



# Brumby Bridges

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### A Tale of Two Brumbies

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.” – *Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities*

### The ABA

The *Australian Brumby Alliance Inc. (ABA)* was established in 2008 to help facilitate the efforts of like-minded wild horse interest groups throughout Australia. We do this by sharing information and expertise as well as providing a collective voice with regard to the humane management, welfare, preservation and promotion of what we consider to be a National Treasure - *The Australian Brumby*.

# ABA News

## President's Chat

What a roller coaster ride the Wild Horses in NSW and Victoria have had over the past few weeks. The news is full of experts of all descriptions joining with claims and counter claims.

For now, legislation has been passed to retain and protect sustainable Wild

Horses in the Kosciuszko National Park, with the proviso that they be managed to the level needed to protect sensitive areas and not compromise native flora and fauna. This is a great outcome. My thanks to everyone who has contributed to this



momentous achievement, in particular, John Barilaro and the NSW Government, and Peter Cochran's persistent lobbying behind the scenes. However, we cannot relax yet as the Labour Party has said will repeal the "Brumby Bill" when they gain power.

Nothing can be resolved until all 'sides' sit around the same table to design, manage and report on one set of truly objective results we have produced together. So much energy, time and money is wasted because the scientific studies accepted by park authorities are not conducted in a robust, objective and peer reviewed manner. See [page 5](#) for "Examples of what park environmental studies do not include" and [page 3](#) for "Brumbies, biodiversity and evolution".

The Australian Brumby Alliance (ABA) has always supported the retention of sustainable Brumby numbers in robust park environments. National Parks and Wildlife

Services (NPWS) in hindsight provided a comprehensive, detailed review of Kosciuszko Brumby management plans before selecting their draft report. Of particular value was the Context review which found that Wild Horses were an attribute to the Heritage value of Kosciuszko national park, and the decision for the first time to have a residual Brumby population. If the population to retain had been nearer the 3,000 level, not the proposed 600, the plan could have been a win-win success.

However, Victoria's recent Alpine Wild Horse management review has shown the ABA just how biased and selective studies designed by some park authorities can go to persuade the public why all Brumbies must be removed from park areas.

I urge readers to always read the full and original documents referenced in park studies and make up their own minds on the words selected to support horse damage claims. Be ready to put forward the counter claims to show how quotes are used selectively and to counter them by providing clear, objective reasons to show why the quotes are biased. Dyring is a case in point.

### *Dyring 1990*

National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) and Parks Victoria (PV) use Dyring (1990) to lift nearly all of the claims they make to horse damage in alpine regions. PV describe Dyring (1990) as "an oldie but a goodie foundation study". What is not stated is that the proportion of damage Dyring found represented less than 1% of the total area studied, meaning over 99% of the area studied was FREE of damage. Furthermore Dyring 1990 found that:

- Trampling by humans, animals and vehicles has been shown to reduce aeration, water infiltration and vegetation regrowth because of increased compaction (citing Dale & Weaver 1974), McQuaid-Cook 1978, Weaver & Dale 1978, Dadkhah & Gifford 1980, 1980).
- Exotic species colonised tracks, but not at the expense of the native species,
- Similarly, the reduced occurrences of exotics in the un-trampled areas suggested the inability of exotics to compete with native species in unstressed situations,
- Monitoring may be achieved through the use of counters (infra-red and mechanical) to estimate

*“..... Unfortunately, modern research often begins at the fourth step by testing a pre-conceived hypothesis or, just as bad, bypasses the scientific method and uses data collection and statistical gymnastics to search for insights into perceived problems. This invariably gets people into trouble because they focus on association and neglect logical cause”. (Firestick Ecology Vic Jurskis Ref-12)*

track use. The placement of sand along portions of tracks near the counters would determine which animal species frequent the area (also Dyring 1990). SO, we ask, why was this never done? It is so important we provide crystal clear evidence.

Now is the time to design and implement truly robust Wild Horse research to identify what needs to be taken into consideration to identify a sustainable Brumby population within a sustainable park environment. We need to keep striving for sustainable

balance - extremes are just not sustainable.

