

# Study on Sexual Behaviour Parameters of Marwari Stallions during Breeding Season

## ABSTRACT

The ejaculation and mounting times of a stallion, as well as the amount of time it takes for the stallion to respond to an oestrus mare, are all elements that might affect the libido of the horse. In order to gain an understanding of how tropical horses adapt to potentially difficult climatic circumstances in terms of their sexual performance, it is necessary to study their reproductive behaviour. The present investigation was carried out on six healthy Marwari stallions (aged between 50 to 140 months) to evaluate and to analyse their sexual behaviour during the breeding season in the arid region. The study was carried out for a period of three weeks and sexual behaviour parameters were recorded at the time of semen collection. Parameters observed and analysed in the present study include erection time, reaction time, ejaculation time, number of mounts and number of thrusts. Erection time, reaction time and ejaculation time of stallions was  $19.02 \pm 1.18$  sec,  $29.11 \pm 1.37$  sec,  $26.86 \pm 0.95$  sec, respectively. The number of mounts and number of thrusts of stallions was  $1.39 \pm 0.09$  and  $10.00 \pm 0.17$  respectively. The above study describes the normal sexual behaviour parameters of Marwari stallions in the arid region and analysed that non-significant ( $P > 0.05$ ) difference exists among the horses for various sexual behaviour parameters.

**Keywords:** Arid region, breeding season, libido, Marwari stallions, sexual behaviour

## INTRODUCTION

The Marwari breed, scientifically known as *Equus ferus caballus*, is a magnificent horse breed originating from the Marwar district of Rajasthan, India. The use of artificial insemination (AI) with frozen semen has demonstrated its efficacy in the global propagation and preservation of animals. The application of AI in horse breeding has shown a significant increase in utilisation during the past few decades (Moran *et al.*, 1992). In equines, major considerations for breeding programmes include a clinical assessment of genital organs and breeding behaviour as well as an examination of the semen quality of the male (Colenbrander *et al.*, 1992). Instead of the scarcity of information regarding the sexual behaviour of stallions and their ability to reproduce (Melo *et al.*, 1998; Sereno, 2002), stallions engage in a variety of sexual behaviours, including exposing their penis, trying to mount, sniffing, biting, kicking and even making noises (Henry *et al.*, 2013). Just like other domestic males, stallions go through two distinct stages of mating behaviour; the first stage is libido or sexual excitement. The second stage, copulation, starts with copulatory movements and concludes with ejaculation (Tischner *et al.*, 1974; Hart, 1989; Houpt, 2004). The arrival of a mare, regardless of whether she is in estrus or not, usually arouses the domestic stallion (McDonnell, 2009). The passionate stallion takes a keen interest in the mare right away (Brinsko *et al.*, 2011). The horse's whinnying, bellowing and distinctive nickering indicate his sexual excitement when it approaches the mare to smell its outside genitalia and groin (Tischner *et al.*, 1974; Houpt, 2004). In addition, the stallion will exhibit signs of impatience, pawing and vocalisation before copulating with the mare. This includes sniffing,

licking and nibbling on the mare's croup, hind legs and occasionally forelegs. As the penis is completely erect, the stallion will also display the flehmen reaction (Tischner *et al.*, 1974; Brinsko *et al.*, 2011). Stallions' libido is constant year-round, with the sex desire being at its peak in the spring and gradually decreasing (but not entirely disappearing) in the fall and winter (Sharp, 1999). The ejaculation and mounting times of a stallion, as well as how long it takes the stallion to respond to an estrus mare, are all factors in influencing the libido of the horse. During the breeding season, you can use the resulting libido score to pick stallions based on their predicted reproductive effectiveness (McKinnon *et al.*, 2011). Understanding how tropical horses adjust to potentially harsh climatic conditions in terms of their sexual performance requires research into their reproductive behaviour. To prevent lower breeding efficiency due to misuse of stallions or too frequent seminal collections, it is important to evaluate the breeding potential of stallions. Because (a) mares only breed in the spring and summer due to their seasonal polyestrus and (b) estrus lasts for about seven days, requiring multiple matings to achieve maximum reproductive efficiency, the latter is particularly important in a natural service breeding programme (Pickett *et al.*, 1975). Therefore, purpose of this investigation was to study the sexual behaviour of Marwari stallions in arid region during the breeding season, define the values of sexual behaviour parameters and to compare these parameters among the stallions using statistical methods.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Animals

