

# RSPCA Animal Welfare Seminar 2023

Ethical training: what does  
it look like?

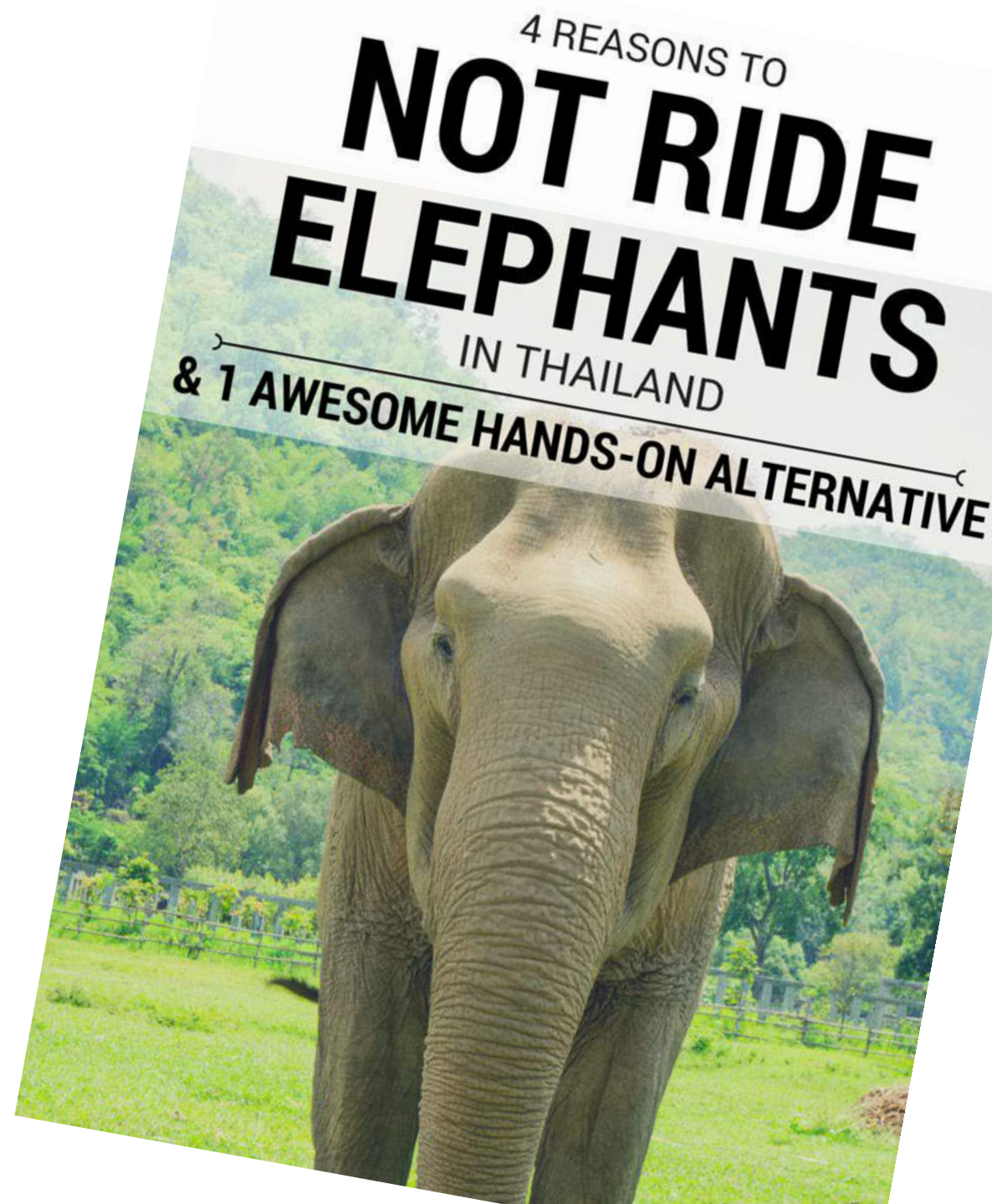
Andrew N McLean





# Social licence to operate

- Ethics and moral consideration of animals:
  - Sentience, agency, harmfulness, utility
- Rising community expectations
- The end of 'behind closed doors'
- The canary in the coal mine: Elephant riding in Thailand
- ISES: The '10 First Principles of Training'





# 1. Regard for human and horse safety

- Dangers posed by horses: size, power and flight response, kicking, striking, biting
- Dangers to horses where humans are punishing, inconsistent, ineffective or confusing
- Dangers to horses of equipment that cause pain, distress or injury to the horse: nosebands, whips, spurs, tongue ties, severe bits



## 2. Regard for the nature of horses

Ensure welfare needs:

- Lengthy daily foraging
- Social needs
- Movement needs
- Human-horse interactions



