Horse Corral

Fact or Fiction: What's the Truth About Horses?

By Alex Valverde, Equine Advocates Communications Manager

Horses have played large roles in society throughout history, as working and companion animals. Despite their constant presence, there are many interesting things people don't realize about horses or misconceptions that should be corrected. Do horses really sleep standing up? Can they see color? Here are some facts and myth-busters about horses.

FACT: Foals can walk and run within a few hours after birth

Foals can start standing within an hour after birth, although it's not always on the first try. They're born with fully-formed hooves because, as prey animals, horses need to move very quickly to avoid predators. Newborn hooves do look different though because they have eponychium, or soft coverings over the sharp edges of a foal's foot. The coverings protect the mother's uterus and birth canal during pregnancy and birth. They dry out and go away within a few days.

FICTION: White hooves are weaker than dark ones

This myth dates back many years when some farriers came up with an unfortunate and completely inaccurate saying: "One white foot, buy him; Two white feet, try him; Three white feet, deny him; Four white feet and a white nose — take off his hide and feed him to the crows." However, the strength, health, and quality of hooves depend on the horse's genetics, environment, and how well you take care of them – Not color. The biggest impacts on the quality of a hoof are moisture content and breed genetics. For example, Appaloosas seem to have extremely strong feet, no matter what color they are, while Thoroughbreds tend to have thinner hoof walls.

FACT: Horses Can Sleep Standing Up

Horses are prey animals and sleeping standing up is one way in which they've adapted to the threat of predators. They have a "stay apparatus," which is a system of tendons and ligaments that stabilize the major joints in their legs so they can relax without falling over. However, horses get their deeper REM sleep while lying down. Due to their sensitive digestive systems, horses can only lie down for short periods of time (typically less than one hour) which is fine since they don't need a lot of REM sleep.

FICTION: Horses are Colorblind

The truth is horses can see colors, but not in the same way as humans. Their vision is dichromatic, meaning horses can tell between two color wavelengths within the visible light. They can see blue and green colors, but not red. Humans perceive color in three wavelengths (red, blue, and green), and by combining them, we can see millions of colors. For horses, red and reddish colors appear green or yellowish.

FACT: Horses cannot burp or vomit.

A horse's digestive tract is one-way system thanks to a powerful lower esophageal sphincter. This system tightly regulates the passage of food and water from the esophagus into the stomach and prevents the contents from going in reverse. This unique feature means horses should be carefully monitored to avoid overeating or consuming something harmful or poisonous.

FICTION: Horses only communicate through neighing

Horses do communicate through sounds like nickering and neighing, but it isn't their primary form of communication. They also use body language to communicate with each other and with humans. They'll "speak" with their eyes, ears, tails, and body movements.

A final thought that rings true for us: It's a privilege to have wild and domestic equines in our lives and it's our responsibility to ensure that they can lead their lives safe from harm and pass with peace and dignity.

Photo of Kip, a rescued Quarter Horse.

EQUINE ADVOCATES

Equine Advocates Rescue & Sanctuary
3212 State Route 66, Chatham, NY

2024 OPEN DAY SCHEDULE

11:00 AM - 4:00 PM
Sunday, May 5
Saturday, June 8
Saturday, July 13
Saturday, August 17
Saturday, September 14
Saturday, October 12
Sunday, November 3

Berkshire Humane Society
214 Barker Rd, Pittsfield, MA 01201
Phone: (413) 447-7878, Berkshirehumane.org

Guinea pigs looking for love! We'd love to introduce you to **Carl and Charlie**, a pair of adult male guinea pigs who were abandoned in a box at a local state park. Luckily, this dynamic duo was found by a good Samaritan and brought to Berkshire Humane Society so they could have the opportunity to find a new, loving, lasting home. They are understandably incredibly shy, so the volunteers and staff at Berkshire Humane have been diligently working with them on being handled, so they understand life is A-OK with humans. As guinea are animals who are easily startled this is a work in progress, but with time, patience and love these boys can thrive in a home with the proper care they deserve. Once they learn this, they will be great companions to their new people and will become excited to see and interact with their adoptive family. Interested in learning more about Carl and Charlie? Please reach out to the Berkshire Humane Society small animal staff at 413-447-7878 ext. 124 for more information.