

EQUINE NOTES for March 2018.

“The horse is an archetypal symbol which will always find ways to stir up deep and moving ancestral memories in every human being.” Paul Mellon

Hello Again,

Sometimes I sit down to write these notes with a blank mind. No welfare problems have been reported to me this last month, which is a good thing, but I did have a query about how to recognise a case of neglect.

Every horse has the right to have food, water, vet treatment and foot care when needed, and a way of avoiding the elements, such as a thick hedge to shelter under if there is no stable or field shelter provided.

Tethering a horse is an accepted method of restraint provided that the halter is fitted correctly and the chain or rope has a swivel at the ends, so to allow movement without entanglement. The horse should be moved daily onto a fresh patch so as not to graze among droppings and mud. Feed in the form of hay or haylage to be fed and water constantly provided.

To monitor a horse's condition look at its sides. Are the ribs showing under, maybe a thick coat? Do the pin bones either side of the horse's quarters look prominent with little flesh, or are they well rounded? From behind, does it have poverty lines or grooves running down its upper hind legs? Is the horse eating well or do bits of forage drop from its mouth, indicating a sore mouth or teeth that need attention. Thinness can be due to an over burden of worms and a horse in bad condition will be more prone to an over load and become more sick.

Feet need regular attention as the horn, like fingernails keep growing, especially on soft ground and need paring back to avoid undue strain being placed on leg ligaments. Does the horse look sad, ill or reluctant to move? Are its eyes bright and is it alert? Don't worry if a horse is without a rug in winter, provided it has not been clipped. God gave it suitable protection from the weather, particularly ponies and native breeds, some of which have double coats as they have evolved to live out in extreme conditions. It is only hot bloods, ie- Thoroughbreds and Arabs, and the ill and elderly that require extra warmth in winter, provided adequate forage is available. This provides inner heat.

Ideally equines should have company as they are herd animals, but this is not a welfare issue however one might feel about it.

If you have concerns about any horses in your area please contact me. As a contact for British Horse Society welfare I will make sure that all concerns are addressed.

While out the other day I bumped into our local, hard working footpath and bridleway warden, trimming back overhanging branches. She told me that always on walkabout with her dog, she carries a good pair of secateurs in her pocket as clips any twigs off as she goes. She thought it would be a good idea to get horse riders to do the same, especially as they are high enough to clip the odd bits that hit you in the face, and which she, on the ground cannot reach. I would suggest that the secateurs should be carried in a container from the saddle, similar to a hunting horn case, for safety reasons.

Today the sun is shining although it is bitterly cold, the ground, thankfully is hard and the dreadful mud, which made outside work so tiring, has disappeared. Just the hay to feed, and the water troughs to deice. Roll on spring and warmer sun on our backs, to make us all feel better. I can't wait.

Oscar, Ziggy and Sid are standing in the sunshine, heads down dozing, but it beats me why in gales and teeming rain they prefer to be out in the open, tail to a hedge and not in their field shelter where their hay is fed in corner racks. I can only suppose that because horses are flight animals, they feel safer.

Don't forget to contact me if you need advice or just want to talk over a welfare problem. On behalf of the BHS, I am here to help.

Heather Lee. BHS welfare contact for E. Devon and W. Dorset