### 3. Regard for horses' mental and sensory abilities

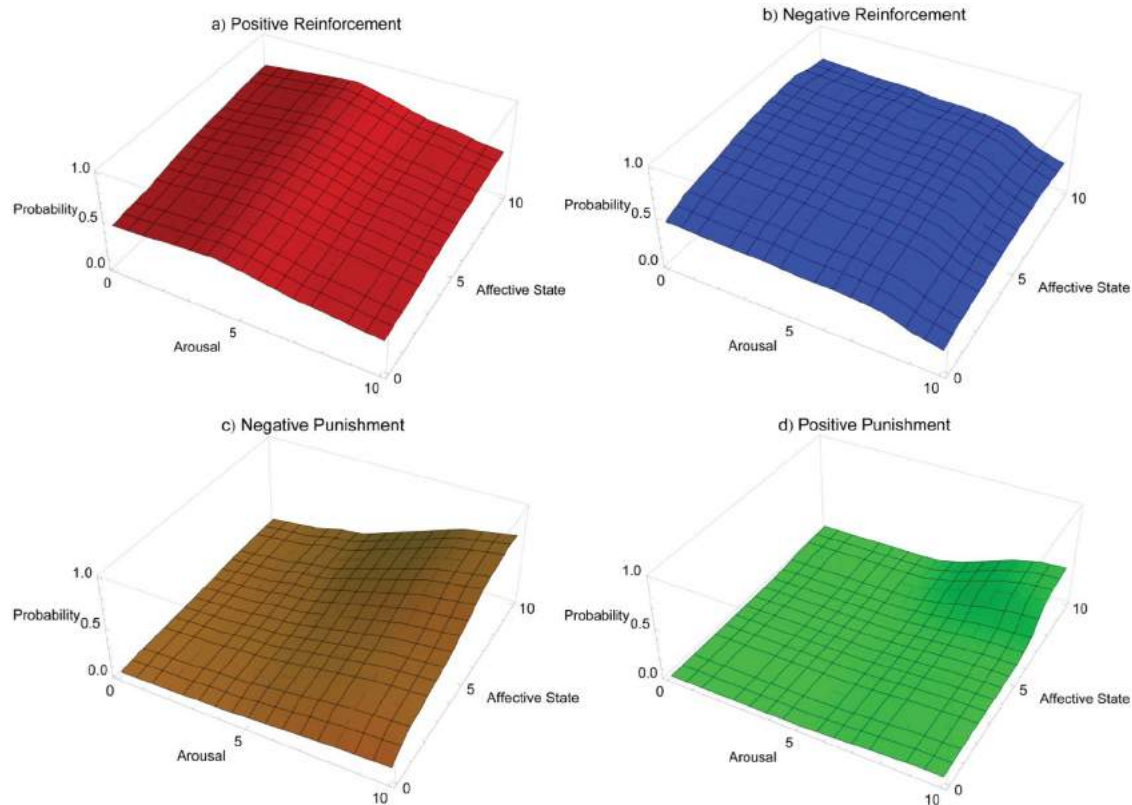
During training & interactions:

- Avoid overestimating or underestimating the horse's mental abilities
- Assuming mental states rather than directly observable behaviours
- Recognise sensory and perceptive differences and similarities





## 4. Regard for current emotional states



- Ensure trained responses and reinforcements are consistent
- Avoid triggering flight/fight/freeze reactions
- Avoid high arousal when using tactile or food motivators
- Help the horse to relax with stroking and voice
- Encourage positive emotional states in training
- Recognise pain

Starling *et al.*, 2013

## 5. Correct use of habituation/ desensitisation/ calming methods

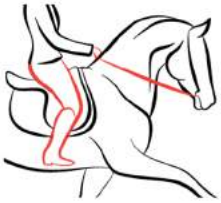
- Systematic desensitisation
- Overshadowing
- Counter-conditioning
- Target training
- Approach conditioning
- Differential reinforcement
- Stimulus blending
- Response prevention
- Negative reinforcement



## Behaviour more likely

### Negative reinforcement

The **removal** of an **aversive** stimulus to make a behaviour **more** likely.



*e.g. ceasing leg/rein pressure when horse gives desired response*

### Positive reinforcement

The **addition** of an **attractive** stimulus to make a behaviour **more** likely.



*e.g. delivering food, a scratch/rub when horse gives desired response*

### Combined reinforcement

The **removal** of an **aversive** stimulus **and** the **addition** of an **attractive** stimulus to make a behaviour **more** likely.



*e.g. ceasing leg/rein pressure when horse gives desired response, and scratching the horse or delivering food*

### Positive punishment

The **addition** of an **aversive** stimulus to make a behaviour **less** likely.



*e.g. smacking the horse when he gives an undesired response*

### Negative punishment

The **removal** of an **attractive** stimulus to make a behaviour **less** likely.



*e.g. withholding food from the horse when he gives an undesired response*

## Behaviour less likely

Aversive stimuli (pressure / personal space / sound)

Attractive stimuli (scratch / rub / food / freedom)

# 6. Correct use of Operant Conditioning

1. Reinforcement:
  - Positive = adding
  - Negative = subtracting
  - Combined = both
2. Punishment:
  - Positive
  - Negative



# The Diversity of Negative Reinforcement



Be careful what you reinforce!

