

NIMBIN ARTISTS GALLERY
presents

NIMBIN ART FAIR

Sat 30th March - Sun 21th April
10AM to 4PM DAILY
NIMBIN SCHOOL OF ARTS

CONTACT: PH 02 6689 1444
www.nimbinartistsgallery.org
nimbinartistsgallery@gmail.com



Autumn Art Fair

by Tonia Haynes

The Nimbin Artists Gallery Autumn Art Fair is in full swing at Nimbin Town Hall, opening hours 10pm-5pm, seven days a week, until 24th April.

Local artists are showing their best right now, for all to view and hopefully to buy.

One would think that a relatively small area might engage a limited amount of artistic flair, but it appears that the Gods and Goddesses of Creativity have a great fondness for attracting to this green and peaceful land, housing a myriad of those whose creative talent surpasses that of many others.

I can think of three artists from this area whose works are known and shared world-wide.

At the opening of the exhibition, the Margaret McLaren Art Foundation Awards were also announced.

The overall winner, with \$3000 prizemoney, is Naomi Malone (pictured). Lucy Carr won the Emerging Artist award.

The efforts extended by the volunteers to put this show together are enormous.

As with all creative theatre, it is the physical and mental passion that goes on behind the scenes that has made this art festival happen. And I am most proud to be a small part of that.

Come and view the extraordinary talents of our local folk. A relaxing stroll around the town hall, to look at and discuss a plethora of individual impressions of what we call 'Art' will bring sunshine to your day.



One of several assemblages by Alison Wonderland

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Three artists join at Serpentine



'Another Day' by Rio Diabo

We have three diverse Northern Rivers artists and three very different shows opening together at Serpentine Gallery in April.

As we sometimes do at the gallery, we are dividing the space into three and offering visitors a range of abstract artistic perspectives.

One exhibition titled 'In the Clouds' by Vitoria Martins is a body of work based on cloud dreaming. These works originate from the artist's contemplation of clouds and her awe at the simplicity and complexity of the woven layers in the sky.

Vitoria says clouds represent impermanence, mindfulness, simplicity, beauty and gratitude.

On Saturdays 20th and 27th April, from 11am 'til 12pm, Vitoria is offering a free healing workshop taking you through a journey of self-



'In the Clouds' by Vitoria Martins

healing techniques and then drop into a meditation that will leave you still calm and quiet just like floating in the clouds.

Come along with an open mind and heart and no experience necessary, and you will be wonderfully surprised.

Rio Diabo presents his body of work called 'Particles'. Rio lives in Possum Creek, creating artworks without intentions or stories, but just with pure joy.

His work is sometimes abstract, sometimes surreal. It always changes with his mood and what he's got in his hand. He just satisfies his soul with doing it and that is why he does it.

The third exhibition being showcased is 'Searching for Answers' by Rowena Gibson.

Rowena describes her creative inspirations in her poem:

"I'm a hippie. I'm a stoner. I'm a gypsy. I'm a loner. I'm a freedom fighter. I'm a fire lighter. I'm a part of the planet, the earth, wind and sea."

I feel the fire burning in me, the rivers in my veins flowing from my heart in my chest, the mountains in my breast, the waterfalls in my tears, the darkness in my fears, my past present future spinning thru the cosmos.



'Connecting with Country' by Rowena Gibson

My soul in flight in my dreams at night. My body earth bound in the light of the day. My soul at play with fellow species globally in a constant ebb and flow, deserts and snow, blistering heat burning my feet as I walk thru the valleys of hell under a demon's spell. In search of enlightenment, a dire need to be content.

I search for answers every day, finding more questions along the way, without directions I find my path on an endless ocean, I build a raft in the thickest jungle I'm ever so humble. Then when I reach that beach I take the plunge into the waves and realise that nature saves."

Join us for the opening night of these three solo shows on Friday 19th April from 6pm to 9pm, all welcome.

