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Contributed Presentation

**Social structure and interactions within groups of horses
containing a stallion**

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Abstract

Earlier research indicates that stallions might either prevent social interactions between mares in their herds directly or indirectly by their presence (Feist and McCullough, 1976; Sigurjonsdottir et al., 2003) The impact of stallions on the social interactions between harem members was studied in 6 groups of Icelandic horses in 2004, 2006 and 2007 for altogether 525 hours. Four of the groups were permanently living together under semi-feral conditions, while two were temporary breeding groups. In addition, temporary and permanent groups were compared and the effect of the stability of the group on the social behaviour of horses was investigated

The results show that stallions seldom intervene directly in social interactions between harem members. However, the hierarchies were less rigid and fewer friendship bonds were found in the groups compared to what has been found in groups without stallions in Iceland. These results give some support to our prediction that the stallion does indirectly suppress social interactions of herd members

The stability of the group was found to affect the aggression rate, since a higher aggression rate was found in the temporary groups compared to the permanent groups. The number of preferred allogrooming partners of the horses was also affected to some extent, as a significantly lower number of allogrooming partners was found in the most unstable group compared to all the other groups. The results have significance for further research in the field of social structure of mammals, and may also be applied in the management of horses and other domestic animals

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