

ASSESSMENT OF HORSES AND PONIES IN MATHERAN

22 March 2023



Assessment of Horses and Ponies in Matheran, Maharashtra

Introduction:

An assessment of horses and ponies was conducted on 22 March 2023 for six hours in two shifts (from 10:00–14:00 am and 03:00-05:00 pm) at different locations in Matheran, Maharashtra. Animals were observed at main market, near Matheran Railway Station, Echo Point, Charlotte Lake, Lord Point, Alexander Point, and Rambagh Point. The assessors included Dr Rakesh Chittora (veterinarian), Mr Bhagwan Singh (trained animal assessor) and an investigator.

During our assessment, we observed both horses and ponies being used in Matheran. All observed horses were male (few were castrated) and were being used for carrying tourists to different points for sightseeing and also from the ticket window at Dasturi to the main market or tourists' hotel in Matheran. Ponies are used for carrying goods (like building material, household items, grocery, etc.) on their backs. Per the discussion with horse owners, around 460 horses are used for giving rides to tourists, out of whom 300 are from Matheran and remaining 160 are from Neral village which is located at the foot of the hill. Horses are used to carry tourists on their backs by fitting a saddle/harness, and most owners had two horses to cater to tourist couples. Prices for carrying tourists are fixed by the government and displayed on signboards, although horse owners agree after negotiating prices. All horses were shod whereas not even a single pony was shod, while both horses and ponies work on the same track which is paved by bricks at most places.

Few animals were also observed being made to walk from Dasturi to a hotel at Matheran (a 3-kilometre-long track) on the evening of 21 March evening and from a hotel to Dasturi on the morning of 23rd March.

Medical condition:

A total of 40 horses and 20 ponies were assessed using an internationally recognised scientific working equine welfare assessment tool. This method was developed by Brooke Hospital for Animals and the University of Bristol, both in the UK, as a monitoring and evaluation tool to assess the mental, behavioural, physical, and lameness indicators of working equines.

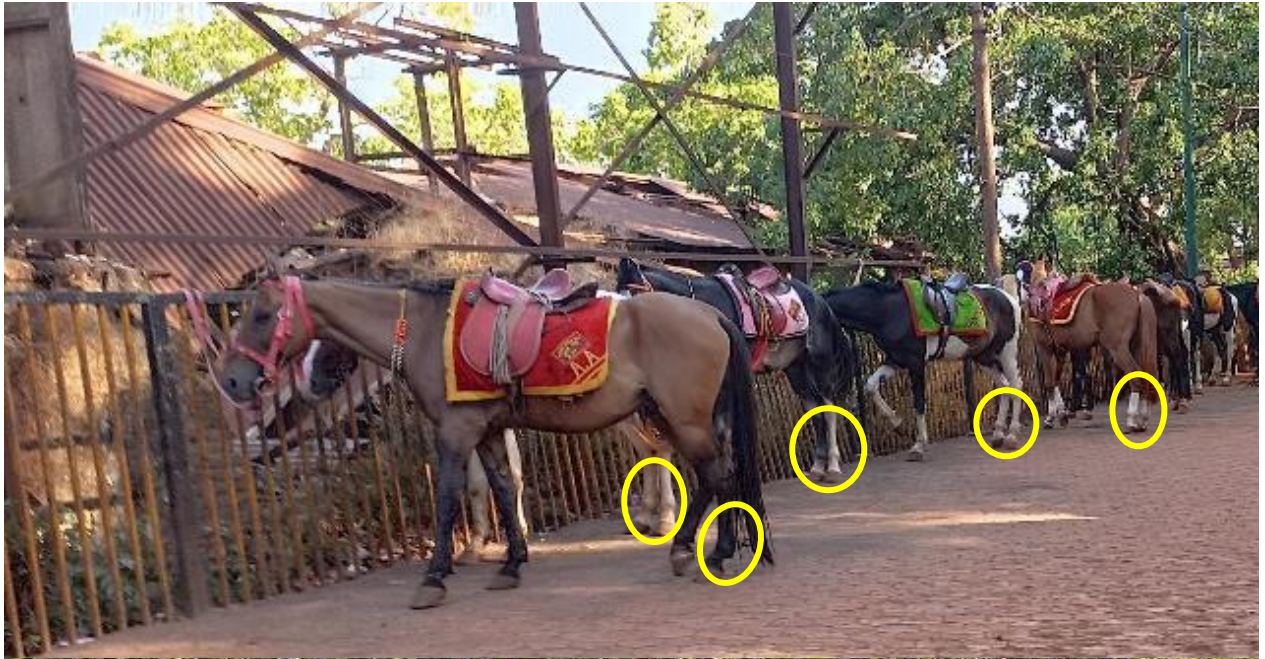
Limb and gait indicators:

Swelling on superficial flexor tendon and fetlock joint: Of the 40 horses assessed, 20 horses (50%) had swelling on fetlock joints and flexor tendons of all four legs and 30 horses (75%) had swelling on fetlock joints of two legs, i.e. mostly hind legs when observed from the side and rear. Out of the 20 ponies assessed, 15 ponies (75%) had swelling on fetlock joints of two legs when observed from the side and rear.











