Summary

The methods of the Orphan Foal Rearing Station in Wittorf, area Lüneburg, were analysed by the study of 14 foals from the 1999 foaling season with respect to immunology, nutritional physiology and ethology. In the sample were ten German Warmblood foals, two pony cross foals, a Quarterhorse foal and a Friesian foal, which had been orphaned or rejected by the mother and been sent to the station by the owners. During the initial examination the antibody titre of all foals was measured in the field by a test (CITE- Foal-IgG®, Fa. IDEXX-GmbH, Wörrstadt) in order to test the level of passive immunity. In animals with an IgG- titre < 800 µg/dl a plasma transfusion was successfully used to bring the levels up to 800 µg/dl. The course of illness, timing and response to therapy of any disease was documented. Foals under three months old were fed with a commercially produced milk replacer as well as a foal starter mix and good quality hay. Growth up to the age of three months was monitored by body weight and girth measurements at weekly intervals. In order to promote the development of correct social behaviour, the foals were kept in groups in both stable and paddock. The behaviour of the foals with respect to their companions and people was observed on arrival and after a 3 month period at the station. Owners were also questioned about it by telephone a few weeks after successful discharge.

For the 1999 foaling season 100 % rearing was recorded in that all orphaned foals could be released in a healthy condition after weaning at 13 weeks.

The cases of illness recorded during the foals stay at the station were typical for the age group and successfully treated with appropriate therapeutic measures. No significant cases of deprivation from published figures of growth and weight gain were noted. During the period at the rearing station and after release, normal behaviour with respect to other horses was observed. In relation to people the foals were tame without developing too close attachment to the person caring for them.

The immunological, physiological and ethological data collected for this study lead to the conclusion, that the method investigated for the rearing of orphaned foals is to be recommended.