The study involved six healthy Marwari stallions housed at the Equine Production Campus, ICAR-National Research Centre on Equines, Bikaner, Rajasthan, India. Animals used in the study were aged between 50 and 140 months and reared under uniform conditions of feeding and management (Table 1). The study was carried out for a total of 3 weeks with a frequency of semen collection twice a week and sexual behaviour parameters for each Marwari stallion were recorded at the time of semen collection during breeding season with a mare in oestrus used as a dummy.

**Table 1: Identification of horses with their age**

S. No.	Marwari Stallion (identification)	Age (months)
1.	<u>Mohit</u>	140
2.	139	86
3.	Dogger	78
4.	167	52
5.	170	51
6.	175	50

## Sexual Behaviour Parameters

Sexual behaviour parameters, including erection time, reaction time, ejaculation time, number of mounts and number of thrusts, were recorded for each Marwari horse (Figure 1). Ejaculation time was considered as the time between the penile intromission by the male and its first seminal emission. Erection time was considered as the time between the dummy female being seen by the male and the full erection of the male's penis achieved (Waheed *et al.*, 2015). Reaction time was considered as the time between the entering of male inside the breeding area and its mounting on the dummy (Cavinder *et al.*, 2010). The number of mounts performed by males on the dummy female was counted, as reported by McDonnell (1992). The number of thrusts performed by males for the ejaculation of semen was counted, as reported by McDonnell (1992).



**Figure 1: Mounting behaviour of Marwari horse**

## Data Analysis

Data on sexual behaviour parameters of Marwari stallions were collected, organised, summarized and statistically evaluated for mean, standard error (SE), analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Duncan's new multiple range test (DNMRT) using IBM-SPSS Statistics Version 26.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study was designed to assess various attributes of the sexual behaviour of Marwari horses.

### Erection Time

The duration of erection time in Marwari stallions shown during the breeding season ranged from  $13.47 \pm 1.06$  to  $25.19 \pm 3.59$  sec, with an average of  $19.02 \pm 1.18$  sec. Non-significant difference ( $P > 0.05$ ) was seen among Marwari horses for mean values of erection time in the present study. Mehra (2021) observed the range of  $16.00 \pm 1.30$  to  $20.8 \pm 6.07$  sec with a mean of  $18.45 \pm 1.61$  sec. Sultan (2021) observed the range of  $14.00 \pm 3.78$  to  $19.40 \pm 1.96$  sec with

amean of  $16.60 \pm 1.35$  sec. Non-significant difference ( $P > 0.05$ ) among Marwari stallions for mean values was also seen by Mehra (2021) and Sultan (2021) which is similar to the present results.

### **Reaction Time**

The duration of reaction time in Marwari stallions shown during the breeding season ranged from  $23.44 \pm 1.41$  to  $35.59 \pm 4.76$  sec, with an average of  $29.11 \pm 1.37$  sec. Non-significant difference ( $P > 0.05$ ) was seen among Marwari horses for mean values of reaction time in the present study. Mehra (2021) observed range of  $16.40 \pm 2.52$  to  $60.00 \pm 11.94$  sec with a mean of  $34.65 \pm 4.65$  sec. Sultan (2021) the range of  $14.00 \pm 1.58$  to  $69.40 \pm 6.23$  sec with a mean of  $34.35 \pm 5.13$  sec. Significant difference ( $P \leq 0.01$ ) among Marwari stallions for mean values was seen by Kumar (2018), Mehra (2021) and Sultan (2021) in their studies, which is in contrast to the performed study.

