

Preventing the Escape of Horses and Livestock from Containment

Our topics for this week are:

- Consequences of Large Animal Escapes
- Prevention of Large Animal Escapes
- Response to Large Animal Escapes

Animal Escape Consequences

Escaped animals risk injury to themselves and to people. The handler and owner assume great liability for the consequences of animal escapes. How an animal may have escaped from containment should not be discussed until after a complete investigation. Possibilities, even if wrong, could invite allegations of negligence.

Livestock, especially horses, are a danger to themselves when they escape. They can get hit by moving vehicles, attacked by dogs, fall in holes, become lost and starve, and be stolen, among other dangers.

The most useful means of identifying escaped horses that will assist their return is having good quality, recent photographs of the horse and closeups of its markings. In addition to photographs, stabled horses should have ID plates on their halter or dog tags with the owner's name and phone number. Lip tattoos can be useful for pastured horses that may escape. Inside the upper lip tattoos are used on race horses and recorded on their registration papers.

Microchips and iris identification are good identifiers that may aid in the return of escaped horses, but both require special equipment in detection and are best used in addition to halter tags or plates or tattoos, rather than in place of these easier identifiers.

Owners and handlers of animals are responsible for human injuries resulting directly or indirectly from escaped animals. For example, a handler can be liable for injuries to another person from an escaped bull that was in the handler's care. The other person's injuries can be crushing by the bull or breaking a leg by jumping a fence to escape the bull.

Prevention of Escape

Preventing escapes necessitates the double checking of gates and doors that should be closed. Stall doors should be double latched. Gate hinge pins should be oriented to prevent gates from being lifted off the hinge pins. Gates adjacent to public roads should be locked. Perimeter (secondary) fencing should be created around pastures, especially horse pastures, located near busy roads or highways. There should be a regular schedule of checking the condition of fences, ideally daily, and as soon as possible after thunderstorms and ice storms. Fence strength and height should be appropriate to the species, age, and condition of the animals enclosed and the size of the enclosed area.

Reasons for a desire to escape should be reduced or eliminated. Always provide adequate food and water, sufficient exercise and companionship, and prevent harassment (dogs, trespassers, herd bullies). Escape is often motivated by lack of food or water or being frightened. New members to a herd should be introduced slowly and at times when the herd is distracted by a new food source to prevent bullying. When sorting out a member of a herd to provide treatment for an illness or injury at least one known preferred herdmate should be kept with the animal. Horses should be put in stalls before thunderstorms. Dogs should be prevented from chasing horses.

Response to Escaped Horses and Livestock

Escaped livestock or horses can be a life-threatening danger to themselves and to humans, but despite the urgency needed to return them to confinement, excitement or disorganization in the efforts to contain them can worsen the situation. If the animal is off the handler's property, law enforcement should be contacted (call 911) for notification of potential personal or property damage that could be done by the loose animal. Neighbors should be contacted and requested that they contact the handler if they see a loose animal.

When possible, animal access to roads should be blocked, and a temporary enclosure created. Horses escape enclosures more often than other livestock. Primary reasons are fear, hunger, thirst, or sex drive. The response to a loose horse should include gathering a halter and lead rope, grain in a bucket, and a flashlight, if night is near. If the animal's location is not known, a spiraling circle should be walked looking for tracks. Wherever there are other horses kept should be checked as well as where food or water might be found because a common cause for horses to try to escape enclosures is inadequate access to food or water. In some cases, enlisting the aid of a drone may be the best means of locating an escaped horse.

When possible, the horse(s) should be lured into containment. Herd members do not like to be separated from the herd. If all the herd members have not escaped, the best lure is to tie other well-mannered horse(s), but not stallions, inside pastures or pens and open the gates to lure a loose horse or horses into the enclosure. Another means of using herd members as a lure is to lead another well-mannered horse (not stallions) as encouragement for a loose horse to follow. Grain in buckets may be used as a lure if only one horse is loose. Using food for a lure with multiple loose horses is too dangerous for the handler.

A handler of the loose horse should discourage anyone else, including law enforcement officers, from attempting to catch the animals to prevent likelihood of injuries to an inexperienced handler and stirring up the animal(s). These assistants can be helpful in positioning themselves between the animals and a roadway to try to prevent animals going into traffic endangering motorists. Assistants can block any further exits, as much as possible. Simple portable rope corrals created with poles and mesh fencing, construction netting, or one to three strains of ropes may assist in containing loose horses until an appropriate handler calms and catches individual horses. Several people are required to keep the corral line stretched out.

The approach to a loose horse must be done quietly with confidence, preferably by a handler known to the horse. The portable corral can be used to herd the horse into a fixed

enclosure (pen or pasture) or slowly shrink to enclose the horse so that a handler can approach the horse without it fleeing. Like most fences, a portable corral is a psychological enclosure, not a physical enclosure. If frightened enough or aggressively approached, a horse will challenge the enclosure and try to either run through it or jump it. After a successful capture, the horse should be kept in relatively close confinement such as a stall until the excitement of their adventure has subsided.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects, contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. Escaped large animals can cause injury or death to themselves or to people they encounter.**
- 2. Properly constructed fences and gates, plus elimination or reduction of causes to want to escape, are the foundations of preventing large animal escape.**
- 3. When looking for escaped livestock or horses, the first places to check are nearby sources of food, water, and/or members for the same species.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my books, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling*, and *Concise Textbook of Large Animal Handling* all published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: www.betteranimalhandling.com . This website has more than 200 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.