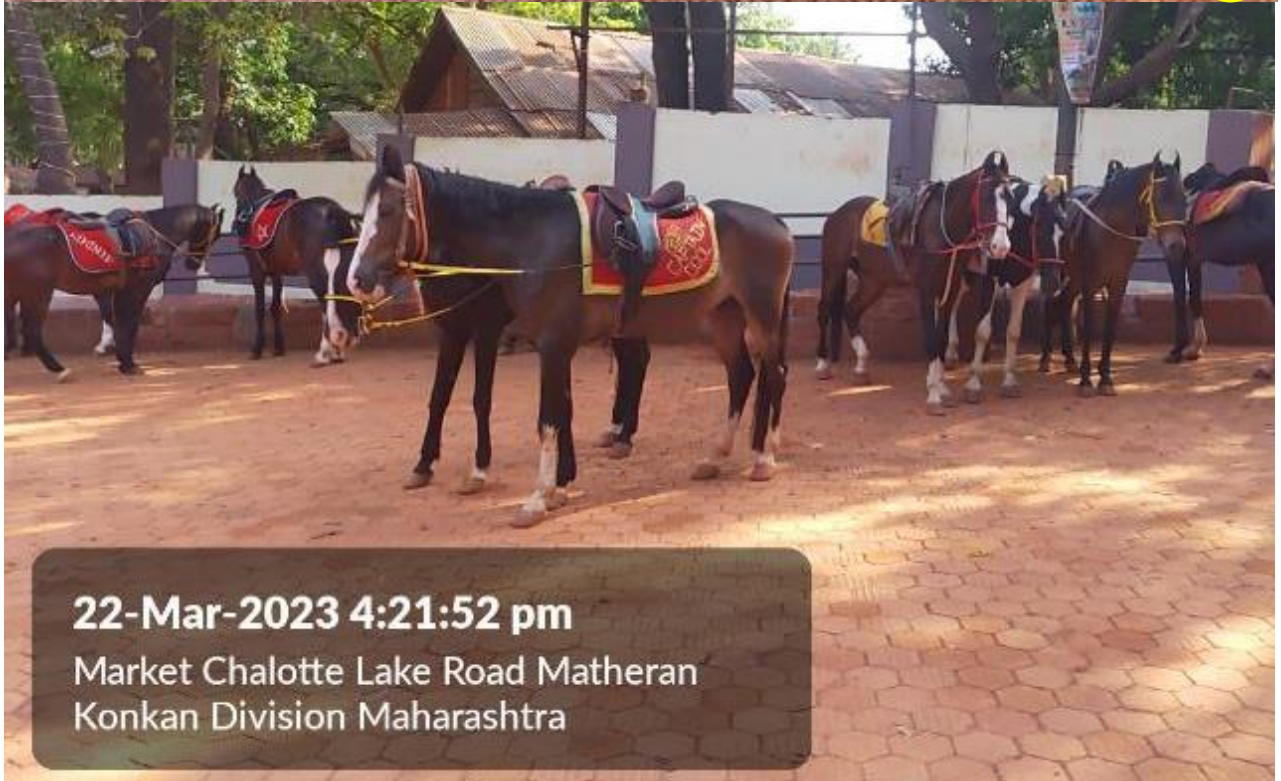


Hoof shape and horn quality: Of the 40 horses assessed, 20 (50%) showed clear abnormality in the shape of one or both the foreleg and hind legs hooves when observed from the side, front, and back. Of the 40 horses assessed, 10 (25%) showed abnormality in hoof horn quality as dumping of hooves was observed. Of the 20 ponies assessed, 20 (100%) showed clear abnormality in the shape of one or both the foreleg and hind legs hooves when observed from the side, front, and back. One pony was observed to be suffering from severe osteoarthritis. Of