- *Jill Pickering*

## Brumbies, Biodiversity and Evolution

The Australian Brumby Alliance supports sustainable Brumby populations managed in sustainable park environments. We also support the view that moderate Wild Horse grazing levels do in fact have positive impacts in park environments, for example Nimmo & Miller (2007) found that avian richness and diversity was higher in areas subject to *moderate* grazing than in areas that excluded horses.

Consider - when does introduced become indigenous, is it time or value related? Nature is constantly adapting to change in order to survive, individual species move around, often into new areas as they look for a niche to survive.

Humans have evolved and migrated until they now cover the earth, and where they migrated to, along came much of the flora and fauna they use. So, if the current non-Aboriginal peoples who have migrated to Australia now

have a right to settle here, so also should the wild Brumby decedents of horses that came to Australia with them also.

Some might say *but not all humans can live where they want to such as in national parks*. Yet humans daily walk, cycle, ride motor bikes, drive 4WDs, make roads, build hydro-electric schemes, tourist resorts etc., across our national parks. So, let Wild Horses that have lived for 200 years in areas that are now national parks also continue to live on, in managed numbers.

Davis et al. (2011) argues that it is *“impractical to try to restore ecosystems to some ‘rightful’ historical state.”*

Claims that Brumbies crush vegetation, compact (or the opposite cut into) soil because of their weight and hard hooves fail to acknowledge that three species of Australian megafauna weighed 1,000 –2,000 kilograms, and megafauna Sthenurines had an extremely developed, almost hoof-like, fourth toe.

Fortwangler (2013) says that *“It is time for conservationists to focus much more on the functions of species, and much less on where they originated”*.

A debate in the journal *Conservation Biology* highlights this re-examination, with contributors questioning whether the native/non-native distinction is worthy any longer of scholarly attention (Schlaepfer et al. 2011, 2012; Vitule et al. 2012).

Ecologists turn our attention to “novel biotic communities” that are dominated by facilitating, rather than competing, interactions between native and introduced species—where we find “patterns of mixing” among introduced and native species (Lugo et al. 2012: 233).

Trigger (2008) explores the responses of Aboriginal people in Australia to introduced animals and plants resulting from British colonization. He examines how, for example, buffalo and Wild Horses have been embraced within some Aboriginal cultural traditions, and presses us to consider the implications for how identities can be defined in terms of native landscapes comprised of introduced species (for a counter case, see Rose 2002).

What if an introduced species has become part of a cultural tradition or is valued economically?

Environmental historians have noted for some time—that humans are and have always been part of ecosystems, and that “wilderness” is a social construct, and can be found as much in cities as in national parks (Cronon 1996).

Do we have to make things right? What is right? Some argue that animals are now in place and we need to make space for them as well—either for practical or ethical reasons. Still others note that we might cause even more complications by trying to restore systems to something they once were (if we can even truly know what that was). Some point out that there may be cascading effects if we remove introduced species (Cadotte 2009).

Crystal Fortwangler includes work by Bergstrom et al. (2009a, 2009b) which details how the removal of cats (an introduced species) on Macquarie Island in the south

Pacific led to a direct increase in rabbits, which then decimated island vegetation.

Bill Gammage “The largest Estate on Earth” looked at how The Aborigines made Australia, some of his quotes include;

- “What we think of as virgin bush in a national park is nothing of the kind”
- “Aboriginal people managed the land in a far more systematic and scientific fashion that we have ever realised”
- “Across Australia, early Europeans commented again and again that the land looked like a park with extensive grassy patches and pathways, open woodlands and abundant wildlife, it evoked a country estate in England”, and

Australia has numerous [government-funded programs](#) to eradicate introduced foxes in order to protect small native marsupials. But if we only target the foxes with poison baiting, the numbers of feral cats and rabbits, which are suppressed by foxes, tend to boom once the foxes are gone. So, in many places the small marsupials will still be hunted — only by cats instead — and the rabbits will wreak havoc in the landscape, depriving native animals of food and shelter. Continued investment in fox baiting will do little to restore these populations without new thinking about [alternative actions](#).

<http://www.abc.net.au/environment/articles/2015/04/30/4226211.htm>

However, these kinds of traditional threat-focused approaches have a number of drawbacks. They limit conservationists to solving only one part of the problem; can be expensive compared with alternative management choices; and may have undesirable outcomes if the threat being targeted is only one of a suite of problems affecting the wildlife in an area.