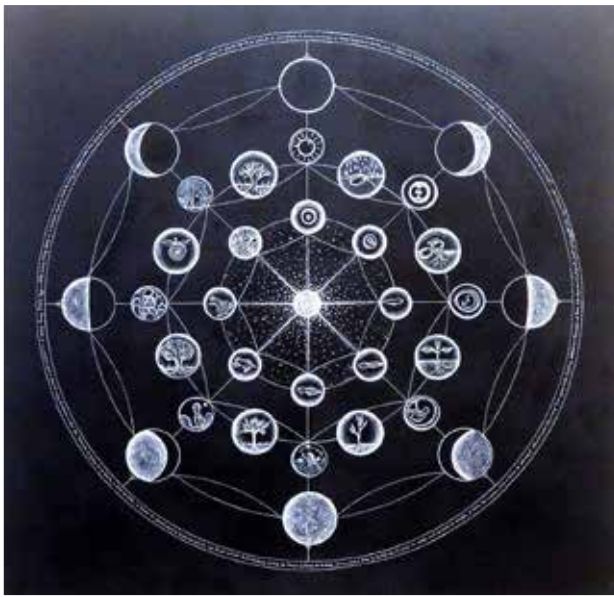
Find Serpentine at 3/104 Conway Street, Lismore. Opening hours: Mon-Fri 10am-4pm; 10am-2pm on Saturdays.

For more, see: gallery@serpentinearts.org



'Footprints in the Sand', triptych by Bev Leggett-Simmons

Images of nature and more



'Guardians' by Narelle Carlyle (above)
'All Things Connected' by Linnie Lambrechtsen (left)

'A Landscape Medley' by Bev Leggett-Simmons in the Solo Space is an exhibition of small paintings, which captures a collection of three small similar grouped images framed together, that express the different angles of the one landscape.

Several triptychs will be on display by local artist, Beverley Leggett-Simmons from Kyogle.

Using acrylics, the impressionist paintings capture several differing and subtle images, including impressions of forests,

seasides, trees, skies, sunlight, and creeks.

In her paintings, Leggett-Simmons captures the changing presence of nature. 'From Earth We Come' is the new artists and members exhibition in the main gallery area.

The theme for this exhibition was to evoke images of nature and the interconnectedness between humanity and nature.

There is a range of artistic interpretations by the artists, which include images of the landscapes around us, the

objects we use that come from the materials of the Earth.

There are the intermediaries, the guardians and spirits ancient and contemporary, who move in realms of the real and the imagination.

This is a well-rounded exhibition with much to impress and delight the visitor.

Both these exhibitions will run until Saturday 11th May.

For any enquiries, please call 02 6689-7449, email: bkbgallery@inet.net.au or visit the Blue Knob Gallery, Cafe & Ceramic Studio Facebook page, or go to:

www.blueknobgallery.com

Blue Knob Cafe

Is well attended by locals and visitors alike with fresh food, meals, cakes, coffee and more. We look forward to seeing you on the veranda and enjoying great food and art at this community space.

Blue Knob Writers Group

The group meets weekly at Blue Knob Cafe on Sundays. For more info regarding the Writers Group contact Alex 02 6689-7268 or Helen on 0487-385-134.

On the wing of a bird

Flourish Gallery/Studio is proud to present a solo exhibition 'Aves of Life' by multi-medium artist and Flourish Director, Jeht Burgoyne.

Drawing inspiration from the profound symbolism of black and white birds, Jeht Burgoyne's 'Aves of Life' offers a contemplative space for visitors to reflect on the interconnect of all living beings and the spiritual nuances embedded within our individual paths.

Through her artworks on paper, canvas, clay and a fusion of mediums, Jeht invites viewers to embark on a journey of introspection, exploring the parallels between the flight of birds and the spiritual essence of human experience.

"The concept for this body of work took flight from an oil painting of a scared little girl clutching a frightened white bird.

"This image spurred on a flurry of black and white bird images. The black, depicting the emotionally hard places in life and the



white, the uplifting, smooth sailing moments," Jeht Burgoyne said.

The exhibition is on display until Friday 26th April at Flourish Gallery/Studio, located at 15 Casino Street, South Lismore and wheelchair accessible. Gallery hours are Wednesday to Friday: 10am-4pm; Saturday: 10am-2pm.

Resin artworks for Palestine

by Luca Barbieri

In a world where art has the power to inspire change, one local artist from Clunes is making waves with his resin creations.

Trevor Thomas (pictured) is a visionary man whose work transcends boundaries and speaks to the heart of a pressing global issue.

With a passion for both creativity and compassion, Trevor has dedicated his talent to support a cause close to his heart: the well-being of Palestinian children.

Through his hand-painted resin artworks with the iconic Palestinian flag adorned with a golden symbol of peace (diameter 220mm), he's not only spreading awareness, but also making a little tangible difference in their lives.

