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JCC RESEARCH SEMINAR

TOPIC

Mounted Load Carrying Capacity of Working Donkeys (Equus asinus)

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ABSTRACT

Overloading of equids has become an important concern among veterinarians, trainers, riders, and animal welfare advocates. Increased weight carrying may have a negative impact on equids' biomechanical, physiological, biochemical, and behavioral parameters during exercise, including causing gait asymmetry or lameness. It is critical to understand how to precisely calculate the load-carrying capacity of both ridden horses and working equids. There are numerous options for assessing the effect of loading on an animal's body, but these have been applied inconsistently, making consensus difficult, even for well-studied animals like horses.

Working donkeys (Equus asinus) are essential to people's livelihoods. They are necessary for transporting goods, but one of the primary welfare concerns of working donkeys worldwide is overloading. In Pakistan, we investigated mounted load-carrying by donkeys and the factors that influence it. A cross-sectional study of donkey owners was carried out, and questionnaire-based interviews were conducted. Overloading based on current recommendations was common, with most donkeys carrying more than the recommended limit. This survey provides evidence of on-the-ground working practices and factors associated with mounted load carrying, which is essential for developing evidence-based loading recommendations to improve the welfare of working donkeys.

We will identify behavioral indicators of stress and welfare assessment in working donkeys later in the project, validation objective measures of lameness in donkeys, load-carrying capacity in healthy donkeys, and load-carrying capacity in working donkeys in Pakistan. Quantified loading limits or overload indicators could then be used by NGOs, policymakers, and other stakeholders working with vulnerable communities and working equids to limit overloading and improve animal welfare.

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Syed Saad Ul Hassan Bukhari is a PhD research student in the Department of Veterinary Clinical Sciences, Jockey Club College of Veterinary Medicine and Life Sciences.

Saad graduated from the University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF), Pakistan, with a Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine and was awarded with a Medal in 2017. Following a period of equine veterinary practice, he returned to UAF for his M. Phil. and graduated in 2019 with distinction. Later, he joined an equine veterinary hospital and started practicing equine medicine in Pakistan. In 2020, he joined the City University of Hong Kong for his PhD. He has recently been awarded with the Outstanding Academic Performance Award for Research Degree Students by the City University of Hong Kong. He is also a professional player of Tent-pegging and Polo in Pakistan.

Mr. Syed Saad Ul Hassan Bukhari
PhD student supervised by Dr. Parkes

Dr. Rebecca Parkes
Assistant Professor

Dr. Rebecca Parkes is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Veterinary Clinical Sciences and Deputy BVM Program Lead. She leads the Clinical Skills Laboratory and the Veterinary Practice and Professional Studies courses within the BVM program.

Rebecca graduated from the Royal Veterinary College with a Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine with Honours in 2010. Following a period of time in clinical practice, she returned to the RVC to undertake a PhD in equine locomotor biomechanics, supported by a scholarship from the Horserace Betting Levy Board. Rebecca moved to Hong Kong to work as an Equestrian Veterinary Surgeon at the Hong Kong Jockey club in 2015 where she was involved in the rehabilitation of retired racehorses and providing veterinary care for the 600 horses engaged in equestrian sport in Hong Kong. During this time Rebecca also joined the Training and Selection Subcommittee for the Hong Kong Equestrian Federation.

Rebecca moved to City University of Hong Kong in 2019 to pursue her passion for research and teaching. She has since gained a Postgraduate Certificate in Veterinary Education and has been awarded Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy by Advance HE, UK.

Dr Alan McElligott is an Associate Professor in Animal Behaviour and Welfare at the Jockey Club College of Veterinary Medicine and Life Sciences, City University of Hong Kong. He received his BSc from University College Cork, PhD from University College Dublin, and postdoctoral training at the University of Zurich. After serving as faculty member at the University of Nottingham, Queen Mary University of London and the University of Roehampton, he joined City University of Hong Kong in 2020.

Alan is a member of the Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour (ASAB) as a well as serving on ASAB's Education Committee. He is also a member of the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW) and the International Society for Applied Ethology (ISAE). His research has been featured in many news reports across TV, radio, newspapers and other media. Recently his research has been the focus of two TV documentaries on farm livestock cognition and welfare: "SMART AS A GOAT" by ZED TV (France), and "INTO FARM ANIMALS' MINDS" by ARTE TV (France/Germany). He is as an editor for Frontiers in Veterinary Sciences, Animals and Animal Sentience.

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