

THE SCENT OF THE TAO
IN HORSE POO

THE AROMA OF THE ECOSYSTEM

BY LEO GREENWOOD

I have taken care of horses a lot on my travels — in every season of the year — and each season has a familiar sensory experience to it. The horses are telling us something, and I've been picking up what they're putting down.

Sometimes, you muck out the stables with long-handled tools, and so you do it standing up. Sometimes you pick up their poo with rubber gloves and put it in a bucket, and so you squat down close. It depends on how the stable owner likes to do it. Regardless, you can't help but notice the sweet aroma of what they leave behind.

It has a sweetness like a flower has a sweetness. A sweetness that tells you it's for the nose, not for the tongue — though if you want to test this, you'll have to let me know how it goes.

Horse poo has a scent, and depending on the season, that scent changes. It seems the grass must grow slightly differently in different temperatures and with different amounts of rain and sunlight.

Sensibly, we could reason that, in summer, the grass would have more sugars due to the increase in sunlight and boosted photosynthesis. Naturally, then, when the horses digest summer grass, the richness of sugars are fermented in the digestion process, and so the scent is sweeter coming out the other end.

As I squatted there this morning, the beautiful realisation of the complete and holistic nature of Earth's environment struck me from the unexpected angle of horse poo: Everything, absolutely everything on Earth, is contributing to the unfathomably unique smell of this planet.

Every animal eats something. All animals that eat something poo. This fermenting process in digestion flavours the air. The air that I breathe is the same air the horse breathes. The ducks, the geese, the heron, and the cat; the goldfinches and blue-tits, the rabbits and the deer, are all fermenting what has been eaten and give back this rich present of Earth-food.

The nutrients leftover from digestion go back to the soil, and out of the soil spring flowers, mushrooms, more grass, trees, herbs. These all scent the very experience of life itself.

Just as the scent of horse poo changes when the grass changes, the scent of the apple blossom, the basil, the tulips is bound to change based on the qualities of the food they 'digest' from the soil, from the air, and from starlight.

We do not live in an ecosystem. We are the ecosystem. 'The ecosystem' is not an abstract noun; it is the living reality of us.

In our topsy-turvy inside-out system, we capture and then flush our poo down enormous tubes and send it to big buildings where they hide it forever in gigantic water-filled toilets behind armed guards (I'm pretty sure) so no one ever has to admit this simple, gentle, and gloriously tension-easing, truth... we are the natural way of things.

We don't need to hide ourselves or parts of ourselves, it's all out in the open.

The truth, the way, the Tao, is in the air.

With love,

Always,

O