With every purchase of just \$40 for each artwork, he will donate 50% of the proceeds to the Palestinian Children's Relief Fund, a testament to his belief in the power of art to enact positive change.

So, why not be a part of



something greater? Join Trevor on his mission to make something helpful today, one resin creation at a time.

You can find Trevor at the local Sunday markets (rotating between Bangalow, The Channon, Byron Bay and Uki), or visit him in his workshop in Clunes, by appointment only at 0409-844-603.

Let's turn art into action.

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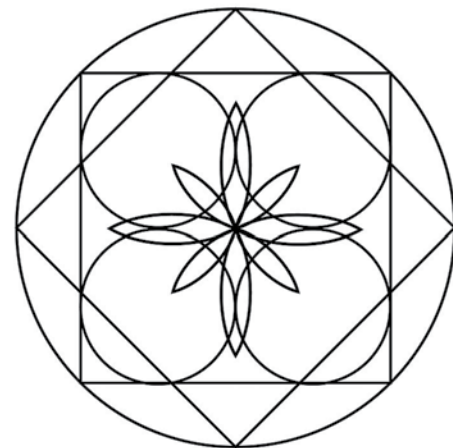
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Engineers and Jenga Blocks

by Scott O'Keeffe, ecologist

They say that "from little things big things grow". Well, surprising as it might seem, the best example of this that I can think of comes from animals the size of a grain of rice. Huge ecosystems rise and fall in the presence of these animals. This makes them keystone species and the physical and chemical changes they make across whole landscapes makes them ecosystem engineers.

Welcome to the world of termites. Worldwide there are about 3000 species, and they've been around for about 160 million years. They've managed to colonise most of the world's land with the greatest variety in the tropics and subtropics.

Australia has about 348 species, Africa about 1000. There are subterranean species, which most of us will rarely see (until our houses fall apart), mound builders, and arboreal species.

It's worth remembering that the house munching carried out by some species is the same activity that prevents Australia from being head high in nice crispy firewood.

Be comforted by this, and the fact that most of our 348 species get their cellulose, starch, and carbohydrates from other sources. They get the protein they need by consuming fungus that grows inside the nests or on

plant material where they are active.

Only 14 of Australia's termite species are considered "pests". One of these, the West Indian Dry-wood Termite, was accidentally imported to Australia.

Termites don't really exist as individuals. They have a complex social structure (a whole other topic!) that at its most basic consists of three castes: king/queen, responsible for breeding; workers that protect the queen, larvae and eggs and soldiers, that defend the colony.

Termite castes are so specialised, they can be thought of as organs that make up a super organism called a colony. In savannah areas, for example, mound-building termite colonies are best thought of as the equivalent of grazing animals.

Mound-building termites in savannahs graze quantities of cellulose so large they rival the consumption and mass of large herbivorous mammals. Some of these termite colonies contain millions of individuals. Incredibly, in tropical savannahs, termites account for 10% of all animal biomass.

We all know that big, bulky grazing animals shape ecosystems. If that's true then surely, with 10% of animal biomass, termites must also be ecosystem engineers or keystone species, or both.

Now consider this: in some tropical rainforests, termites

account for 80% of insect biomass. The importance of these termites in maintaining nutrient cycling, creating soil, encouraging microorganisms, providing food for other animals, and who knows what else, must make them keystones in their ecosystems.

Mound building and subterranean termites in dry areas aerate soil, and dramatically increase water penetration, keeping soil moist, improving drainage and encouraging vigorous plant root growth.

Collapsed and abandoned mounds have a high clay content but contain the accumulated organic waste of huge numbers of animals built up over decades.

These unique soils create landscape diversity, providing opportunities for a wider range of plants and animals.

In Australia, one of the best examples of the mosaic environment fostered by termites at a grand scale are the spinifex rings in arid areas of the Pilbara.

Spinifexes are arid zone grasses. In many parts of the outback, they form distinctive rings of living grass with more-or-less bare patches in the centre. They are a distinctive feature of vast areas of the desert, but their origin has long remained a mystery.

These bare patches, called pavements, are the remains of harvester termite nests created around 12,000 years ago.



We're probably all familiar with images of big termite mounds in the outback, but that's not the only environment where they occur. Here's one in a local forest, just on the ecotone between wet eucalypt and rain forests. Photo by the author

These termites had a profound, lasting effect on the landscape. Similar structures occur in African savannahs where they are called 'fairy rings'.