Connell (1978) proposed that species diversity was maximised under intermediate levels of disturbance. At low levels of disturbance, diversity is reduced by competitive exclusion, possibly resulting in the dominance

of a particular species, desirable or undesirable.

<http://www.agr.gc.ca/eng/science-and-innovation/agricultural-practices/soil-and-land/riparianareas/grazing-a-natural-component-of-grassland-ecozone-riparian-systems/?id=1220563603657>

It seems National Parks need to revisit repeated claims made by Australian environmentalists in light of the progress being made overseas to understand the value of *intermediate levels of disturbance* and *conservation grazing* to increase biodiversity urgently.

- *Compiled by Jill Pickering*

## Examples of what park environmental studies do not include

The Australian Brumby Alliance (ABA) supports sustainable Brumby populations in healthy park environments and that *moderate* Wild Horse grazing levels do in fact have positive impacts on most park environments.

**Fact** - The number of walking tracts are still increasing, such as Parks Victoria's *Falls to Hotham walk* which is 38.5 kms long and includes building ecological, serviced style places to stay and regular restock supply depots to attract more Australian and overseas tourists.

include, "snapshot perspectives" that "do not provide an understanding of seasonal or annual variations in use or environmental factors"

**Study** -

However, before determining what horse population level/density is acceptable, it is essential to quantify the percentage of other factors that can influence negative impacts, such as:

- Natural elements such as, severe wild fires, wind, frost, climate change;
- Other species, such as pigs, deer, goats, rabbits, kangaroos, wallabies; and
- Humans such as 4WDs, hikers, cyclists, miners, Snowy Hydro Scheme, resorts etc.

**Study** - Beavis (2002) reported for example:

- Australian studies are extremely limited with significant constraints for wider application due to poor experimental design, site specific conditions or inadequate analysis of results;
- Short term data cannot provide an understanding of the relationship between the degree of impact and the intensity of use; and
- Sun and Walsh (1998) cite that most studies in Australia "have used field survey techniques which provide rapid results with relatively low costs"; and that limitations to this approach

<http://www.watercentre.org/education/programs/attachments/case-study2.pdf> - The invasion and success of exotic and introduced species in rivers is facilitated by the alteration of (Snowy Hydro Scheme) flow regimes.

**Study** -

[https://engage.environment.nsw.gov.au/protectsnowies/forum\\_topics/what-is-more-important-toconsider-the-estimated-population-of-wild-horses-or-the-impact-of-wild-horses-on-the-national-park-or-both](https://engage.environment.nsw.gov.au/protectsnowies/forum_topics/what-is-more-important-toconsider-the-estimated-population-of-wild-horses-or-the-impact-of-wild-horses-on-the-national-park-or-both) Humans introduced exotic weeds, (Scotch/Spanish Broom, Lupins, willows to KNP); [NPWS Admin reply to queries raised in the "Protect the Snowies" Chat room process].

**Study** -

<http://www.americantrails.org/resources/wildlife/horseenvironment.html> - Seeds are primarily dispersed by gravity, wind, surface water movement, soil erosion, birds, ants, dung beetles and rodents.

**Study** -

<http://weedsnetwork.com/traction/permalink/WeedsNews1938> Clothing on 33,000 annual hikers visiting KNP significantly spread seeds. [Ref-11]

**Fact** - 175,000 to 1 million Sambar Deer live in the Victorian Alps alone according to PV news reports from 2 years ago. Because deer are nocturnal and very shy they are rarely seen, but Wild Horses stand out for a long way and do not rush for cover, leaving an impression that there are far more horses than deer. So, with 175,000 to 1 Million Sambar deer vs 2,350 Brumbies in the Victorian Alps, that equates to 320-426 Sambar Deer to *one* Brumby, or Brumbies <1% of the Victorian Alps Samba deer populations.

**Quote** - “Very tall people with red hair, big tattoos and conspicuous facial scars rarely have successful careers as bank robbers, and loosestrife has a similar problem: it’s just too conspicuous for its own good”, *Story & science of invasive species* by K. Thompson [Ref-3]

**Study** - The Independent Technical Reference Group (ITRG) stated on p.12 “Numerous degraded sites are distributed across KNP where vegetation loss or active erosion occurs. These sites are associated with fire trails, transmission lines and areas of intense human activity, or are relicts of historic fire, grazing and construction.”

