

Grass, pasture and horses in Kentucky

Here is a reportage from a study visit to Kentucky, US. It was an intense week for me and my colleague; we tried to see most of what Kentucky has to offer.

Kentucky is a real horse Mecca and I have wanted to come here for a long time. Kentucky has lots of horses, horse people, stables and pastures. But there are also many horse researchers here and many different horse research projects going on.

Our first visit was at Kentucky Equine Research where they do research on nutrition and exercise physiology in horses. We got to see the nice facilities and they told us about their research projects and how they work.



We also got to visit University of Kentucky and their very large and nice facility for horse research. Several horse researchers showed us their work and told us about their research projects.

They gave us a guided tour at the Gluck Equine Research Center and there we got to hear the story about the caterpillars. In spring 2001 and 2002 there were big outbreaks of unexplainable abortions in mares at Kentucky's horse farms. It was a big tragedy and great economic losses for the horse industry in Kentucky. With achievements from the researchers at University of Kentucky and other research institutions they managed to solve the mystery. It was caterpillars building silken tents

in trees around pastures, to live there before they started wandering in search for a place to pupate. During their wandering they crossed pastures and were eaten by grazing pregnant mares. The researchers concluded that it is probably the hairs on the caterpillars that break off inside the horses' intestine and perforates the intestinal wall. Bacteria can then invade the circulatory system and cause infections leading to abortion. When the researchers had solved the mystery of what caused the abortions people could start prevent the problems with the caterpillars.

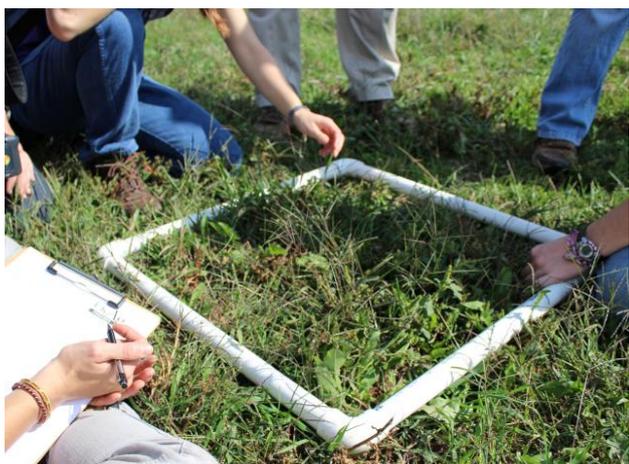


When I think about Kentucky I think about pastures, and we got to see a lot of pastures. All had big sturdy fences, black or white, that was rounded in the corners so no horse could get trapped in a corner by other horses.



Researchers from University of Kentucky took us out with them to a pasture where they held a class in pasture evaluation for a group of students. We got to be students again for a day and participate!

To estimate the botanical composition, e.g. what kind of grass and the amount, a frame of 50 × 50 cm is used and within it a more thorough investigation is done. The frame is tossed out on several locations on the pasture being evaluated to make sure it is random and not one self who controls which squares gets a closer look. However, a strategic patterns over the whole pasture is followed to get an as representative picture as possible of the whole pasture. Evaluating the pasture like this you get a general map of the botanical composition of the pasture.



When I think about Kentucky I also think about Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*). It is a rather small and thin grass and we found it underneath other grasses and weeds, so we had to get down in the vegetation to find it. We learned that we had to 'get down and dirty' to really see what is growing there.

Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*) is also common in lawns and golf courses and in Sweden it is called Ängsgröe. Here I found one, do you recognize it?



Tall fescue (*Festuca arundinacea* Schreb.), in Swedish called Rörsvingel, is also quite common in Kentucky. Tall fescue was sampled for analysis since some of the Tall fescue contains an endophytic fungus that lives in symbiosis with the grass and can produce toxic alkaloids. Too big consumption of alkaloids can lead to problems in pregnancy and delivery. Sampling and analysis of endophytes contributes to mapping the presence of and prevent the problems with toxic alkaloids. Here is a picture of Tall fescue.



Besides all the new acquaintances and knowledge intake we also took the opportunity to visit the yearling sales at Fasig-Tipton outside Lexington. It was packed with beautiful horses, trotters and pacers, lots of people and a delicious buffet. Everywhere people were speaking Norwegian and Swedish, there were a lot of Scandinavians on site. The atmosphere was intense; we could feel the excitement and large amounts of money were paid for several horses.



Of course we also took the opportunity to see some racing. At Keeneland racetrack it was a party

atmosphere, lots of people and many had dressed up for the occasion. It was a very nice racetrack for thoroughbred racing and we got to see many nice horses.



We got to see lots of two year old fillies, both trotters and pacers, during an afternoon at the racetrack The Red Mile which is in the central parts of Lexington. People were speaking Swedish everywhere and we even saw some Swedish trotting celebrities.



Another can't miss was the Kentucky Horse Park where we visited the nowadays retired Mr Muscleman, one of the riches trotters in the world! He seemed to have a very good life there in his paddock grazing with a buddy. Check out the video tribute to him at his own website:

www.worldclasstrotting.com/MrMuscleman/

As the superstar that he is he came up to the fence and let me take this picture!



Kentucky Horse Park had so much to offer that we did not have time to see everything. But at the International Museum of The Horse we sort of got stuck for a long time and they had to throw us out at closing time.

I don't know how many, but a lot of the worlds horse breeds are presented at Kentucky Horse Park and these two Clydesdale horses gets to finish this reportage. Kentucky – see you later!



Text and photo: Sara Muhonen