Many species of Australian termites are active above ground in trees. These arboreal species create colonies within the trunks and limbs of trees. The resulting cavities provide dens, nests, and other living space as well as feeding opportunities for a multitude of invertebrate, reptile, amphibian, mammal, and bird species.

Many depend on termite cavities for their survival. The endangered Greater Glider, for example, relies on the presence of hollows in old growth trees shaped by termites, for denning.



Nesting site for a pair of kookaburras. Photo courtesy Bundaberg Regional Council

The gliders can't live without these hollows.

Some species of arboreal termites create mud termitaria that are especially important for parrots and kingfishers. Australian kingfishers such as Kookaburras, Forest Kingfishers, Sacred Kingfishers, Buff-breasted Kingfishers and Collared Kingfishers use these structures for nesting.

The endangered Golden-shouldered Parrot from Cape York nests in termite mounds. The now extinct Paradise Parrot, once very common in southern Queensland also nested in termite mounds. Its disappearance was the result of changes to the landscape brought about by agriculture. The destruction of termite mounds as part of this process deprived them of breeding sites and contributed to the decline.

Apart from the structures and changes that termites bring to the landscape, their sheer abundance makes them

a crucial food resource for other organisms.

Many of us will have seen echidnas digging termites out of termite nests, or at least seen the signs of their feeding around *termitaria*. Some termites produce vast numbers of winged alates – reproductive termites – that swarm and fly off to found new colonies.

When this happens, all sorts of winged vertebrates take advantage of this rich food source. One of these is the Pacific Swift (*aka* Fork-tailed Swift) that can form huge flocks that attack swarms of alates and consume them on the wing.

So, termites play a huge role moulding the character of landscapes and the make-up of ecosystems. They are both keystones and engineers. Formally we call them Class: *Insecta*; Order: *Blattodea*; In: 18 Families.

But I call them astonishing. See also: www.abc.net.au/news/2023-04-04/indigenous-knowledge-science-links-termites-fairy-circles/102177938

The Blues in March

by Scott O'Keeffe ecologist

The Small Green-banded Blue Butterfly (*Psychonotis caelius*) is found in coastal Queensland and New South Wales, and inland some distance as well.

They are also native in PNG. At the moment, if you look carefully at the edges of rainforest, in patches of other remnant wet forests, or well-developed gardens, you have a good chance of seeing this lovely little butterfly.

SGBB's are part of a large informal group of butterflies with similar shape, size and appearance. These are the Blues, Hairstreak, Coppers and Azures. These are all relatively small butterflies, mostly with wingspans of between 20 and 35mm.

Along with these, SGBB's are

members of the Lycaenidae family, which contains over 30% of the world's butterfly species. Most species of *Lycaenid* butterflies inhabit the tropics.

Although they can be seen most of the year, you are more likely to encounter SGBB's in late summer and autumn. It is thought that two generations of butterflies are produced every year. Native Ash trees (*Alphitonia petrei* and *Alphitonia excelsa*) are the food plants for the larvae.

Like other butterflies, SGBB's lay eggs that hatch into larvae (caterpillars). These go through five stages of development (instars) before they pupate. In the pupal stage, the body of the larva rearranges itself to produce adult organs.

When the transformation is complete, the pupal case splits and

a fully formed butterfly emerges.

Many species of Lycaenid butterflies have unusual mutualistic associations with ants. For example, the caterpillars of some species have glands that exude a food attractive to particular species of ants. The ants get a feed and in return they protect the larvae from predators such as parasitic wasps and predatory flies.

The life cycles of these butterflies are completely bound to the 'attendant ants'. Although SGBB larvae are sometimes attended by ants of the genus *Technomyrmex*, the SGBB's larvae are not fully dependent on them for protection. It's more of a casual association than a necessity.

The more ant-dependent Lycaenid butterflies are vulnerable to impacts from invasive 'tramp' ants. Species like Fire Ants (*Solenopsis invicta*) and Yellow Crazy Ants (*Anoplolepis gracilipes*) can destroy, out-compete or drive off attendant



A female Small Green-banded Blue with its food plant *Alphitonia petrei*. Photo by the author

ants, potentially putting their host butterflies at risk.

The arrival of invasive ants is a direct threat to many Lycaenid butterflies.

