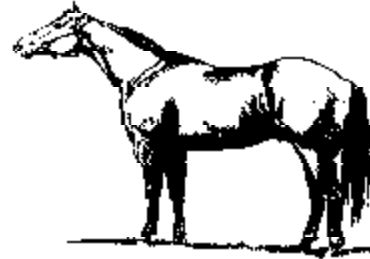


Extension Animal Science Horse Information Series

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DOES MANAGEMENT AFFECT WHEN MARES FOAL?

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As an impatient society, we are prone to want things instantly. In fact, many businesses are based on providing fast food, fast film development, etc.

It is a wonder that broodmare owners have the patients to wait 11 months for a foal to be born. The length of most gestations is 335-340 days.

Few broodmare owners have seen a foal born. Most mares foal at night. In fact, 86 percent foal between 10 p. m. and 2 a. m., when most of us are asleep.

There are various devices to alert the owner that a broodmare is nearing foaling. Even in-stall, closed-circuit video cameras are popular.

Using these devices, you can still miss the event if you are asleep. Mares foal rapidly, usually within 30 minutes of the onset of hard labor.

Broodmares also have the unusual ability to delay foaling, at least for a short time. It

has been observed that a mare that gives all indications that she will foal tonight may not if the weather turns stormy.

A person entering the stable every hour or two may also be disruptive to a mare. It seems that they just wait until you leave, then lie down and foal. At the next visit, mother is munching hay, and the new foal is nursing or sleeping.

What effect, if any, do various management practices have on the time when a mare will actually foal?

British researchers studied two breeding farms. Farm A was a Thoroughbred breeding farm where management activities were basically finished about 4 p. m., and rarely later than 5 p. m. The farm manager quickly checked the stables in the evening, but there were few disturbances after 5 p. m.

In-foal mares were turned out to pasture in the morning and stabled in mid-afternoon. Late-pregnant mares were stabled under artificial lights nightly. Closed-circuit television was used to monitor foaling.

The other farm (Farm B) bred hunter-type horses. It also turned mares out to pasture from morning until mid- to late-afternoon depending upon the time of year. Also, all pregnant mares were stalled at night under artificial lights. They also used closed-circuit television. But, farm activities often extended late into the evening or even past midnight.

The results were that 80 percent of the mares on Farm A foaled before midnight, while only 36 percent of the mares on Farm B foaled before midnight. Only 13 percent of the mares on Farm A foaled between midnight and 4 a. m., but 44 percent of the foals at Farm B were born during this time.

No seasonal influence on time of foaling was observed. They also reported that advancing the clock an hour at the end of March did not delay foaling on either farm.

This study indicates that broodmares prefer to foal in a quiet environment.

Lights do not appear to bother them, but a lot of activities into the night, particularly from 6 p. m. to midnight, appeared to disturb the mares which resulted in more of them foaling after midnight.

Your management system may affect what time during the night your mare foals. Keeping things quiet with a set routine improves the chances of a mare foaling before midnight. So, you can get more sleep.

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