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RACE HORSE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN THE NUWARA ELIYA DISTRICT OF SRI LANKA

J. M. R. V. Wijayarathna, I. S. Abeygunawardena

*Department of Basic Veterinary Sciences,
Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science, University of Peradeniya*

Horse racing and the management of race horses remains amateurish in Sri Lanka, although it is well-developed in many countries. Management of race horses encompasses housing, nutrition, training, exercise, grooming and general health care. This study was carried out to gain basic information on local management practices and to identify related problems. It was also expected to make suggestions for improvement, using information gathered through a literature survey.

The Nuwara Eliya district was selected as the study area because rearing horses and racing is mainly performed in this area. Data were obtained by administering a questionnaire to stable workers and horse owners of all stable units in the district.

The total number of racehorses in the district was 44, out of which thoroughbreds were predominant (62%). The majority of the race horses (72%) were imported from India. All stables were located on well drained land and were not undesirably close to domestic dwellings. The basic construction design and material were similar in all stables. The daily routine in all stables was the same with only minor differences. The amount of exercise and the type and amount of feed given to the horses during the non-racing period differ from those given during the racing season. The animals are fed depending on the physical needs and not by analysing feed quality or by evaluating the nutrient requirement. Grooming and hoof care comply with recommended methods although health care is not satisfactory as veterinary attention is sought only after the condition of a sick horse worsens. After the horse's racing days are over it is used for breeding or riding. Constraints faced by race horse owners include high expense in maintaining horses and lack of workers with professional knowledge and expertise.

The management of race horses in the Nuwara Eliya district has not reached the standards of countries where horse racing is well established. This study should be extended to the other parts of the country, so that racehorse management practices elsewhere in the country can also be studied. Relevant practices from countries with a developed equestrian industry can be adopted locally to improve management. This will upgrade the performance and welfare of race horses, thus improving the racing industry and attracting more tourists to the area.