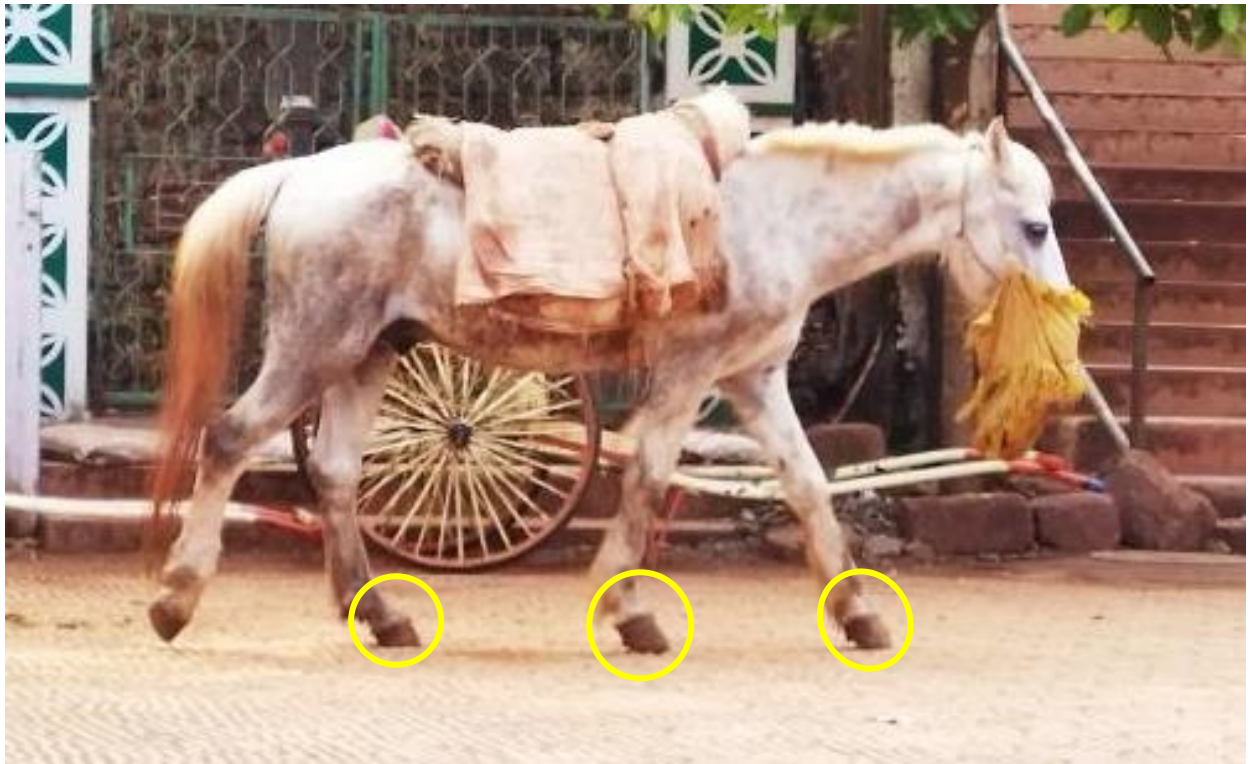
the 20 ponies assessed, 10 (50%) showed abnormality in the hoof horn quality as dumping of hooves was observed.







22-Mar-2023 4:21:52 pm
Market Chalotte Lake Road Matheran
Konkan Division Maharashtra





Hobble lesions: One horse was observed with hobble lesions on all four legs.



Wound: One horse was observed with a wound on the left brisket region. One pony was observed with an open wound on the left foreleg at coronet with swelling. It could be due to firing.





Use of spiked bits:

During the assessment, out of 40 horses, 10 (25%) were seen to have spiked bits even though per Rule 8 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Draught and Pack Animals Rules, 1965, the use of spiked bit is prohibited.



Summary:

1. Limb and gait indicators:

- **Swelling on superficial flexor tendon and fetlock joint:** 75% of the horses and ponies assessed had swelling on one or both the fore or hind limbs when observed from the side and rear.
- **Hoof shape:** 50% of the horses and 100% of the ponies assessed had clear abnormalities in the shape of one or both the fore or hind hooves when observed from the side and front.
- **Hoof horn quality:** 25% of the horses and 50% of the ponies assessed had a damaged hoof wall, i.e. dumping of wall, broken or collapsed hoof wall, or vertical or horizontal cracks of fore or hind limb hoof walls were seen.

2. Hobble lesion and wounds: One horse was observed with hobble lesions on all four legs. A horse was observed with a wound on the brisket region, and a pony had an open wound on the left fore coronet region, possibly due to firing.

3. Spiked bits: 25% of the total horses assessed were observed with spiked bits which is prohibited under Rule 8 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Draught and Pack Animals Rules, 1965. Per Section 38 (3) of The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act, 1960, any person who contravenes the 1965 Rules shall be subject to punishment, which could include imprisonment.

Recommendations:

There is a high prevalence of irreversible and untreatable conditions in working equines in Matheran caused by a lifetime of gruelling labour. Specifically, being made to labour on paved tracks leads to leg problems and ultimate lameness in horses and ponies. Further, it can be clearly seen that the horse owners are using spiked bits which is prohibited and a punishable offence per the Prevention of Cruelty to Draught and Pack Animals Rules, 1965, and the PCA Act, 1960. Hence, it can be unequivocally stated that no regulations can prevent the infliction of unnecessary pain and suffering on these animals. Replacing the horses with a non-animal means would be a sustainable solution that would end the abuse of these animals while also protecting the livelihood of the people involved in this business.