If you can find some of the SGBB'S food trees, and they are quite common, you have a

very good chance of seeing these butterflies. They are particularly abundant at the moment.

As butterflies go, they are quite placid and their flight is comparatively weak. They are therefore easy to observe up close, and to photograph.

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Nimbin Garden Club notes



by Kerry Hagan

A joy to wander around

Over 40 members and guests attended our visit to the garden of Saskia and Dave.

We were extremely lucky with the weather, as the rain held off long enough for us to be able to meander through Saskia's wonderful garden.

Many brick paths curve through the property, creating pockets of intimate gardens edged with native

and exotic ground covers overhung by larger flowering shrubs and then emerging into open spaces.

At the back of the house is a lovely area of native palms and bromeliads. The whole garden is beautifully maintained and just a joy to wander around.

Many of us went home with cuttings of some of the more curious ground covers, yet to be identified! Thanks Saskia and Dave.

Our April garden is very

lovely in a very different way. One of the joys of Garden Club visits is seeing the diverse ways that we approach and manage our land and the April garden of Sammi and Paul will fascinate many.

It will be held on Saturday 20th April, 2-4pm at 'Sparrowhawk', 4819 Kyogle Road Wadeville. Please bring a cup and a plate to share. There is plenty of seating. Guests are always welcome. See you then.



Minyon 'magic' Falls and Girraween granite



by Peter Moyle
Nimbin Bushwalkers Club

The hot weather has been very uncomfortable for all, and bushwalking can be very trying in these conditions. Fortunately, after considering the weather potential we have had some not-too-much heat during walks.

We recently returned to Minyon Falls after three years: Covid, bushfires and floods restricted this great walk for a couple of years. A mostly shady walk and in the 'wet', there was always plenty of water and the falls magic. This was, as expected, a very popular walk for members and visitors. Shar our Secretary/Treasurer and walk leader organised things beautifully. As she had 22 walkers, she seconded Mark and Ron, and split into two groups going in different directions. We did the loop with a very manageable number in each group. No dramas and then back to the picnic area for a rejoining and the usual Nimbin Bushwalkers after-walk refreshments and get together time.

With the hot weather continuing our trip to Girraween NP near

Tenterfield proved a great move. With days at 18 degrees, and nights about 12 degrees, these were perfect walking conditions. 14 members made the trip and tackled all the tracks over five days. This is stunning granite country and the amazing rock formations with a camper friendly area combined for an exciting adventure. One of our favourite get-aways, and it never disappoints.

Walks programme Thursday 25th to Sunday 28th April - Green Pigeon via Kyogle

Member only trip. The Nimbin Bushwalkers have been invited to spend the ANZAC weekend on this private property. This is our third visit over ANZAC weekends, always popular with wonderful hospitality and some lovely walks. Camping in the front paddock at minimal cost and some nice walks that back onto the Border Ranges National Park. We have been guaranteed decent firewood, facilities, and great walks.

Grade: 4. The walking will be on both old

logging tracks as well as off-track. There will be some rock hopping and creek crossings where slippery conditions will be encountered.

Meet: You are welcome to come out Thursday and camp till Sunday. We will be walking on Friday and Saturday from 9.30am.

Come for a day walk or stay. Sorry members only **Bring:** usual camping gear, walking footwear and a hat.

Sunday 12th May - Goonengerry National Park

Leader: Ron Smith 0497-792-789. You must register with Ron as numbers limited.

Grade: 3-4. 10km approximately four hours. There are some off track sections that may be slippery. Good walking shoes/boots needed. We will be walking into an area with some nice waterfalls; Ron guarantees plenty of water. This is a great walk even in the wet as it is on top of the ridge so not boggy.

Meet: 9am at the Goonengerry NP at the end of Mill Road.

Bring: the usual including hat, water, and lunch.

Shat GPT

View from the loo
by Stuart McConville

Curious about AI? I was too and used it to produce the following article. Pretty impressive eh? It lacks a personal touch but I can see the potential for the huge changes it will bring to our world. I even got to teach it the difference between waste and byproducts!

Composting toilets have a rich cultural history, deeply intertwined with sustainability, self-sufficiency and environmental stewardship. Across various cultures and regions, composting toilets have been embraced for their practicality, efficiency, and ecological benefits.

