

IMPRINTING IN FOALS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF FIRST CONTACT WITH HUMAN

E. Köntés^{1*}, I.M. Pop¹

¹University of Agricultural Science and Veterinary Medicine Iasi, Romania

Abstract

Imprinting of foals and the importance of first contact with man/human Temperament and behavior of horses together with the development of equestrian sports has become an increasingly important criterion. First contact with human in the early hours of life at the "imprinting" phase is very important as evidenced by the work of Dr. Robert M. Miller and other authors. A properly conducted imprinting can influence the behavior of young animal and also can prepare it from this early age to the stress factors the animal will have to confront during lifetime especially under actual development conditions which require increased adaptability of the animal. Twenty foals were supervised on three farms, during two years, from parturition to the age of 180 days. During the monitoring period were collected biometric data and were made a series of behavioral recordings. During the study was found that those subjects which had encountered human contact in shorter time from parturition showed an increased exploring and decreased rescuing/defense behavior. Gathering biometrical data from these subjects was much easier, they responded with higher tolerance to stress factors caused by monitoring. Correct human intervention in the short period of imprinting influences the sensitivity and tolerance of animals to stress factors which they will face in the course of life, increasing the chances of becoming a reliable partner of man.

Key words: imprinting, stress

INTRODUCTION

The horse, as prey animal, born with a highly developed nervous system, right after parturition is able to assimilate a large amount of information from the surrounding environment.

This period may be used to accustom foals with the presence of human and to perform certain specific exercise that could influence the animal behavior around human, and also may change the exploring and the saving/defense behavior of individuals beneficially to humans.

The influence of this contact is increasing as the first contact with human is closer to the act of parturition.

RESOURCES AND METHODS

In the research with the topic "Youth Equine Nutritional Behavior" twenty foals were monitored during 2015-2016 at three

farms in Covasna county. There were used means of video recording and biometric data were collected in predefined periods.

At the three farms animals are kept in different ways: in boxes/stalls, in boxes provided with access to the paddock and pasture.

Subjects which had the first contact with human at an interval less than 60 minutes after parturition showed a lower reluctance to collection of biometric data (weighing, body measurements).

In this research it was used as a research method video monitoring, body measurements and experimental observation.

There were monitored and compared the reaction of subjects who participated in the experiment of three farms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Relationship between the newborn foal and human should begin immediately after parturition, during this period the foal can familiarize with a series of physical and acoustic stimuli which otherwise (without

*Corresponding author: konteserno@gmail.com

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such intervention) would trigger saving behavior.

During the study was found that those subjects which had encountered human contact before rising showed a slight increase of exploring and decrease of the rescuing/defense behavior.

During the collection of biometric data such as body measurements or weightings of these specimens the stress factors triggered later or didn't trigger at all the saving reaction.

Those subjects which came in contact with human after rising/standing up, the saving reaction was triggered earlier; during the work of collecting biometric data they accepted harder human touch and proximity of unknown objects such as scales or measuring instruments.

Foals that had first human contact after 10-12 hours showed an increased saving reaction especially the ones born on pasture.

Biometrical data collection and measurement required a larger timeframe than other categories, saving behavior was triggered much earlier and the exploring occurred in a lesser extent.

Based on the time interval between parturition and first contact with human were found three categories:

- contact before rising
- contact immediately after rising
- contact after 12 hours

Considering the quiddity of the initial research "Contributions to the study of nutrition and eating habits in young equine" during the monitoring period was attempted to reduce to the minimum necessary contact with human, outside periods of collecting biometric data, monitoring was carried out by video surveillance, the behavioral pattern of the three categories was kept almost unchanged.

For compiling the ethological records, corporal data collection took place on the 1st, 7th, 30th and 180th day.

At the first two categories of subjects data collection was conducted relatively easily, these foals maintained exploring behavior on a higher level, response to stress factors by releasing rescue behavior was manifested later or at all.

Data collection, body measurements and weighing were difficult especially in the third category especially at the age of 30 and 180 day where the body weight of the animal and the physical strength becomes significant at the onset of rescue behavior.

CONCLUSIONS

Subjects which had encountered human contact before rising had a higher threshold of rescuing/defense behavior and showed an increased exploring behavior.

The foal moved quickly and at greater distances from the mare, accepting human presence, proximity and touch.

Subjects which had encountered human contact after rising showed a slight increase of rescuing/defense and decrease of tolerance to human approach.

At subjects from the third category, which have encountered human contact 12 hours after parturition was found a relatively high reluctance to human presence, increased trigger of saving behavior and decrease of exploring behavior.

Imprinting and first contact with human has a significant potential, which can be applied in the benefit of equine exploitation, especially in the current context when they are used for sports and leisure in an increasing number.

Stimuli transmitted from human to newborn foal immediately after parturition, in the first hours of life can ease the work of man in the future and/or diminish certain behavioral pattern disadvantageous to exploitation.

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