



International Society
for Equitation Science

10th International Equitation Science Conference

Equine Stress, Learning and Training

ISES – Denmark 2014 August 7-9

<http://www.equitationsscience.com/press-releases>

Equine stress, learning and training

[Conference proceedings](#)

The International Society for Equitation Science (ISES) held its 10th annual conference in Denmark. The conference was attended by 235 delegates from 22 countries. The conference attracted international scientists and practitioners discussing aspects of stress responses, learning and cognition, and sustainable training of horses. Her Royal Highness Princess Benedikte of Denmark, who is greatly supportive of initiatives to improve horse welfare and human safety, was the patroness of ISES 2014.

The three-day conference with 35 spoken presentations and 57 poster presentations took the participants back to the biological roots of Equitation Science focussing on the measurement and interpretation of stress responses in horses, continuing with the theme of learning and cognition and concluding with how the results of scientific research can be used to achieve sustainable riding and training. Highlights included five plenaries by renowned scientists and a number of review presentations.

The *Interpretation of equine stress responses* theme introduced the fundamentals of stress. The main message being that in order to assess stress in horses, studies must be carefully planned and conducted under standardised and controlled conditions using validated methods and take indicators such as behavioural observations into account. Equestrians are reminded that besides the physical impact of stressors, perception (e.g. inherent fearfulness, life history and early experience) are also key contributory factors to the stress experienced by horses (and humans).

Not only does stress affect the welfare of horses, it also has direct implications for training and the learning capacity in horses, which was addressed within the presentations on *Learning and cognition*. The links between stress and brain function, including effects of the neurotransmitter dopamine, were emphasized. Dopamine is heavily involved in the reward system and in memory formation and learning in horses. There is no doubt that research in neuroscience and brain function will bring new insights to the importance of how horses learn optimally in practice.

Presentations addressing *Sustainable training and riding* highlighted the importance of adequately preparing the horse for exercise and competition, and the often forgotten physical and physiological condition of the riders. The need for more objectivity in dressage judging was emphasized and a vision for training in horse sport based on learning theory was presented.

A range of scientific topics were presented in a number of very interesting free papers; examples being rugging, road safety and the prize-winning student oral presentation on horse's preferences for different ammonia concentrations (Jessie Weir, University of Florida, US) in addition to the prize-winning student poster presentation on methods for testing judgement bias in horses (Sara Hintze, University of Bern, Switzerland).

The practical session held at Billund Riding Centre focussed on the theme *Ontogeny of the rider*. The audience was provided with a delightful demonstration by Mette Hald and Merete Stenner (Ædelund Shetland ponies) and their 10 Shetland ponies and young students. Hald and Stenner demonstrated learning theory being put into practice by children and their trainers within the riding school setting, with obvious benefits for the welfare and learning of both children and ponies and promotion of a lot of fun during the process of teaching children how to train and ride horses.

Using simple training skills coupled with techniques drawn from martial arts, Judo champion Palle Flodgaard and Helle Sydendal expertly demonstrated how to how fall from a horse without getting hurt.

Professional rider and horse trainer, Susan Kjærgård (BlueBerryHill), delivered an educational show jumping clinic teaching four horse-rider pairs that had previously experienced problems during jumping, to apply learning theory to circumvent the horses' behavioural problems resulting in improved jumping outcomes.

The practical day concluded with an impressive demonstration of the principles of academic riding by Belgian Riding Academy Equestrian Instructor, Leopold Gombeer and Justin Verboven. Academic riding was discussed as one alternative way of performing dressage training. The practical day successfully provided a platform for discussion of training methods, and for promoting the mission of integration between science and practitioners.

The ISES 2014 conference was hosted by Aarhus University at the modern and comfortable Vingsted Hotel and Conference Centre near Vejle in Denmark where guests enjoyed splendid meals, indoor and outdoor sports facilities and a range of relaxing recreational activities.

Mark your calendar - ISES 2015:

International Society for Equitation Science
11th Annual Conference
Ethical Equitation for all Equestrian Disciplines
6-8 August 2015
University of British Columbia
Vancouver CANADA

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The International Society for Equitation Science conference offers an outstanding international platform for scientists and professional practitioners to present and discuss research related to the field of equitation science. For more information about the conference, venue and programme: www.ISES2014.com

The International Society for Equitation Science (ISES) is a not-for-profit organisation that aims to facilitate research into the training of horses to enhance horse welfare and improve the horse-rider relationship.

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