In many indigenous cultures, composting toilets are not a novel concept but rather a traditional practice deeply rooted in the community's relationship with the land. For centuries, indigenous communities around the world have used composting toilets as a sustainable way to manage human byproducts. These toilets often reflect a profound respect for nature and a holistic understanding of the interconnectedness of all living things.

In Japan, the practice of composting human byproducts, known as 'night soil,' dates back centuries. Historically, night soil was collected from urban areas and used as fertiliser in agricultural fields, contributing to the fertility of the soil and the productivity of crops. Although the practice has evolved over time, the principles of recycling nutrients and minimizing byproducts remain central to Japanese cultural attitudes towards sanitation.

In Scandinavia, particularly in countries like Sweden and Finland, composting toilets have been embraced as a way to reduce environmental impact and promote sustainable living. These countries have a long tradition of living in harmony with nature, and composting toilets are seen as a natural extension of this ethos. Today, many eco-villages and sustainable communities in Scandinavia rely on composting toilets as part of their commitment to ecological sustainability.

In Australia and the US, composting toilets have gained popularity in alternative communities like our own, eco-friendly homes, and off-grid cabins.



These toilets are often seen as a way to reduce water consumption, minimise pollution of water sources, and lessen the burden on sewage treatment systems. The cultural shift towards more sustainable living practices has contributed to the growing acceptance and adoption of composting toilets in the US.

One of the key cultural aspects of composting toilets is the shift in perception around byproducts. Instead of viewing human byproducts as something to be flushed away and forgotten, composting toilets encourage a more mindful approach to byproducts management. They remind us that byproducts are a valuable resource that can be recycled and reused in a way that benefits the environment.

Overall, composting toilets embody a cultural shift towards more sustainable, environmentally conscious living. They are a testament to the ingenuity of human beings in finding innovative solutions to environmental challenges.

As awareness of the importance of sustainability grows, composting toilets are likely to become even more prevalent, not just as a practical sanitation solution, but as a cultural symbol of our commitment to a healthier planet.

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Flower Foliage Spectacular

Kyogle Garden Club will host the Flower Foliage Spectacular on Friday 19th April, 9am-5pm, and Saturday 20th April, 8am-2pm, at St Brigid's School Hall and grounds. Entry is \$3.

This will be the fifth annual Spectacular for the Club, which was started to promote the Kyogle Garden Club and local businesses. Thanks to the hard work of the Flower & Foliage Committee, many plants, products and artworks will be available to visitors. Last year we had more than 800 visitors over the two-day event.

Each year the Club presents a different theme for the main display in the hall. This year the theme is child-related - children being the gardeners of the future.

Come along and see what is on offer this year. As well as cacti and succulents, bromeliads, indoor and outdoor plants, trees, natives, paintings and garden art, etc. Light refreshments will also be available.

The ABC's, Phil Dudman will make an appearance on Friday after 10.30am, and on Saturday there will be speakers and demonstrations on Desert Roses, bonsai and orchids. Something for everybody!

Why did my horse do that?

by Suzy Maloney

Understanding equine behaviour is a cornerstone of horsemanship, encompassing a delicate balance of observation, empathy, and curiosity.

Horses communicate primarily through body language and actions, often leaving us intrigued by their motivations. We desire to comprehend the motivations driving a horse's actions.

There are many factors influencing a horse's actions ranging from instinctual responses to environmental stimuli, past experiences, physical discomfort, and emotional states. Understanding requires an investigation into the horse's past encounters, temperament, and current surroundings.

Understanding the 'why' can empower us to meet the unique needs of each horse, enhancing their quality of life, overall welfare, and ease with training.

While this is necessary and desirable, like all good things we can fall prey to doing it too much. The perennial question that has confounded equestrians for centuries: 'Why does a horse do what they do?' can go too far. Every action seems to invite speculation and inquiry.

As we delve deeper into the intricacies of equine behaviour, we may find ourselves in a labyrinth of uncertainty, grappling with



the elusive nature of the 'why' question.

This pursuit of understanding, while noble, can lead down a rabbit hole of frustration and bewilderment, echoing the broader human propensity to over-analyse and drive oneself crazy with relentless questioning. This in turn stops us from being present with our horses.

As our minds go over and over the why question we are firmly in our heads and not present in our body with our horse. In this state it can sometimes be difficult to deal with the behaviour that's presently occurring.

