



Brumby Bridges

The quarterly newsletter of the ABA

SPRING 2021, ISSUE 21-4

The Australian Brumby Alliance

President- Jill Pickering

Vice President - Sandy
Robertson

Secretary - Pat Hoelmer

Treasurer - David O'Brien

*Dedicated to the
recognition,
management,
preservation and
welfare of Australian
wild horses*

A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the spring edition of **Brumby Bridges!**

We hope everyone is staying safe during these difficult times and that whilst many of us can not visit our beloved Brumbies in person due to COVID restrictions and lockdowns, that you are still inspired and motivated from some of the amazing photography out there.

With spring comes new life and new opportunities and the ABA has been busy behind the scenes trying to develop fruitful and meaningful relationships with key stakeholders.

We welcome any feedback and contributions to the Brumby Bridges newsletter, so please contact us any time.

Brumby Bridges Editor



Photo credit: Australian Brumby Photography by Carol Hancock



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PRESIDENT'S CHAT

Still we wait for several key changes, safe release from lockdown, warmer weather, and the first Wild Horse Heritage act management plan DRAFT. We were also informed months ago by the Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio that before the next Parks Victoria plan for Bogong High Plains and the East VicAlps is released, a revised count for Victorian Brumby alpine populations will be conducted.

Parks Victoria already have full government support to continue to exterminate all Brumbies in Barmah Brumbies and Bogong High Plains, and as many as they find in the East VicAlps. A new count is essential to inform management following severe fires, ongoing removals, and many reports of clandestine aerial and ground shooting of Victorian Alpine Brumbies.

Brumby Rehomers who offer to take Alpine Brumby caught by Parks Victoria also need advanced warning of numbers available to rehome and details of how this will be managed.

We also urge anyone from ANYWHERE across Australia with a Brumby to collect hair with hair roots attached. To see the correct method of

collecting samples, check out a 1 minute video link:

<https://snowymountainsbrumbyregistry.weebly.com/dna-information.html> that demonstrates the correct collection method.

Send samples from across Australia to Lyn Sutton via: hoofs2010@live.com.au for details. The Snowy Mountains Brumby Registry also collects Kosciuszko Brumby hair samples, email: snowymountainsbrumbyregistry@gmail.com for details. All DNA hair root samples are sent to the same DNA lab contact.

That's all for now, we hope you enjoy this action packed Spring Brumby Bridges newsletter.

Jill Pickering
ABA President

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THE MEGA PROBLEM OF LARGE HERBIVORE DECLINE

What it Means for the Environment and Implications for Wild Horses in Australia

By Sandy Radke

There is a sad and important story unfolding. Climate change and human activity - including hunting, poaching, land-use change and resource depression by livestock - is closing in on the world's megafauna and in some corners of the globe, particularly in developing countries, many are under threat of extinction.

A growing area of research is showing that large terrestrial herbivores are crucial to ecosystems and human societies and their decline has cascading effects on other species. The rate of decline suggests that increasing areas of the world will soon lack many of the vital ecological services these animals provide, resulting in significant ecological and social costs.

While much of the scientific research in this area is focusing on recent decimations, other work focuses on the fossil record of Late Pleistocene extinctions around the world (from 130,000 years ago), including Australia where complete extinction of Australian megafauna was by or around 40,000 years ago. The cause of Pleistocene extinctions remains controversial but it is likely to be a combination of climate change and the rise of human activity, including hunting and use of fire, are key contributors. Sounds like the present day does it not?

The current work indicates a number of key consequences of large herbivore decline and here we highlight these consequences and how they might relate to wild horses in Australia.

**Looks can be deceiving
– so take a closer look!**

*Seed dispersal or Weed dispersal?
Horse dung disperses seed within the
habitat and cycles nutrients at the same
time*

SEED DISPERSAL

Research on paleo megafauna is revealing the importance large herbivores had in seed dispersal and colonization of plants and this continues in the current day; now, as it was in the past, large herbivores consume a greater range of seed size and can disperse more seeds per defecation event.

With respect to wild horses in Australia, this important function of Seed Dispersal is often presented as Weed Dispersal.

But considering that wild horses are living within the broad environmental habitats that they are allegedly polluting, they are less of a threat than the humans who visit the area from outside



Weed invasion

Weeds are spread through feral horse dung and hair.

Photo from Reclaim Kosi website

Trampling habitat or creating patch heterogeneity or ephemeral habitats for other species?



Photo from The Conversation

these areas. Even if they are transporting seeds between specific ecosystems, evolutionary and natural selection processes which ensure a healthy and diverse ecology, are based in part on migration of species, species interaction and other changes in environment. Is this any different?

