

Can horses count?

The objective was to determine if horses could not only count how many pieces of carrot were dropped into a bucket but would choose the bucket containing most carrot treats.

We tested 60 horses with this experiment, mainly because it was fun and everyone at the barns we visited wanted to put their horse to the test.

What you need: Two identical buckets and a bag of carrots (cut into bite sized pieces).

The horse was positioned between the two buckets (a little way back) so he could see what I was doing.

First I gave the horse a piece of carrot so he knew what the treat was.

Then I dropped one carrot in the first bucket and dropped three carrots in the other bucket.

They were dropped separately so the horse could hear each carrot landing in the bucket.

The horse was allowed to walk forward and choose which bucket he wanted.

Would he connect the sound of three carrots falling into the bucket plop-plop-plop as more rewarding than just one plop of the first bucket?

Would the horse choose the bucket with more carrots in it?

Was he able to count?

We alternated which bucket had more carrots in it and each horse was given three tries.



Results:

Of the 60 horses we tested 50% totally got it. They watched attentively and without hesitation went to the bucket with three pieces of carrot every time.

35% of the horses went to the same bucket each time - I don't want to say these horses are not smart, in fact they are probably very easy to train. After all, by repeating the same action (same bucket) they got a reward, which is in fact, how we train horses.

15% of the horses thought the experiment was dumb and either randomly selected a bucket each time or chose not to participate at all. Some horses just turned around and walked off.

Note: This experiment works best if there are few distractions and the horses is paying attention to what you are doing.

How to record and Submit the results of your equine experiments

Download the results form from www.TheHorsewatcher.com

Answer the questions and e-mail it back to thehorsewatcher@shaw.ca

Put Worldwide Equine experiment in the title bar