



WILD DISCOVERIES

The effect of a novel object on the behavior of mare and two year old horses

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The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of a novel object, an orange ball, on equine behaviors in two year olds and mares. We predict that the two year olds will demonstrate more interest in the novel object compared to mares, and as times passes, the novelty will wear off. We also predict that both the two year olds and older mares will individually demonstrate more behavior not associated with the ball compared to behaviors associated with the ball. Data was collected using ethograms to observe behavior associated with the ball for several weeks. The ethogram is divided into 14 different behaviors, four of which were associated with the novel object, and remaining 10 were not. Time started when the ball was introduced to the enclosure, with two members outside the pasture recording behaviors. Each week, six ethograms were completed on the two year olds, and six ethograms on the older mares. The two year olds demonstrated more interest in the novel object compared to older mares ($P < 0.01$). Mares demonstrated more non-associative behavior compared to associative behavior with the object ($P < 0.01$). Two year olds also demonstrated more non-associative behaviors compared to associative behaviors with the ball, but much less than that of mares ($P < 0.01$). Over time, the two year olds exhibited less associative behaviors with the novel object ($P = 0.10$). This data indicated that novel objects are indeed beneficial for young horses and may have future implications for prevention of behavioral abnormalities.