

Social learning and contact seeking behaviour in horses (*Equus caballus*)

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Background and Aims

Horses have a close relationship with humans due to domestication, and are thought to be skillful in this interspecies communication.

The aim of this study was to investigate if horses seek human contact when faced with an unsolvable task, and if those that do are more successful in a social learning experiment. In addition, the study investigated if personality had significance for their success or contact seeking behaviour.

Methods

Behaviours towards a human during an unsolvable task were analyzed in 22 horses and ponies.

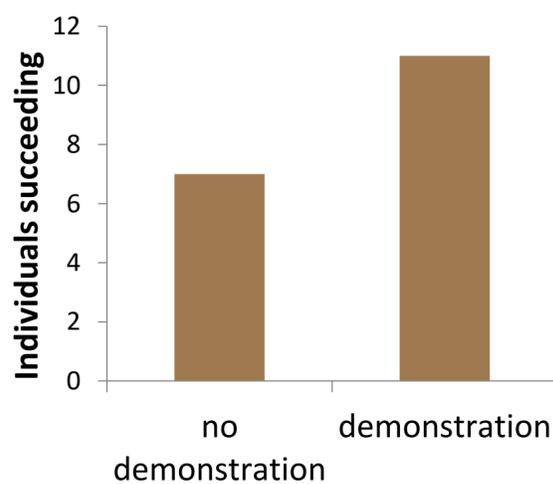
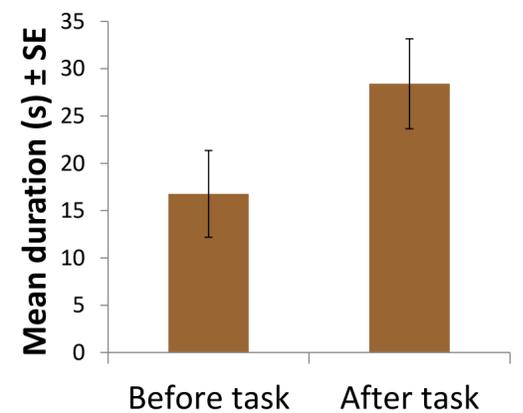


As well as the horses' success and behaviour in a social learning experiment, with and without a human demonstration.

A questionnaire about the horses' personalities resulting in scores on personality traits, such as e.g excitability, anxiousness, protection, and sociability.

Results

Horses spent significantly more time in proximity to a human when faced with an unsolvable task.



Success in the social learning experiment did not differ significantly before and after a demonstration.

Horses that seek most contact with humans when faced with an unsolvable problem did not have a higher success rate in the social learning experiment.

The personality traits Anxiousness and Excitability correlated negatively with behaviours related to motivation, in both experiments.

Conclusions

Horses that seek contact with humans when faced with an unsolvable problem are **not** more likely to learn from a human demonstrator.

Personality did influence the horses' motivation for the two experiments, but not their success.