**Quote** – “Severe fires and storms are the greatest mover of soil structures into streams” see Fire Management in the Alpine Region, Vic Jurskis, Paul de Mar (Forests NSW) and Barry Aitchison (NSW Rural Fire Service).

**Quote** – “Runoff during storms and floods especially in parks downstream of pastures and residential areas, was potentially much greater than anything that occurred during the anthropogenic disturbances captured during the 2011 study” – see: Detecting stream health impacts of horse riding and 4WD vehicle water crossings in South East

## The Brumby Bill

There is much misinformation being distributed about the intent and content of The Kosciuszko National Park Wild Horse Heritage Bill 2018.

Queensland, Redfern, Hadwen, Negus, Blessing and Marshall”.

**Quote** – “The 2003 fires caused loss of human life, unprecedented erosion and siltation of water supply catchments, killed many rare and endangered plants and animals” see: Fire Management in the Alpine Region Vic Jurskis, Paul de Mar (Forests NSW) and Barry Aitchison (NSW Rural Fire Service)”.

**Quote** – “Neither background reviews recognised that extreme wildfires and mining operations had caused erosion” see: Fire Management in the Alpine Region, Vic Jurskis, Paul de Mar (Forests NSW) and Barry Aitchison (NSW Rural Fire Service)”.

**Quote** – “Downstream of Jindabyne dam, the loss of fish represents only one revenue loss caused by the (hydro) Scheme. Saline intrusion up the mouth of the Snowy River has caused multiple fish kills and destroyed river bank vegetation, giving rise to additional erosion management and bank stabilisation costs” see: Snowy Hydro-electric and irrigation scheme: A situational and critical analysis by Diane Cousineau and Nathan Cammerman”.

**Quote** - Adda Quinn (1998) researched the potential risks of horse manure, and concluded: “The chemical constituents of horse manure are not toxic to humans. Horse guts *do not* contain significant levels of two waterborne pathogens of greatest concern to human health risk, Cryptosporidium or Giardia, neither do they contain significant amounts of the bacteria E. coli 0157:H7 or Salmonella”.

For more detail visit [www.australianbrumbyalliance.org.au](http://www.australianbrumbyalliance.org.au) “Info papers”.

- *compiled by Jill Pickering*

Much of the text of the Bill itself is largely text defining terms and setting up a framework for implementing the legislation, and this is pretty much how most legislation is set out. But the heart of the bill is this:

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“The object of this Bill is to recognise the heritage value of sustainable wild horse populations within parts of Kosciuszko National Park and to protect that heritage through a wild horse heritage management plan. “

The Chief Executive is to seek the advice of the Wild Horse Community Advisory Panel in the preparation of the draft plan.”

I encourage readers to read the Bill for yourselves via the ABA Website:

Brumby Bill

<http://australianbrumbyalliance.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/First-Print-Brumby-Bill.pdf>

The Hansard transcripts provide an interesting discourse on the debate (note that you will have to scroll down to the yellow highlight)

<http://australianbrumbyalliance.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/HANSARD-1323879322-102122.pdf>

You may also want to view the Second Reading of the Introduction of the Bill by John Barilaro:

<https://www.facebook.com/JohnBarilaroMP/videos/1906842449337159/>

- *Sandy Radke*

Importantly, Clause 5 mandates that environment is also important and that Park Management plans must consider both the heritage of the Brumby and the environmental responsibilities under legislation:

“Clause 5 requires the Chief Executive of the Office of Environment and Heritage (the Chief Executive) to cause a draft wild horse heritage management plan to be prepared for Kosciuszko National Park. The draft plan is to identify the heritage value of sustainable wild horse populations within identified parts of the park and set out how that heritage value will be protected ensuring other environmental values of the park are also maintained. The draft plan is also to take into account the objects of the proposed Act and the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 and the matters that must be taken into consideration in preparing a plan of management under that Act.

## Member News

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### Save the Brumbies (STB)

The last few months has seen the continuation of extremely dry weather at our New England Brumby Sanctuary. Water cartage every two weeks has been a severe drain on our resources. We are now installing two more large water tanks in the hope that a decent flood may help us prepare for droughts in the future. Hay prices have risen due to the drought however our supplier has reserved enough to carry us through the winter months.

