

Effectiveness of desensitizing ponies to new stimuli

Summary

It was assumed that ponies raised for recreation or sport for children should quickly become accustomed to atypical situations, without exhibiting dangerous behaviour. Hence the aim of the study was to evaluate the effects of desensitization of ponies to new stimuli on the basis of behaviour assessment and cardiac parameters. The study included 12 adult Friesian ponies which were desensitized three times through exposure to new visual and auditory stimuli. During this treatment, their behaviour and cardiac parameters were assessed. Repeated measures analysis of variance and the Tukey test were performed and Spearman's rank correlations were determined. The effectiveness of desensitization of ponies was found to depend on the type of stimulus. Desensitization to visual stimuli is more difficult to achieve than desensitization to visual-auditory stimuli. Positive changes in the ponies' behaviour during desensitization cannot be an indication of the accompanying emotional excitability measured by means of cardiac parameters, which may be due to effect of the animal's movement on cardiac function. Due to the discrepancy in the results regarding the effectiveness of desensitization of ponies to visual and auditory stimuli, further research is necessary.

KEY WORDS: ponies, desensitization, behaviour, cardiac parameters