



KAIMANAWA HERITAGE HORSES

Press Kit - September 2015

This information has been compiled by the Kaimanawa Heritage Horses (KHH) charitable society to increase awareness of the upcoming muster of Kaimanawa horses, in the hope that homes can be found for the removed horses. KHH is dedicated to the welfare of Kaimanawa horses in both the wild and domestic environments.

Please make use of this information to help the horses by publicising the upcoming muster. If you have other questions we can be contacted by emailing media@kaimanawaheritagehorses.org, or visiting our webpage. High quality images by professional photographers are also available, with details in the accompanying *Press Kit Images* document.

Wild horses have been present in the central North Island since the 1870s, but the protection of the environment and welfare of the horses requires that their population be managed. The public outcry at a plan to shoot the horses in the 1990s resulted in the establishment of a mustering programme, with the next taking place in late Autumn 2016. In the 2012 muster, homes were found for 119 of the 191 horses, with the remaining 72, many of which were suitable for rehoming, being sent to slaughter. In the 2014 muster, homes were found for 147 horses, with 15 being sent to slaughter.

The lower number of horses sent to slaughter from the 2014 muster was in part due to the Kaimanawa Stallion Challenge competitions. Thirteen trainers were invited to compete, and they were allowed to take up to two stallions, which were randomly assigned to them. The Major Milestone competition took place at Equidays 2014, only 5 months after the muster, and while not all horses were ready for the competition, the trainers that attended amazed the crowd with performances that showed what the Kaimanawas are capable of. The Stallion Makeover competitions were held at the 2015 NZ Horse of the Year show, consisting of a horsemanship workout, obstacle course, freestyle performance, and then the top 8 ranked combinations competing in the final - which was taken out by Tina Fagan and her horse Rockstar. As well as saving many horses that would otherwise have been sent to slaughter, the competitions have exposed the Kaimanawa horses to a much greater audience, which KHH hopes will improve the results from the next muster.

When the horses have been placed in suitable homes they have proven to be great all-round riding ponies. Many have also proven to be talented competition horses with successes in Show Hunter, Saddle Hunter, Pony Grand Prix Jumping, and Eventing. The most notable being Watch Me Move, who is believed to have been mustered out as a foal, and won the prestigious Grand Prix show jumping title, the Pony of the Year, at the New Zealand Horse of the Year show in 2012. The partbred Kaimanawa Pioneer Makokomiko also won the 2012 Puhinui CCI3* Eventing title.

Anyone interested in taking a horse from the next muster should visit our website at www.kaimanawaheritagehorses.org, and tax-deductible donations can be made to allow the temporary homing of additional horses until permanent places can be found. Applications for membership to KHH can be made on the website, and members receive the KHH magazine.

The Horses

Name

The name Kaimanawa comes from a Maori legend. On Ngātoro-i-rangi's travels he meets Hapekituarangi and asks how he lives in such a barren and cold country. Hapekituarangi looks towards the Kaimanawa ranges and replies "my breath (manawa) is my food (kai)".

Location

The wild Kaimanawa horses are located in the Kaimanawa Ranges, in the central North Island. This is the area to the East of the Desert Road, and a large part overlaps up the Waiouru military training area.

Origin

The first wild horses were reported in the area in 1876, and around that time Exmoor and Welsh bloodlines were intentionally introduced into the wild population. In 1941 a threatening equine disease epidemic resulted in horses from the mounted rifle cavalry being released. An Arab stallion is believed to have been released in the 1960s, and many horses have been released or escaped from farms.^[2]

Characteristics

Characteristics of all the introduced breeds can be seen in the present day horses, with some areas showing greater prevalence of different bloodlines. Genetic testing has shown the horses have a diverse genetic heritage^[1].

This diversity has resulted in a wide variation of appearance, but they are typically between 124 and 152 cm high at the wither (between pony and small horse size), and well muscled. Their environment and lack of human interaction leads them to be sure-footed, intelligent, alert, and able to keep better condition in lower quality environments.^[3]

Environment

Moawhango Ecological Region

The horses occupy a unique area within the Moawhango ecological region. The landscape is montane and sub-alpine, with rolling hills and plateaus. This region is the most extensive red-tussock grassland in the North Island, and also has mixed shrubland, forests, wetlands, and sub-alpine herbfields. Sixteen threatened, rare, and local plant species occur in the area. It is feared that some of these plants could be subject to damage and grazing by horses.^[5]

The Reasons for Management

After the introduction of a protected range for the horses in 1981, their population grew to more than 1700 by 1997^[6]. At this population level there was an increased risk to the rare plant species of the area, and the horses were typically in very poor condition due to overpopulation (around 2.5 on a 10 point condition scale^[7]). Studies from 1994 to 1998 determined that the population was growing at 16% per year^[7], and population surveys leading up to recent musters have shown that the growth rate is now higher (most likely because the horses are in much better condition).