NUTRIENT CYCLING

All herbivores will affect nutrient cycling in two important ways: relocation of nutrients and speeding up the rate of decomposition. Because large herbivores consume more than small ones, their role in this process is greater.

Put another way, horses will consume vegetation, digest it and excrete it elsewhere thus relocating the now partially composted plant material in another location. Yes – that nasty horse dung is helping cycle nutrients – a sort of mobile composting. And that dung is probably sitting side by side with leaf and twig litter that is decomposing at a slower rate than the dung. Together they provide a more continuous supply of nutrients.

“ECOYSTEM ENGINEERING”

Through consumption of plants and trampling, large herbivores maintain patch heterogeneity in systems that would otherwise only support continuous woody vegetation. For example: elephants and bison can maintain open patches preferable to species that do not do well in woody vegetation; bison wallows increase habitat density for a variety of plants and animals.

Further evidence of the role megafauna in shaping the environment comes from exploring the past. Paleo extinction work suggests that mixed rainforest was converted to sclerophyll vegetation in Australia following the Late Pleistocene megafaunal collapse, inferring that megafauna had an important role in maintaining the mixed rainforest environment. Elsewhere in the world, the fossil record is revealing other ecological changes such as the emergence of paleo-novel ecosystems following large herbivore extinction.



Trashed and trampled
The source of the Murray River has been grazed to nothing and trampled by horses.

Photo from Reclaim Kosi website



Photo from Evening Report NZ

Over grazing or fire mitigation?



Photo from ABC Landline

SYNERGY BETWEEN HERBIVORES

The existence and survival of smaller herbivores can be facilitated by large herbivores. For example, when elephants browse woody vegetation, they create areas within woody scrub that provides grazing for impala. Large herbivores also create pathways which are then used by other species to migrate to food sources.

SMALL ANIMALS

Small organisms, from microscopic and up have benefitted from large herbivores in many ways. Asian elephant dung is used as refuge by small amphibians and many insects will feed or take refuge in animal dung. By creating ephemeral pools, bison wallows support amphibians and birds. Grazing can produce areas where it is easier for small animals to feed or travel.

In Australia, roll pits and hoof prints, often attributed to horses, allegedly destroy habitat. Whether these features are caused by horses, deer or other animals, they may actually offer benefits to other species.

PREDATORS AND SCAVENGERS

Large herbivores are an important food source for predators. Even when adult herbivores are generally too large to be directly threatened, juveniles, injured and old individuals are vulnerable. As large animals, their carcasses are usually consumed by more than one predator as well as scavengers, feeding a range of species in the environment. Large herbivores also facilitate success of predators by opening up areas of vegetation, exposing smaller animals.

FIRE

All grazing and browsing herbivores will do their bit to reduce fuel loads and help reduced the number and intensity of fire and large herbivore consume more so may have more impact.

Imagine a world without large herbivores



Forest elephant in habitat. It is considered to be an important seed disperser.

Photo from Wikipedia



Photo: ABA website and Donna Crebbin

Paleo research is also suggesting a relationship between the decline in Pleistocene megafauna and increased evidence of fire.

1

The truth is that any impact can have both positive and negative effects on the environment and we will be shortchanging the environment as well as wild horses if we do not explore the spectrum, determine the net benefits and the population density limits before making wild horse management decisions.

HUMANS

Imagine a world without large herbivores. Particularly in developing countries, it would cause loss of food security and tourist dollars. For many other people around the world, it would diminish their experience of nature, as well as social history and heritage. In short, it would diminish a richness in our global society.

Some might argue that wild horses do nothing but damage the natural world and reduce biodiversity, but emerging world-wide research is challenging this view.

And what does this have to do with Brumbies in the wild?

Time after time we see horse dung, trampled stream crossings, roll pits, comparison of exclusion zones etc. cited as evidence that horses are devastating habitat. We do know that these so-called (negative) impacts occur but are there positive consequences of horses in the wild and, realistically, how much of the habitat is irrevocably affected?

Isn't it more likely than not that these impacts will also have *positive consequences* such as those found in world-wide research on large herbivore decline?

And if so, what will happen if horses suddenly vanish? We do not know as this has NOT been fully examined, however, [current research in the Victorian Alpine region](#) is methodically investigating this with a key aim of identifying horse population density levels which are appropriate for the environment.

For a list of references, please go to [\(link\)](#) where the article is also available.