### **Ejaculation Time**

The duration of ejaculation time in Marwari stallions shown during the breeding season ranged from  $22.75 \pm 1.83$  to  $31.46 \pm 2.80$  sec, with an average of  $26.86 \pm 0.95$  sec. Non-significant difference ( $P > 0.05$ ) was seen among Marwari horses for mean values of ejaculation time in the present study. Mehra (2021) observed the range of  $30.00 \pm 2.85$  to  $40.8 \pm 6.62$  sec. with a mean of  $34.65 \pm 2.26$  sec. Sultan (2021) observed the range of  $22.80 \pm 2.51$  to  $38.00 \pm 4.85$  sec with a mean of  $31.25 \pm 2.33$  sec. Mehra (2021) and Sultan (2021) also observed non-significant ( $P > 0.05$ ) difference among Marwari stallions for mean values, which is in conformity to the present results.

### **Number of Mounts**

The number of mounts taken by Marwari stallions during breeding season ranged from  $1.17 \pm 0.17$  to  $1.83 \pm 0.17$ , with an average of  $1.39 \pm 0.09$ . Non-significant difference ( $P > 0.05$ ) was seen among Marwari horses for mean values of number of mounts in the present study. No traceable literature available for number of mounts on Marwari stallions.

### **Number of Thrusts**

The number of thrusts taken by Marwari stallions during breeding season ranged from  $9.33 \pm 0.42$  to  $10.83 \pm 0.40$ , with an average of  $10.00 \pm 0.17$ . Non-significant difference ( $P > 0.05$ ) was seen among Marwari horses for mean values of number of thrusts in the present study. Mehra (2021) observed the range of  $7.00 \pm 0.32$  to  $7.2 \pm 0.37$  with a mean of  $7.05 \pm 0.19$ . Sultan (2021) observed the range of  $6.60 \pm 0.51$  to  $7.60 \pm 0.24$  with a mean of  $7.05 \pm 0.21$ . Mehra (2021) and Sultan (2021) also noted non-significant ( $P > 0.05$ ) difference among Marwari stallions for mean values favouring the obtained results.

Little traceable literature is available regarding the sexual behaviour parameters of Marwari stallions. However, study was carried out on few different breeds of horses.

Houssou *et al.* (2020) documented the libido scores of Arabian and Barb stallions, which had mean values of  $3.07 \pm 0.66$  and  $3.67 \pm 0.76$ , respectively. The study found a significant difference between the two groups ( $P < 0.05$ ). The study found that there was no significant difference between Arabian and Barb stallions in terms of the time it took for them to achieve an erection ( $48.70 \pm 56.20$  sec vs.  $50.38 \pm 20.15$  sec). However, there was a significant difference in the time it took for them to mount with an erection ( $112 \pm 58.90$  sec vs.  $90.54 \pm 33.17$  sec), with the Arabian stallions taking longer. There was also a significant difference in the number of mounts required for ejaculation ( $2.00 \pm 1.00$  vs.  $1.46 \pm 0.51$ ), with

