



Jr. Animal Scientist

MAY 24, 2020



**WHAT
WE LOVE
ABOUT
HORSES!**

Horses have shaped the world!

People have taken care of horses for thousands of years, and we've learned to work together with them. Around the world, ranchers ride horses through pastures as they care for their livestock. Draft horses pull machinery through fields to turn the soil and help crops grow. Police officers even ride horses sometimes!

And many people ride horses for fun, of course. Trail riding and horse shows are great ways to get experience handling these amazing animals!

Animal scientists who study horses are called **equine** scientists. Equine scientists study what horses should eat, where they should live and how they should exercise.

Fun fact!

Horse height is measured in units of four inches. This measurement is called a "hand." The tallest horse in the world today is a Belgian Gelding horse named Big Jake. He is more than 20 hands tall!

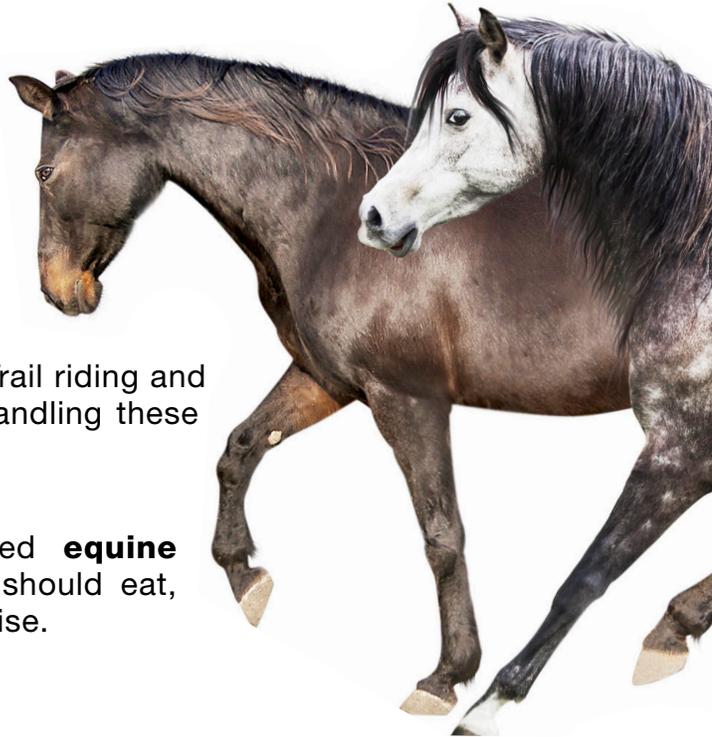


Image: iStock/ bootsandbling



Word Watch

Look for these terms in this issue of Jr. Animal Scientist

DOMESTICATED: When an animal species is raised by humans and selectively bred for certain traits.

STIRRUPS: A pair of devices that attach to the saddle of a horse. Stirrups hold the rider's feet in place and allow them to ride hands-free.

EQUINE: A word to describe something related to horses.

KERATIN: A tough protein that makes up our hair and fingernails.

TEMPERAMENT: Individual differences in behavior. Some horses have a calmer temperament than others.

The history of horses



When animals are raised by humans for many generations, they are called **domesticated** animals. People began raising and domesticating horses more than 6,000 years ago! People wanted to domesticate horses because they are very fast and very strong.

Thanks to horses, people could travel longer distances faster than ever before. This allowed people to trade their goods to people far from home. Horses could also allow people to carry messages quickly across long distances—

the historical equivalent to sending a text message! In fact, in the fifth century BCE, Persian horse riders were famous for delivering messages 1,700 miles in just seven days.

Horses were also used in warfare. Around 2,000 years ago, riders in Asia began using stirrups to hold on to horses with their feet. This allowed them to use their hands to use weapons while they rode. In Europe, soldiers began riding horses in battle and even making armor for horses.

People also bred extremely strong and muscular horses to use as draft animals. Draft animals haul materials or machinery. People could use draft horses to carry plows and prepare fields for planting.

Today there are around 300 breeds of horses. Some have been bred for speed, others for size, strength or even gentleness. These horses are the descendents of the same horses people relied on throughout history!

Horses have many jobs

Horses are smart animals and can be trained to follow many commands. This means they can be trained for many jobs.

Police horses

Horses can help with law enforcement! Police officers have found it useful to ride horses to move through crowds and see above groups of people. Horses also make it easier to patrol wilderness areas.



Image: USDA/ Lance Cheung

Ranching

Ranching is the practice of raising livestock, such as cattle and sheep, on a piece of land. People who own ranches are usually called ranchers, and people who work on ranches are sometimes called cattlemen, stockmen or cowboys. Horses are important on ranches! They allow riders to monitor livestock herds and round up their animals. In the United States, the most common horse breed used on ranches is the American quarter horse.



Image: USDA/ Preston Keres

Equine-assisted therapy

Working with horses can be a good way to help people build confidence and practice physical skills. Some people also find it very calming to ride and handle horses, so some use equine therapy as a way to help them improve their mental health. People with muscle weakness or injuries can also practice riding horses as a way to strengthen their balance.



Image: U.S. Army photos by Sgt. Nicholas T. Holmes

Soldiers in the U.S. Army have used equine-assisted therapy as a way to recover from injuries.