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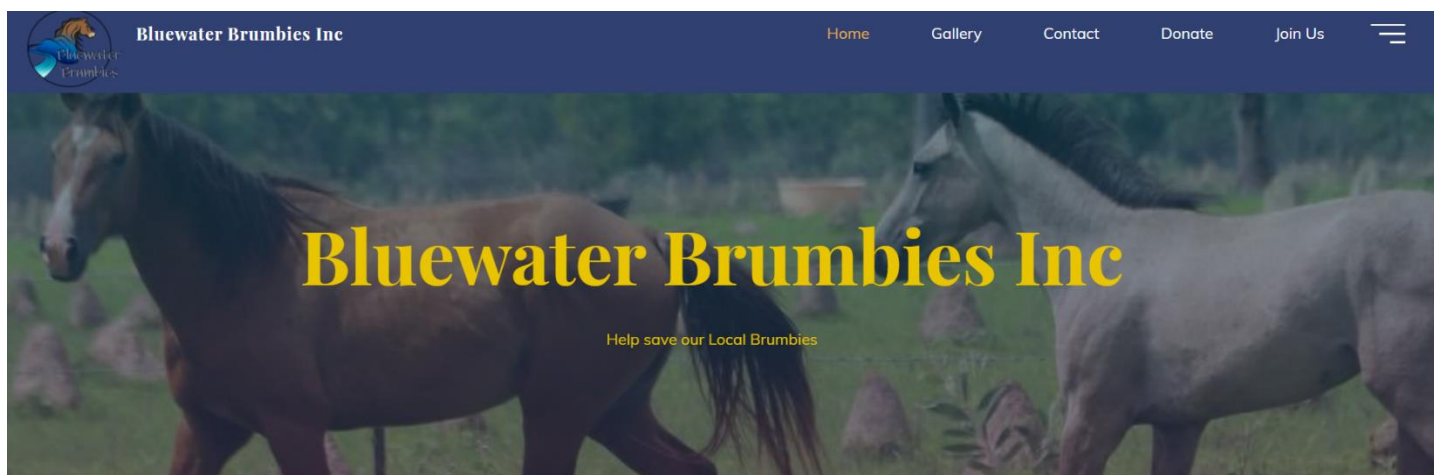
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BLUEWATER BRUMBIES

Welcome to the newest member of the ABA, Bluewater Brumbies!

“Bluewater Brumbies inc. was formed by members of the Bluewater Park and Bluewater communities to find sustainable and humane ways to manage the wild horse population in the area. We believe these horses deserve better than the inhumane treatment they have been subject to in the past.”



Contact Bluewater Brumbies

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SAVE THE BRUMBIES

We've been extremely busy at STB; some 29 horses from KNP and a further 11 from Corindi, near Grafton have certainly kept us working hard over winter. I'm pleased to report that all except two who suffered some injuries on the long journey north, have now found good homes. Note: our planned Open Day for November has been cancelled due to COVID restrictions, we will reschedule for around Easter 2022.

Due to the extensive flooding in recent months on the mid north coast we were approached by Grafton NPWS regarding the possibility of taking Brumbies from Corindi, which is mid-way between Grafton and Coffs Harbour. The horses were causing havoc on domestic farms due to fencing being destroyed and they had strayed from the adjoining state forest. Local T.V. news covered the story. Again we stepped up to the rescue and more horses arrived at NEBS.

Luckily our paddocks currently have abundant good grass and the generous donation of 500 bales of hay from a kind supporter has also helped to keep all well fed. Grafton NPWS and Local Land Services trapped and transported the horses free of charge and also paid for the gelding costs.



Thanks to all involved, this is the first time NPWS has actually assisted us with the costs of relocating Brumbies and we are very appreciative for the much needed financial help.

The Corindi Brumbies are excellent quality and there is an interesting story about their origins.

We were told some years ago that these horses have thoroughbred blood lines; apparently a trading vessel, the Port Jackson, was shipwrecked in the mid eighteenth hundreds off the Coffs coast. Thoroughbreds were being transported from Sydney to Brisbane for the race-track.



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Some horses managed to swim ashore and survived, thus forming the foundations of the Corindi horses.

And even more interesting; it is said that the legendary Phar Lap carried the blood lines of some of those racehorses. Does anyone want a Brumby racehorse ?? We've been told that Sydney Maritime Museum has details of the shipwreck. There is also another version of the Corindi horses; they were claimed by local indigenous groups and were bred up for stock work etc. Whatever, Interesting folk lore and part of our history.