Management

Historical

Prior to the horses protection in 1981, they were subject to hunting for their meat, hide, and hair; and captured for use as stock and riding horses^[8]. Pressure from land development also reduced the range of the horses^[9]. This unplanned management kept their population to low numbers, but risked their complete extermination from the area.

Protection

In 1981 a protected area was established to ensure the remaining 174 horses would not be lost from the area^[1]. This was done to address concerns that hunting and capturing would lead to their complete loss. The protected area includes an area of the Southern Kaimanawa Mountains, a section of the Kaimanawa Forest Park, and some privately owned land^[4]. Horses found outside the protected area will be removed^[10].

Recent

In 1991 a draft management plan was released for comment, which proposed that shooting the horses from helicopter was the most humane option. Between 1990 and 2003 more than 1400 submissions were made to the Minister of Conservation, exceeding all other conservation issues. This resulted in the planned shooting to be abandoned in favor of mustering.^[4]

The management plan^[10] was updated in 2012 and aims to achieve both ecological and horse welfare objectives by keeping the horse population at 300 (thought to be the minimum effective population). Musters are currently performed every two years, with the next taking place in 2014. People can apply to take horses captured during the musters, but as no captured horses are released, the remainder are sent to slaughter.

2012 Muster

The 2012 muster took place in May, and required the removal of 179 horses. As only whole bands of horses are mustered, and some were found outside their allowed range, a total of 191 horses were brought to the holding yards. This was made up of 46 foals, 39 yearlings or two year olds, 37 older stallions, and 69 older mares (a large number of which would be in foal). Homes were found for all the younger horses, 13 stallions and 21 mares. The remaining 24 stallions and 48 mares were all sent to slaughter, sadly they could have been rehomed if suitable homes had been found.^[16]

2014 Muster

The most recent muster took place in May 2014, with 162 horses being mustered. Two bands were brought in from outside the allowed range, but escaped before making it to the muster yards. The horses were 58 adult mares, 34 adult stallions, and 70 juveniles. KHH placed 139 horses, and another group placed 8. The remaining 3 stallions and 12 mares were sent to slaughter, and as with the 2012 muster, many of the slaughtered horses could have been rehomed if suitable homes had been found.

Future Management

As with other international populations of wild horses, it is hoped that fertility control through immunocontraception may prove to be an effective management technique that will reduce or eliminate the need for other population controls. In the 1990s a trial was conducted with the PZP vaccine^[12], but it is thought that a faulty or damaged batch of the drug resulted in its failure^[7]. In addition to this, production and application difficulties have led to alternatives to PZP being sought, with trials of different vaccines being carried out internationally.

Involved Parties

The Kaimanawa Wild Horse Advisory Group was formed to develop the management plan, and consists of several groups including the Department of Conservation, Kaimanawa Heritage Horses, Royal NZ Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society, NZ Veterinary Association, NZ Army, and others.^[10]

Kaimanawa Heritage Horses (KHH) is a non-profit charitable society dedicated to the welfare of the Kaimanawa Horses in both the wild and domestic environments. This is achieved by finding as many suitable homes for the mustered horses as is possible, and supporting the owners of domestic Kaimanawa horses.^[15]

Success Stories and Events

- The Kaimanawa pony 'Watch Me Move' ridden by Tegan Newman won the Pony of the Year title at the NZ Horse of the year show in 2012^[13], and is believed to have been mustered out of the wild as a foal.
- The partbred Kaimanawa Pioneer Makokomiko won the 2012 Puhinui CCI3* Eventing title.
- Field trips to see the horses in the wild take place annually in November or December. For more information and to book a place, please visit www.kaimanawaheritagehorses.org.
- Selected trainers competed Stallions from the 2014 muster at Equidays and Horses of the Year. This drew huge crowds which were amazed at what professional trainers could achieve with Kaimanawas less than a year out of the wild. The Stallion Makeover final was won by Tina Fagan and her horse Rockstar.

Adopting and Helping the Horses

With the next muster being due in late Autumn 2016, applications for taking horses are available through Kaimanawa Heritage Horses. If you would like to be involved, please visit www.kaimanawaheritagehorses.org to read about the process and submit your application.

If you can't adopt a horse but would like to help in a different way, you can make a tax deductible donation to Kaimanawa Heritage Horses. This will allow extra horses to be saved from the muster until permanent homes can be arranged, and to support KHH's other activities.

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