



## 'EQUINE COMMUNICATOR' CHECKS ANIMALS' CHAKRAS, READS AURAS FOR ILLS

By Roselyn Tantraphol  
Courant Staff Writer



USING HANDS-ON TECHNIQUES, Sheila Ryan of Barrington, R.I., checks the balance polarity of Max, a 19-year-old horse. Below, Max's owner, Colleen Mancuso of Springfield, holds the lead while Ryan checks his energy for medical problems.

(Photos by Tom Brown / The Hartford Courant)



### HORSE SENSING

By ROSELYN TANTRAPHOL  
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Sheila Ryan has heard all of the comparisons: pet psychic, horse whisperer, a modern-day Dr. Dolittle.

Ryan doesn't deny such descriptions, but she is quite clear about what sets her apart from other self-styled animal communicators — her dowsing rods.

The Rhode Island resident brings her L-shaped rods from stable to stable as she travels the East Coast answering calls from horse owners who want her help. They call her to talk to their horses, read their auras for signs of physical problems and check out their chakras, or energy centers, for emotional distress.

In her search for answers, Ryan watches the motion of the metal rods—perhaps best known as tools for finding water—as they swing from side to side.

"When you actually experience it for the first time, you feel the rods move on their own, and you know you're not doing it — it's a wild feeling," Ryan says. "It's very liberating. You're like, 'Oh my god, I've accessed a whole new world.'"

Skeptics say so-called animal communicators are accessing little more than the checkbooks of well-to-do pet owners. They say people like Ryan simply read an owner's body language or give answers so broad that they can't go wrong.

Nonetheless, personalities like Ryan and Animal Planet's pet psychic Sonya Fitzpatrick are grabbing headlines and believers. Some of Ryan's biggest fans were once skeptics.

Colleen Mancuso of Springfield has friends who hum the "Twilight Zone" theme whenever the topic comes up, although she thinks a few of them might be growing less skeptical.

"Over the years," she said, "I think things have happened that people have just had to say 'wow.'"

Standing 5-foot-10, the blond Ryan cuts a striking image as she faces a horse to start a session. The horse may snarl, kick or plant his hoofs in defiance, but Ryan, 43, doesn't flinch. She keeps on asking and analyzing, balancing the dowsing rods between thumb and forefinger and pointing them straight ahead.

"How's your stomach feel?" Ryan asked during a session with Max, Mancuso's 19-year-old Appendix quarter horse.

The rods both swung to the right.

(Ryan translated: Max's stomach felt 100 percent fine.)

"How's your parasite level?" Ryan asked.

The Rods swung all the way to the left.

(Translation: Max reported no parasites.)

### Checking Chakras of Horses

A typical 90-minute session with Ryan, which costs \$125, includes a nutrition review, the chakra check (using a pendulum) and the aura reading (using the rods again). Clients say Ryan insists that they don't tell her about their horse before the meeting.



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After identifying a problem, Ryan may make a referral to a vet, but in most cases, she suggests herbal remedies and supplements, which she also sells. She does not present herself as someone with veterinary training. Ryan says she often works on routine problems, such as helping rider and horse find a better saddle fit, but claims to have helped several horses through major illnesses.

Joyce Connery, a rider from Newington, learned about Ryan through a friend and asked her to work with her horse. Chappy, for no other reason than to improve their relationship. Chappy was civil, but distant, and Connery considered selling him.

"He feels as if he was a cigar being passed around a bunch of cowboys," Connery said, recounting Ryan's assessment. "He couldn't open up to me because he didn't want to get his heart broken again."

Chappy had had five owners before Connery, which Ryan did not know before the session, the owner said. After that session, Connery reassured Chappy that he was there to stay, and he has warmed to her, she said.

Ryan started out working with humans, not horses. She says she studied holistic healing and worked with people for more than a decade before a personal experience led her to treat horses. As described at her web site, [www.horsecommunications.com](http://www.horsecommunications.com):

"It was the purchase of her horse Mijoy, an Arabian, over three years ago that has lead Sheila to the birth of her business, HorseSense. In a need to understand Mijoy better, she began to experiment with using her type of hands-on work on her horse. Mijoy responded, communicating her past and her concerns and problems. The results were astounding. Sheila immediately experienced an improved rapport with her horse."

She soon quit her management job at Samsonite to start HorseSense, billed as an equine communications company. Ryan says her clients are typically booked three months out, and that 1,500 copies of her instructional video, "Introduction to Spiritual Horse Communication," have been sold through catalogs and her website.

"I think everything that I teach is something people basically have the ability to know on their own," says Ryan, "who says she actually feels what her horse clients feel and that helps in her assessments. "There's nothing freaky or special or secret about it."

The pet-communication business has an increasing number of options these days, from dialing an animal communicator

for a phone session or a house call, to numerous books, including "What Your Animals Tell Me: Through True Stories, an Animal Communicator Reveals the Fascinating and Heart-Warming Inner World of Our Pets."

Alice Moon-Fanelli, a certified applied animal behaviorist at Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine in North Grafton, Mass., said the pet communicators she has observed speak in anthropomorphic terms, which meet with a wide appeal.

"Owners like to think of their pets as their child surrogates, and they attribute all these human emotions," she said. In one case she watched, an animal communicator said a dog that was acting out wanted to convey the message to her owners that "she's a big girl now and she wanted to be treated like a big girl."

"What the heck does that mean?" Moon-Fanelli said. "To me, you're missing the whole part of why the dog is destroying objects when you're not paying attention to it."

"As long as they don't do any harm, it's not a problem. But if they're missing the point regarding the animal's behavior, harm could be done," she said. "They clearly believe in what they do. Whether or not they're providing a public service, I'm not convinced."