Equine athletes

Some horses are raised to be sport horses! In fact, horses even compete with their riders in the Olympics! These horses are trained to compete in events like show jumping and dressage, which is routine where the horse performs smooth, almost dance-like movements. Horses in the Olympics also compete in cross-country, which is like an obstacle course. These sports are called “equestrian” events.



Image: iStock/ kondakov

Five facts about horse anatomy!

- 1** Horses have bigger eyes than any other mammal that lives on land.
- 2** A horse's brain only weighs 22 ounces. That's half the size of a human brain!
- 3** Horses have 10 muscles in their ears. Humans only have 3!
- 4** Horses can't burp! Their digestive system usually only goes one way, so any gas that builds up in the stomach can only go out the back end.
- 5** Horse hooves are made of **keratin**, the same protein that makes up your hair and fingernails.

Parts of the horse

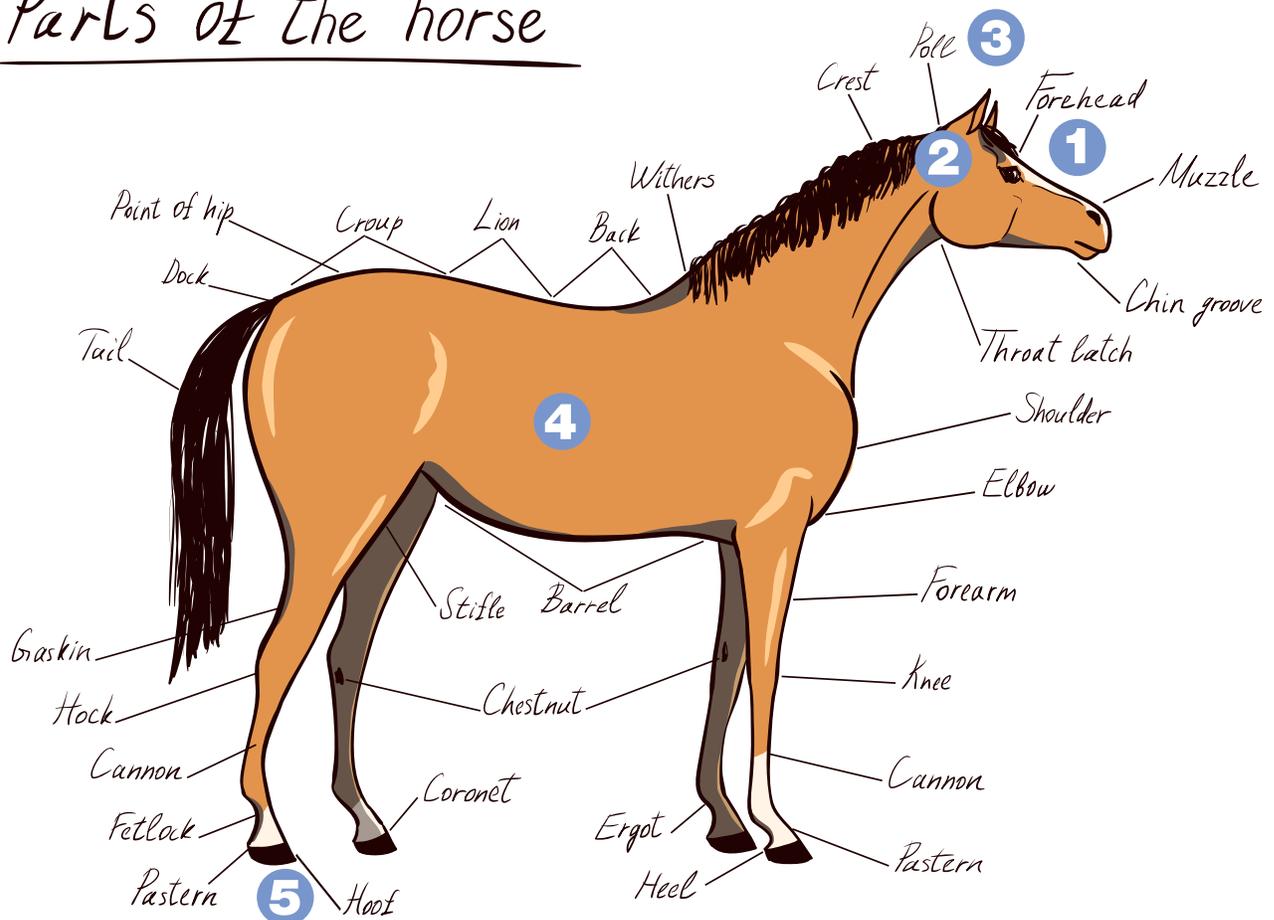




Image: iStock/ GlobalP

So why don't we ride zebras?

Zebras look a lot like horses. In horses and zebras are both **equine** animals. You could think of them as cousins.

We can ride horses, so why can't we ride zebras? Some have tried, but it's not easy! Here's why:

Zebras don't have the **temperament** for riding! Zebras are used to having to watch out for predators like lions, so they tend to be more aggressive toward everyone. They may try to bite and kick a rider. They aren't really mean, they're just wild animals! In fact, they can kick so hard, they can break a lion's jaw! Horses can act like wild animals too, but most can be taught to carry riders and be calm.

There's actually a movie about riding a zebra. It's called "Racing Stripes." This movie was hard to make because of how hard it is to actually ride zebras. In fact, the people making the movie had to use a horse instead of a zebra for some scenes.

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