the Arabian stallions requiring more mounts. Additionally, there was a significant difference in the time it took for ejaculatory mount ( $19.15 \pm 10.76$  sec vs.  $12.23 \pm 2.68$  sec), with the Arabian stallions taking longer. However, there was no significant difference in the total time spent in the breeding area ( $218 \pm 18.24$  sec vs.  $169 \pm 55.80$  sec) between the two groups. Rua *et al.* (2016) examined how the month of assessment and age category influenced the breeding behaviour of nine Brazilian pony stallions during both the breeding and non-breeding seasons. The stallions were divided into two age categories: 5–8 years and 9–13 years. The researchers measured the average reaction time of stallions in the 5-8 year age group to be  $16.3 \pm 19.7$  seconds, whereas stallions in the 9-13 year age group had an average reaction time of  $93.2 \pm 116.5$  seconds. In addition, they noted that the month of assessment also has an impact on some breeding behaviour characteristics. Furthermore, they found no significant association between the age of stallions and their response time, erection time and ejaculation time. Waheed *et al.* (2015) conducted a study on 16 healthy Arabian stallions and found that the season had a significant impact ( $P < 0.05$ ) on all sexual behaviour indicators, except for the time it took for ejaculation to occur. They observed that the lowest latency to ejaculation was observed during the spring in the normal breeders. The researchers also noted that slow breeder stallions had significantly longer latency to ejaculation (erection time), time to first mount (reaction time), number of mounts per ejaculate and latency to mount compared to normal breeder stallions. The differences were statistically significant ( $P < 0.001$ ). The specific values for slow breeder stallions were  $228.26 \pm 50.48$  sec,  $259.82 \pm 42.66$  sec,  $2.63 \pm 0.35$  and  $371.95 \pm 36.27$  sec, respectively ( $n=4$ ). In contrast, normal breeder stallions had values of  $49.45 \pm 3.78$  sec,  $61.12 \pm 5.18$  sec,  $1.32 \pm 0.04$  and  $82.54 \pm 6.39$  sec, respectively ( $n=12$ ). Rua *et al.* (2015) conducted a study on the sexual behaviour of male horses throughout both the non-breeding and breeding seasons. They examined indicators of sexual desire, such as the duration of mounting, the time taken to react and the time taken for mounting and ejaculation. The researchers measured the average time it took for mounting as  $32.4 \pm 8.2$  sec and  $34.7 \pm 4.5$  sec, the average reaction time as  $15.0 \pm 6.1$  sec and  $13.9 \pm 3.4$  sec and the average time for mounting and ejaculation as  $23.9 \pm 2.1$  sec and  $24.5 \pm 1.1$  sec during the non-breeding and breeding seasons, respectively. Cavinder *et al.* (2010) measured the response time and frequency of mounts in seven stallions. The average response time was found to be  $4.67 \pm 2.6$  minutes, while the average number of mounts was  $1.47 \pm 0.563$ . A statistically significant difference ( $P < 0.05$ ) was found among stallions in terms of the average reaction time. No statistically significant difference was found among stallions in terms of the average number of rides. Noue *et al.* (2001) examined the sexual conduct of 42 stallions during in-hand natural service and semen collection. The stallions belonged to various breeds, including French Saddlebred ( $n=8$ ), Standardbred ( $n=19$ ), Thoroughbred ( $n=5$ ), Anglo-Arab ( $n=2$ ), draft horses ( $n=7$ ) and one pony. The age range of the stallions was between 6 and 19 years. We noticed a lack of substantial association between the age of stallions and both erection time and the number of mounts. McDonnell (1992) conducted a study on the sexual behaviour of horses, specifically focusing on various parameters. These parameters included the duration from mounting to penetration (ranging from 1 to 5 seconds), the number of mounts (ranging from 1 to 3), the total duration of mounting (ranging from 15 to 45 seconds), the time taken for insertion before ejaculation (ranging from 8 to 20 seconds), the overall time spent in the breeding area (ranging from 0.5 to 10 minutes) and the number of thrusts (ranging from 2 to 12). Tischner *et al.* (1974) conducted an analysis of the ejaculation pattern of four stallions. The number of observations for each stallion was 8, 8, 8 and 9, respectively. The researchers found that the total time of copulation for the four stallions had mean values of 8.92 seconds, 10.25 seconds, 10.50 seconds and 12.18 seconds. The mean number of thrusts for the four stallions was 5.9, 7.3, 7.1 and 8.2. The time of semen emission had mean values of 6.07, 8.09, 8.10 and 8.16 for the four stallions. The mean number of thrusts during emission was nil, 0.6,

1.7 and 5.2, respectively. Pickett *et al.*, (1975) examined the reproductive physiology of stallions who ejaculated at different frequencies (1, 3 and 6 times per week) and found that there was no significant difference in the number of mounts per ejaculate, with mean values of 1.2, 1.4 and 1.4 for the frequencies of 1, 3 and 6 times per week, respectively.

## CONCLUSION

Performed experiment defines the normal value of sexual behaviour parameters of Marwari stallions in arid region during breeding season. It may be concluded that no significant difference exists among the stallions for different sexual behaviour expressions during breeding season. It seems that the sexual behaviour expression of Marwari horses may correlate with other individual parameters. The effect of age and body weight on sexual behaviour expression should be studied to know the individual horse pattern.

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## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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