# 7. Correct use of Classical Conditioning

- Predictability
- Clarity of signals
- Avoid unintended stimuli overshadowing desired responses
- Avoid 'white noise'







## 8. Correct use of Shaping

- Successive approximation
- Achievable responses
- Planning
- Consistency of environment



## 9 . Correct use of Signals/Cues

- Easy discrimination
- One signal = One meaning
- Ensure signals for different responses are never applied concurrently  
e.g. rein and leg
- Aim for locomotory signals to be applied in timing with limb biomechanics



# 10. Regard for Self-carriage

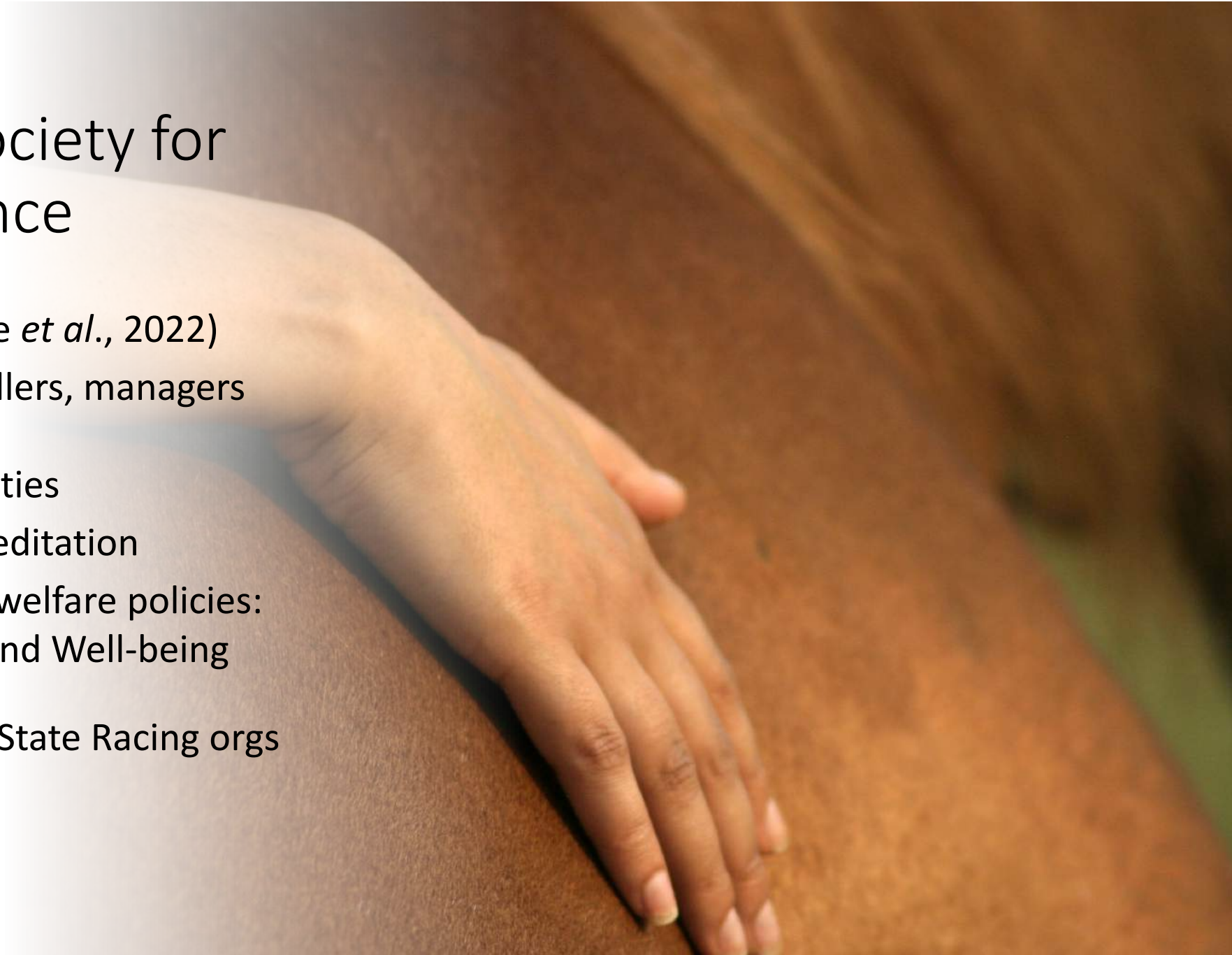
- Aim for self-carriage in all methods and at all levels of training
- Train the horse to maintain:
  - gait
  - tempo
  - stride length
  - direction
  - head and neck carriage
  - body posture
- No forced postures
- Avoid nagging with legs, spurs or reins i.e. avoid trying to maintain responses with relentless signaling.





# Solutions – The International Society for Equitation Science

- Systems approach (Luke *et al.*, 2022)
- Education: Riders, handlers, managers and judges
- ISES & SWF responsibilities
- Qualifications and accreditation
- Regulatory bodies and welfare policies:
  - FEI: Equine Ethics and Well-being Commission
  - IFHA and National/State Racing orgs
  - Pony Clubs







Thank you

[www.esi-education.com](http://www.esi-education.com)

- Lay and academic texts
- Education
- Diploma of Equitation Science RTO