

A WAKE UP CALL FOR equine sleep?

From the effects of pink noise to the perfect under-rug temperature, a wealth of new research from Hartpury University is unlocking the secrets of equine sleep — and the results are surprising. **Catherine Welton** reports

WE ALL KNOW that feeling after a bad night's sleep — tiredness, a tendency to be grumpy and an inability to concentrate. Research suggests that a lack of sleep can even contribute to long-term health issues. No wonder then that the human race is obsessed with getting enough of the stuff, with apps and gadgets galore dedicated to helping to track sleep and improve it.

But did you know that sleep is just as important for horses?

It's a subject that Dr Linda Greening, senior lecturer at Hartpury University and the establishment's resident equine sleep expert, is passionate about.

"Increasingly, the link between sleep and wellbeing is promoted in human medicine," she says. "I'm interested in what conditions we can provide to facilitate good sleep for horses to optimise their wellbeing."

Linda's interest in equine sleep began 15 years ago.

"I was approached to supervise a project looking at differences in nocturnal behaviour, comparing horses stabled on straw versus shavings, which was the first equine sleep publication from Hartpury. I was interested as I had a horse on box rest at the time and every morning I would go and see him and wonder who he'd invited to party in his stable overnight."

Since then investigating sleep behaviour has become a popular research topic at the university and, with plenty of mysteries still to solve, it is regularly chosen by degree students and postgraduate students for their dissertations and theses.

"Currently relatively little is known about sleep behaviour, and so very little information exists for owners and horse care givers. I think it's an important knowledge gap to fill," says Linda.

The university has invested in CCTV equipment for the stables to monitor behaviour 24/7.

"The opportunities for sleep research are vast," Linda observes. "We've recently completed a few studies that have revealed something new or different, so we're keen to share our developing knowledge about horse sleep."



The stable CCTV system installed at Hartpury University is providing insights for researchers