

## Sharing is caring

**Food is the number one motivator for most living things including horses.**

Set the scene:

It's quite common to see horses peacefully eating together at a round bail. After all there is plenty of food, no one will go hungry so this is not really sharing, just an example of calm cooperation.

But what if the hay is limited and there is not enough to fill the bellies of everyone?

This is an easy experiment - one slice of hay was put out for 4 horses. It was deliberately left in a small pile and not spread out to allow all horses easy access.

Some may think this a cruel experiment - but the horses were not fazed by the apparent shortage of hay, in fact they happily munched on the hay together until it was all gone.



Hmm. Not really the result one would expect so let's up the ante and put out one small bucket of oats for 4 horses. The stakes are higher and the prize is greater. However the results are the same. The horses considered the needs of the others to be equal to their own and shared the limited grain. Not one of the horses tried to steal all the grain for himself.



On first blush you may not think this a such a big deal, and to be honest neither did I. After all, these horses knew each other, they obviously got along with each other and probably ironed out any kinks or disputes about sharing a long time ago. Until the thought that perhaps horses are capable of “unselfish acts” occurred to me.

**Unselfish: Willing to put the needs or wishes of others before one’s own.**

That was a mind-blowing thought, but even more incredible, was that it’s true. Horses are capable of and in fact exhibit many examples of unselfish behavior, incidents when they put the needs of others before their own. They do it with other horses and they even extend this act of altruistic behavior to other species including humans.





While conducting environmental observations and research for my book I had one basic rule, “If I can’t photograph the behavior or action it must be just hear-say or myth”. After all, seeing is believing. This meant conducting many, many equine experiments to test my theories and challenge popular (but un-proven) beliefs.

The experiment was conducted again this time with just two horses that didn’t know each other and what took place over the small bowl of food was truly beautiful to watch.

A small bowl of grain was placed between the two horses.

The palamino was first to put his nose in the bowl and started to eat the grain

The black horse slowly approached the bowl. He obviously wanted to join in.

The palamino lifted his nose from the bowl

and turned his head and neck to the side to allow the other horse to eat.

After a few moments the palamino returned his nose to the bowl.

The black horse mirrored the sharing behavior by lifting his nose from the bowl and turning his head and neck to the side. As if to say, “Go-ahead it’s your turn now”.

They repeated this “sharing behavior” until all the grain was gone.

They not only shared amicably but they took turns.

This is just one example of horses sharing - which is a social skill we have to “teach toddlers”.

If you have other examples of horses exhibiting “Unselfish acts” by putting the needs of others ahead of their own I would love to hear them.

**How to record and Submit the results of your equine experiments**

**Download the results form from [www.TheHorsewatcher.com](http://www.TheHorsewatcher.com)**

**Answer the questions and e-mail it back to [thehorsewatcher@shaw.ca](mailto:thehorsewatcher@shaw.ca)**

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