Colts have recently been gelded and another four lovely Brumbies are ready to travel to their new homes, all adopted earlier this year.

Bellingen Sanctuary has been very popular with visitors over the school holidays and our high-level care Sponsored horses have certainly enjoyed the attention and treats.

The show season was highly successful; STB Beaute scored three Championships and one Reserve, her best performance to date.

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We encourage all Brumby owners to support the Australian Brumby Horse Register; this helps greatly to raise awareness of the excellence of our wild horses.

We wait with keen interest to see the outcome of the Bill presented to NSW Parliament by Deputy Prime Minister, John Barilaro. Protection and sustainable management of the KNP Brumbies is needed and long overdue. Correspondence between John Barilaro and STB has been ongoing for several years and we applaud his efforts on behalf of the horses.

For further news and dates of public days our website will have details. [www.savethebrumbies.org](http://www.savethebrumbies.org) Happy horsing around, Jan Carter STB Inc.

Jan Carter for STB Inc. email: [info@savethebrumbies.org](mailto:info@savethebrumbies.org)



Photo right: STB Joey quietly wakes up after his gelding, not quite sure just what has happened to him.

## Victorian Brumby Association (VBA)

We are heading into Winter flat out at the moment! It has been a huge few months here, with lots of Brumbies and a huge amount of lobbying work.

Only two weeks ago, history was made when the Brumby Bill, recognising the heritage significance of and ensuring the sustainable, humane management of the Kosciuszko Brumbies was passed through Parliament in NSW. Thanks for this goes to many, but there is no doubt that without key driver Peter Cochrane, it just wouldn't have happened.

This bill gave us time to reflect also on the contribution of our late friend from the Snowy Mountain Bush Users Group and



passionate Brumby Advocate, Clive Edwards. Clive was surely looking over the Brumbies from heaven that day!

Of course, the bill is just the start, with a requirement to set up a community board to oversee the management of the Kosciuszko Brumbies and a Plan of Management to be developed that reflects the Brumby Bill and the National Park that they reside in. All trapping has been suspended for 2018 in Kosciuszko National Park, to allow time for these important factors to be developed.

Things in Victoria are not so great for our Alpine National Park Brumbies. The same week that the Kosciuszko Brumbies were protected in NSW, the Victorian State Government released a plan



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which will see the entire small population of Bogong High Plains Brumbies wiped out and the population in the rest of the Alps reduced by half. The Plan uses only one method of management, passive trapping and states that all Brumbies not taken by rehomingers will be shot in the yards they were trapped in. This will be no more than mass slaughter of the most inhumane kind and our Environment Minister, Lily D'Ambrosio should hang her head in shame.

We have a meeting this week in the Victorian Alps, where we will bring together all people and groups who are interested in our Heritage Brumbies. We are expecting supportive politicians, the Mountain Cattlemen, several other groups and of course, many members of the public. The aim is to raise awareness of the Alpine Brumbies and to start working towards strong, effective, united lobbying to help them.

Last year, we took in a total of 46 Brumbies by the end of the year, from three different programs. With Kosciuszko trapping suspended, we have only two very small programs we are working with this year, which may just give us a chance for a quieter year!

New South Wales Forestry Corporation trap a small number of Brumbies from the Bago State Forest each year



Kosi Brumbies at VBA sanctuary just before they go to their trainers for the 2018 Australian Brumby Challenge

and of course, we take in any Bogong High Plains Brumbies who are caught in Victoria. The Alpine Brumby Plan calls for 400 plus Brumbies per year to be removed from the Alps, a disastrous number and one that there just aren't homes out there for.

## Fertility Control Studies

It has been frustrating to read recent reports of a small fertility control study conducted by an individual on fertility control which has been unsuccessful. This individual is refusing to release any information, but has been spreading the 'failure' of her project through the media.

This same product has been used with great success in both the USA and the UK, so we can only assume user error. However, to hear negative fertility control press at a time when we are working so hard to get our governments to use one of the very well tested and effective products available is thoroughly disheartening!

