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DIGITAL HORSE WHISPERER GIVES ANIMALS A VOICE

New animal-computer interaction software could revolutionize equine understanding.

BY ANTHONY CUTHBERTSON (/AUTHORS/ANTHONY-CUTHBERTSON) ON 7/18/16 AT 5:09 PM

Is Wearable Technology Just A Fad?

Efforts to understand the language of animals using technology have ranged from a promising dolphin translation tool (https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg22129624-300-dolphin-whistle-instantly-translated-by-computer/) to the absurd WhatsYapp dog collar (http://europe.newsweek.com/whatsyapp-whatsapp-dogs-helps-pets-talk-owners-419643). Now researchers at the University of Nottingham in the U.K. have developed software to understand what horses are thinking and feeling.

The HABIT (Horse Automated Behaviour Identification Tool) project analyzes the behavior horses exhibit, in order to automatically identify whether the animal is stressed, sick or suffering.

Giving animals a voice

"Horses and all nonhuman animals are entitled to interaction technologies that enrich rather than exploit," said Steve North, a research fellow in the Mixed Reality Laboratory (MRL) at the University of Nottingham.

"Anthropocentrism limits our understanding of human interaction in a multispecies world and currently there isn't any software that can reliably analyze video footage and log what behaviors it sees and when. We hope HABIT will also be able to assess how animals react to new surroundings."

New animal-computer interaction software could revolutionize equine understanding.
UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM

The research (http://www.cs.nott.ac.uk/~pszsn/publications/HABIT%20position%20paper%20-%20ACIatBHCI_2015.pdf)—carried out in collaboration with Nottingham Trent University and the Open University—could eventually find real-world applications on farms, in zoos or in veterinary practises.

"We are coming to a point where technology is so widespread in society that animals are becoming exposed to it and interacting with it," said Clara Mancini, a senior lecturer in computer interaction design at the Open University. "However, we are still in the very early stages of developing technology that can interact with them in a user-centred way."

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