

Respect Nature

By Maksida Vogt

Do we still know what this means - to respect nature? Do we remember or is this feeling completely missing? When we look around at the way we keep our horses now days, then we must have the impression it is missing. How else could we explain stables in which we hold our horses as captive prisoners behind bars, how else could we explain minimal pastures where our horses spend day after day and just exist. Yes, it is only just existing... it is not life.

Let us start from the beginning. The domestication of horses has made it impossible for them to live as nature intended, on a steppe, and to this natural way of life. Domestication is only an advantage for the human, it makes horses helpless and easier to keep, to ride and to drive, and with this easier to abuse. And this is something human has wanted since the beginning, the horse should perform as much as possible and we do not raise a claim to the way we are keeping them. Keeping horses in stables is a normal state for us. But, we should ask ourselves why do we keep our animals in the stables?

Because it is safer, more convenient and cheaper for us. There is no other reason, and none of these reasons respects the needs of horses. Horses do not need a stable, we need it. And what is even worse, we make our horses ill by keeping them this way. Many colds and inflammations are the result of warm stables and rugging. We rug our horses to keep them from getting a winter coat - which they need for their protection. And because of this you can see a rugged Haflinger in the middle of Allgäu, Bavaria... We scar these wonderful animals. We cherish them to death. We cut their leg hair which protects their legs from the wetness and the insects, we cut their mane which they need for protection, with brushes and caustic shampoo's we remove the natural grease from their skin which keeps the skin at a proper pH and protects the horse from the reduction of body temperature, we shear their coats, we destroy the thermoregulation of the skin and body with rugging, we take them from the loam and rocky ground which is the best natural care for hooves and bind their hooves with iron shoes which has detrimental effects to the whole horse... We abuse them... We make our horses ill... We must finally wake up... We must bring to mind that no expenditure of money on stuff, no cleanliness or hay will ever replace the pasture and the freedom for the horse. Only there can the horse stay healthy, happy and feel as a horse.

Horses have claims and they have needs, and we trample on them. For the horse, it is only possible to literally feel as a horse, when he is able to live a life that is appropriate to the species. He must be born outside, in a pasture, in herd, and there he must grow up. He should be parented by his mother and other members of the family, and by the lead stallion, his father figure. He should play and frolic around with his buddies and siblings, he should experience play fights and races with them, he should have his place in the herd, in the family. He should have the freedom to be himself. This is all a young horse needs to grow up healthy, mentally and physically... These are his natural needs, they are essential. Why is this not respected? Why are most foals shorn of their natural needs from the first day of their life? Why are they separated from their mothers within 6 months as a rule?

The most important condition for the species-appropriate keeping of horses is keeping them in a herd, ideally consisting of six members or more, where they are able to intimately communicate amongst one another. The horse, as a flight animal, can only rest and relax both physically and psychologically when he has the constant security of the herd, of the lead mare or stallion to guard, watch over, warn if there is danger

and defend if necessary. The young horse can meanwhile calmly graze, play, doze or sleep. Horses who were never able to experience this, can not do this and are mostly very nervous and insecure.

The second important condition for species-appropriate keeping, and this is very closely related to the first condition, is the wideness of pastures. It is a huge need of the horse to build his stamina, his heart and lung function and allows for proper circulation throughout his body. This is one need that keeps him healthy. The pastures here in Germany are deplorably small. Rather they are not much better than a cage as they are a benefit for the horse. But of course still better than a box, that is self-evident, but still not enough for even a basic natural keeping approach. It is time to rethink, a big change here is urgently needed. The pastures should be arranged as diversified as possible, with trees and bushes, hills and ditches. And should always have one continuous race path, at least 1000m to 1500 m long. To give insight or an example of how natural horse keeping should look in order for it to be called species-appropriate, it would be like this: twenty to thirty horses with maybe forty cows on 150 to 500 hectares (371 to 1,236 acres) of hilly wasteland overgrown with trees and bushes for forage and protection from the elements, with natural water sources and various types of grasses for grazing, and full time outside of course. And when all this sounds like fiction, then it should be another alarm bell which shows how fatal our idea about species-appropriate horse keeping really is.

The horse is flight animal, he must develop and preserve his flight impulse, his flight reflexes and his physical mobility in the same way as his relax phases. For this reason the foal games and social living are so important, but much more important are big pastures which are wide enough to invite the whole herd to run even longer distances and to support and benefit flight reflexes, stamina and the feeling of space.



And I am asking why is this not respected? Why is this not realized? When the horse loses trust in his flight ability, physically, because he is tied, jailed or feels held down, or loses his psychical trust because he is injured, lame, underfed or overfed, chronically unchallenged or overworked or because he is ridden so that every movement means pain... then this horse loses his will to live and his courage to face life...

There are horses who are broken after short time because of terrible and forceful treatment. People say to that, horses lose their soul...

And indeed, if we look around, is there anything more soulless, more sad to see than a horse weaving or wind sucking, or with his headed or tongue outstretched? Look at them!

When will we take responsibility for this? How can we let this continue to happen? Are we going to continue to support this?

Or... are we going to live along side and have deep respect and compassion for these incomparable, kind, sensitive and intelligent beings, and to give them back their most basic needs and rights...

With respect and love...

Following Sadko Solinski