The team from the Science and Conservation Centre in the USA ([www.sccpzp.org](http://www.sccpzp.org)) have been incredibly helpful to us and even come over and spent time with our governments on this important subject. Whilst clearly not a 'cure all', we firmly believe that fertility control is an essential tool of any humane Brumby management program.

## Australian Brumby Challenge

On other fronts, our Australian Brumby Challenge ([www.australianbrumbychallenge.com.au](http://www.australianbrumbychallenge.com.au)) commences on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June. We have 27 Trainers who will attend Brumby Junction Sanctuary to pick up a completely wild Brumby and take them home for 150 days of training. At the end of that time, we will all meet up at EQUITANA in Melbourne, where they will be showcased in front of a crowd of around 50000 people over four days. It's an incredible event and one we love running! It sure will be quiet here after we send those Brumbies off with their trainers though!

## Hoof Prints..... Other items of note

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## How Coat Color Adaptations Helped Ancient Horses Survive

Researchers found black coats in horses became more common when climate change pushed horses into predator-filled forests.

From: <https://thehorse.com/155687/how-coat-color-adaptations-helped-ancient-horses-survive/>

Mexican and German researchers have learned that the black coat evolved into a much more prevalent color when climate change pushed horses in Europe into forests full of predators (both human and animal) 11,000 years ago, possibly helping them survive when other species died out.

“Forest cover was increasing as one result of climate change, and horses had to struggle with their new environment,” said Arne Ludwig, PhD, of the Leibniz-Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research and the Research

Group for Evolutionary Genetics, in Berlin, Germany. “One way to do that was to change their coat coloration from bay to black. That appears to have helped them avoid predators through better camouflage.”

When the climate shifted during the late Pleistocene, nearly three-fourths of all large mammals (greater than 44 kilograms, or 90 pounds, in weight) disappeared worldwide, Ludwig said. Global warming changed plant life and caused forest growth. Many animals lost their homes on the steppes and in the plains; some were unable to adapt to different kinds of food. In Europe, those that could adapt had to move into the forests, where predators like wolves and humans could hide more easily before their attacks.

Many species—including the then-abundant mammoth—became extinct. But horses, on the other hand, survived.

“Horses managed the changes in their surrounding environment, whereas mammoths could not,” Ludwig

said. “The shift in their coat color was only one mode of adaptation, which we can fortunately address in ancient DNA analyses. One could consider them a ‘survivor’ species.”

In their study, Ludwig and colleagues from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, both in Mexico City, analyzed DNA from ancient



horse remains from Europe. They genotyped the genes *ASIP* and *MC1R*, which code for basic color phenotypes, as well as seven loci associated with dilutions and patterns. They further analyzed the *ASIP* gene, in which dominant ‘A’ codes for bay color, while the recessive ‘a’ codes for black color, they said.

They also carried out specific scientific modeling, using 82 radiocarbon-dated wild horse remains and nearly 16,000 pollen paleontological records of 25 kinds of plants that are archived in international databases. The plants represented three kinds of spaces: evergreen tree forests, summer-green tree forests, and open land. They performed these analyses for four periods: the Pre-Boreal (about 11,000 years ago), the Boreal (about 10,000 years ago), the Early Atlantic (about 8,000 years ago), and the Late Atlantic (about 6,000 years ago).

Their research allowed them to confirm that horses adapted to forests and did not continue to live out in the open lands as some scientists have previously suggested,

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Ludwig said. They also found that the black coat color became much more abundant, replacing the bay coat color, throughout the advancing millennia.

“It’s not that they preferred to live in forests; it’s just that they had no other option,” said Ludwig. “Climate change supported forest trees, and consequently steppe plants (areas) disappeared in Europe at this time.”

However, that doesn’t appear to be the case in Asia, where horses did not have to move into forests. “In Asia, there were still large steppe areas inhabited by bay horses,

as we continue to see today in modern Przewalski’s horses,” he said.

Coat color probably wasn’t the only evolutionary adaptation horses experienced as they moved into European forests, Ludwig added. They certainly also changed their food preferences and generation lengths, as the decrease in food quality (from steppe forage to forest forage) would likely result in longer generation times. “But those changes are harder to detect in ancient samples,” Ludwig said.

