or controversial topics such as stereotypes the author uses a combination of the two styles to explore past and current thinking. This structure is an effective method of highlighting owners' fears and imparting constructive advice without the reader feeling that the discussion is too theoretical. Whether there are always sufficiently detailed instructions for the owner to follow in practice is arguable but the author's suggestions will certainly encourage a more reasoned approach to the problem.

The message underpinning the whole book is that there is a rational reason for every undesirable behaviour and it is most probably not what you expect it to be. What you can be sure of is that the horse is not behaving that way to annoy you and punishment is very likely to be futile.

Apart from the author's anecdotes and personal research, the information that the book contains is not new and could prove frustratingly simplistic for more knowledgeable readers. It does, however, provide a good summary of equine behaviour that students may find useful as a basic introductory text and starting point for further reading, although the book does not include a list of references. For horse owners the book is invaluable and I would recommend it to readers of all ages. Even if the reader dips into the book haphazardly or on an occasional basis they cannot fail to take something of the book's message with them to the stable, which can only be beneficial for the relationship between horse and handler, and for the welfare of horses in general.

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The Exploitation of Mammal Populations

Edited by Victoria J Taylor and Nigel Dunstone (1996). Chapman & Hall: London. 415pp. Hardback. Obtainable from UFAW; or from the publishers, 2-6 Boundary Row, London SE1 8HN, UK (ISBN 0 412 64420 7). Price £39.50 plus postage. A special price is available from UFAW for members.

Mammal populations are exploited world-wide – by subsistence hunters for meat, trappers to supply the fur trade, ranchers to augment cattle production, sport hunters, circuses, tourists and commercial producers. This great variety of types of exploitation presents an intellectual challenge to anyone attempting a synthesis of the biological, conservation or animal welfare consequences of these activities. This volume takes a first step to considering these issues, and it does so by presenting an extensive sampling of the types of exploitation.

By bringing together some of the leading thinkers from both the conservation and the welfare communities, the original symposium in late 1994, on which this volume is based, surely aimed to build bridges between the two philosophies. Yet only the editors, Victoria Taylor and Nigel Dunstone, in an introductory chapter attempt to consider the implications to conservation and animal welfare of human exploitation of mammals. They question: 'When is exploitation morally defensible? Can exploitation help to conserve species, particularly in the long term? Does assigning a monetary value to wildlife protect it or hasten