Horses, like humans, are sentient beings with their own unique personalities, motivations, and instincts. While centuries of domestication have forged a partnership between humans and horses, bridging the gap between our species remains a perpetual challenge.

Despite our best efforts to communicate and empathise with our equine

counterparts, there are moments when their actions defy rational explanation.

As any seasoned equestrian will attest, things are rarely straightforward in the world of horses. The more we probe into the reasons behind their actions, the more elusive the answers may become.

Is the horse fearful, asserting independence, misunderstanding, sensing something amiss in the surroundings? Each possibility opens a Pandora's box of conjecture, inviting endless mental speculation.

This quest for understanding can quickly spiral into a cycle of obsession and self-doubt. Riders find themselves embroiled in a constant internal dialogue, second-guessing their every decision, and dissecting the minutiae of their horse's behaviour.

Every sideways glance or flick of the ear becomes laden with significance, prompting an endless stream of questions. In our relentless pursuit of answers, we risk

losing sight of the joy and spontaneity that drew us to horses in the first place, trapped in a maze of our own making.

While the temptation to unravel the mysteries of equine behaviour may be irresistible, it is essential to recognise the limits of our understanding. Horses, like all living beings, are shaped by a complex interplay of genetics, environment, and individual experience.

While we can strive to empathise with their perspective and refine our training methods, there will always be aspects of their behaviour that elude explanation.

Embracing this uncertainty is not a sign of weakness, but an understanding that there will always be mysteries in life, and that is OK.

In the end, perhaps the most profound lesson that horses teach us is the importance of letting go of our need for control and certainty. Instead of fixating on the elusive question of 'why,' we can learn to embrace the beauty of the moment.

By embracing the inherent mystery of horses and relinquishing the need for absolute answers, we can cultivate a deeper appreciation for the bond between human and horse, grounded in trust, empathy, and mutual respect.

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Understanding the flight response

by Les Rees

Horses need to feel safe and like all animals, it's part of all our genetic makeup.

The difference for our horses is that they are flight animals and they have a brain that has to make split second decisions concerning the need to flee from danger. This is often misunderstood in the belief that a horse has a behavioural problem.

I used to label it as the "lights on, nobody in syndrome" as I had a horse that had a number of dangerous issues concerning his flight response. Bucking and rearing was a common event when this beautiful boy first came to live with our family. Not good for creating confidence when it happened on a daily basis whilst riding him.

He was a 16.3hh thoroughbred bred for the racing industry, and was an extreme athlete. It didn't help that he was also shut down, a horse that had been misunderstood and treated badly who had switched off from any relationships with

humans, who he saw as the enemy.

The interesting point is that when he bucked me off, he seemed totally unaware of the event preceding it, genuinely seeming surprised that I was on the ground. After the first few times he stopped being afraid of coming back to me as he feared the treatment that he'd received from previous owners, which made me all the more determined to get to the bottom of this horse's problems.

There can be many reasons why these reactions occur, ranging from physical to psychological problems and usually both. This isn't helped by the fact that the safety of the horse is controlled by the unconscious part of the brain working in tandem with the sympathetic nervous system that controls reactions to flight responses.

This would explain why my horse seemed perplexed by finding me on the ground when the last time he was aware of my presence I was sitting his back.

One of the first things I did was to look into his history, and I discovered that he had



Charlie

been broken in by a notorious cruel man. This would explain his fear of humans.

The next discovery was that he had been owned by a lady who had decided that he was too dangerous to ride. As a result he was left alone in a paddock for months, and eventually found with his leg trapped in a wire fence.

These two events of his short life had caused so much damage both physically and psychologically. The one thing I was sure of was that I wasn't going to give up on this poor beautiful boy.

It took a huge amount of time to gain his trust and I began with creating a regimented system where

there were precise times when things would happen during each day.

Traumatized horses soon get used to the regime and can relate to knowing what to expect at any time during the day. This in my view is when the horse can begin to build trust via positive expectations. He was always treated with care, respect, love and understanding. I never once lost my temper with him!

Gradually the layers were peeled away, and I had myself one amazingly beautiful horse that went on to teach me so much not only about him but also the other horses that came to join our family.

I cannot express strongly enough the importance of fully understanding the flight response in horses.

If you increase your awareness of the way in which your horse reacts to stressful situations, you can always discover gentle ways to introduce them to their fears in a safe environment to enable you to reinforce positive outcomes.

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