## The Editor’s Tail

### NSW’S NO-CULL BRUMBY BILL WILL CONSIGN FERAL HORSES TO AN EVEN CRUELLER FATE

We have all seen the headlines, the hysterics, the media frenzy that follows controversial decisions. The media has calmed down and moved to other things, but the controversy continues, and old ways of thinking prevail.

**THE GRIM STORY OF THE SNOWY MOUNTAINS’ CANNIBAL HORSES**

Conventional conservation thinking is largely centred on invasive biology and threats to native species.

Invasive species biology disregards any benefits that introduced species bring to the environment, with research designed to reach negative conclusions regarding feral species and preserve native fauna at all costs. In so doing, inhumane consequences often result, as is a failure to understand and recognise the positive effects introduced species have on global biodiversity.

**'Disturbing': World conservation body blasts NSW wild horse plan**

But this paradigm of thinking is changing around the world.

Compassionate Conservation is an emerging multi-disciplinary conservation

approach that combines environmental science with animal welfare. This does not necessarily mean that all animals are protected at all costs to the environment. But it does mean that individuals of a species have value, that we must first do no harm as humans in protecting the environment and it is wrong for humans to kill one species to save another.

**NSW BRUMBY PROTECTION PLAN SEES SCIENTIFIC ADVISER QUIT**

**Victoria pledges to remove 1,200 brumbies to protect alps and calls on NSW to act**

More and more researchers are investigating the novel ecosystems emerging with introduced species and interesting and exciting things are coming to light.

Among the many research threads in Compassionate Conservation is the growing evidence that many native flora and fauna do adapt to the introduction of other species and in some instances, introduced species actually help other species survive. For example:

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- Dr Arian Wallach of the Centre for Compassionate Conservation notes that even “The introduction of cane toads to Australia, has triggered rapid behavioral and morphological adaptation [of native species] to their toxins, enabling native predators to recover from initial declines.”
- In the Sonoran Desert of Arizona, wild (introduced) burros dig wells in the earth which are used by at least 31 other desert species. While a PhD student at Arizona State University, Dr Erick Lundgren started noticing strange structures in the desert and commenced studying them; his video of the well digging Burros is now famous around the world. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tWN0IJ9voY>.

does work in some situations along side other methods such as mustering and passive trapping.

*Fertility control of wild horses could be 10 years away, says veterinary specialist and researcher*

Research and development funding is certainly needed to enhance the efficacy of fertility control but, at the moment, funding is hardly there at all. So how do we know its full potential if we don't try?

A recent researcher and vet has made a rather arrogant judgement call on the role of fertility control that is both reckless and unhelpful in the current debate. The drug that has been used, GnRH (also called GonaCon) is one of several available; another drug PZP has been used for some 20-30 years with success. Studies on Mustangs using GonaCon and SpayVac show them to be safe and effective. To call fertility control ineffective and basically useless based on a PhD study using one type of drug on a small population of captive Brumbies is ridiculous.

There may be some regulatory and technical hurdles in using some of the drugs but it far from impossible to overcome these issues.

But I guess, like conventional environmental science, this is the old style of in-the-box thinking that needs to be shaken up.

Dr Lundgren also made a significant observation in relation to this work: “As a field biologist, I was becoming interested in how ecologists understand and describe invasive species. I was beginning to realize that to demonize a species because it doesn't belong may prevent us from seeing what it actually does.” [\(https://www.horsetalk.co.nz/2016/06/05/secret-lives-well-digging-burros/\)](https://www.horsetalk.co.nz/2016/06/05/secret-lives-well-digging-burros/)

On a final note, I fail to understand the easy dismissal of fertility control as method of helping to control wildlife populations. It is not perfect, it is not a panacea. But it

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Australian Brumby Alliance Inc.

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**ABA Member Groups**

- ☞ Australian Brumby Horse Register
- ☞ Coffin Bay Brumby Preservation Society Inc. (SA)
- ☞ Hunter Valley Brumby Association (NSW)
- ☞ Kaimanawa Heritage Horses (NZ)
- ☞ Save the Brumbies Inc. (NSW)
- ☞ Snowy Mountains Bush Users Group (NSW)
- ☞ South East Queensland Brumby Association
- ☞ Victorian Brumby Association

**Newsletter Contributions**

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