Contact Save The Brumbies

Ph: 02 665522

E: info@savethebrumbies.org

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The 29 horses from KNP which arrived at the NEBS



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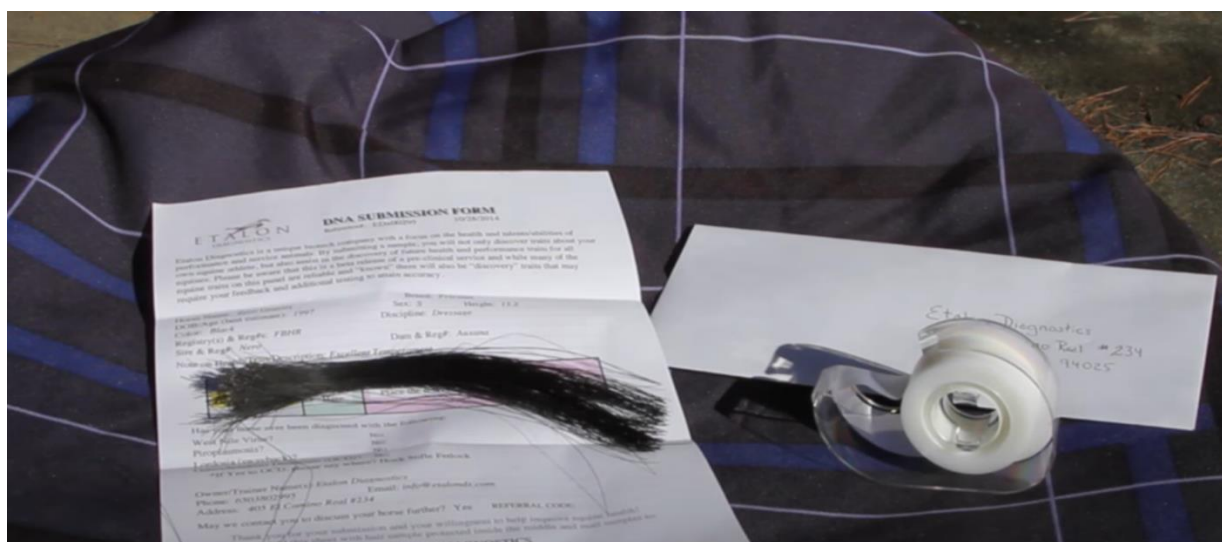
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HOOFS2010 Inc.

Southern Cross Brumby Registry Collecting Brumby DNA hair samples

By Lynette Sutton



For some years now Lynette has been working under **Southern Cross Brumby Registry** and has encouraged people across Australia to send in Brumby hair follicle samples to be cleaned and sent for DNA testing to Doctor Gus Cothran Texas World Wild horse Data base project.

The late Richard Crispin was the driving force behind this project for our Walers and Brumbies and began in 2014 Since then over 180 samples have been sent from areas across Australia.

The **Snowy Mountain Brumby Register (SMBR)** formed in 2019/20 and work on collecting Brumby DNA samples from the north end of Kosciuszko. Our Brumby genetic history is now sent to Dr Brandon Velie at Sydney University. Richard started liaising with Brandon and assisted the study set up here in Australia a wonderful project that needs the support of all who work in the field of Brumby rescue and advocacy, fortunately Brendon has taken over Brumby DNA testing via Sydney University.



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This “is a first for an Australian University to actively engage with the community and establish a program on wild horse DNA. Texas University used a micro satellite system to determine breeds connected to DNA samples provided. Sydney university system is far more detailed and lineage on both the sire and dam lines can be confirmed.” (SMBR website)

The more in-depth DNA test results will incur costs depending on the volume of DNA tests we can send to Brandon.

This one-minute video demonstrating how to collect a hair sample is on southern cross Brumby registry the website link: [how to DNA - SOUTHERN CROSS BRUMBY REGISTRY](#))

DNA samples across Australia are an essential part of Brumby historic records. Work is now urgent as Parks Victoria continue to remove all Bogong High Plains and Barmah Brumbies and most of the East VicAlps.

Australian wide Brumby DNA samples go to Lyn Sutton via post:

SCBR, PO Box 86, Berrigan NSW 2712

Noth Kosciuszko Brumby samples can also go to The Snowy Mountains Brumby Registry via post:

PO Box 835 Cooma NSW 2630 or email:

snowymountainsbrumbyregistry@gmail.com

All DNA samples are managed by Sydney University.

We urge everyone to support, promote and encourage people to collect and send us as many Brumby DNA samples as possible. I will update this process as we work out DNA costs with Brandon, in essence, the more DNA samples tested, the cheaper a single test will be.

Further information from Lyn Sutton on 0401527991 The task is one we all can help please take the initiative to supply DNA hair samples and forward to either Registry.

Regards Lynn



contact HOOFS2010

Ph 0401 527 991

FB /Hoofs2010IncBrumbyRescue

www.hoofs2010incorporated.com



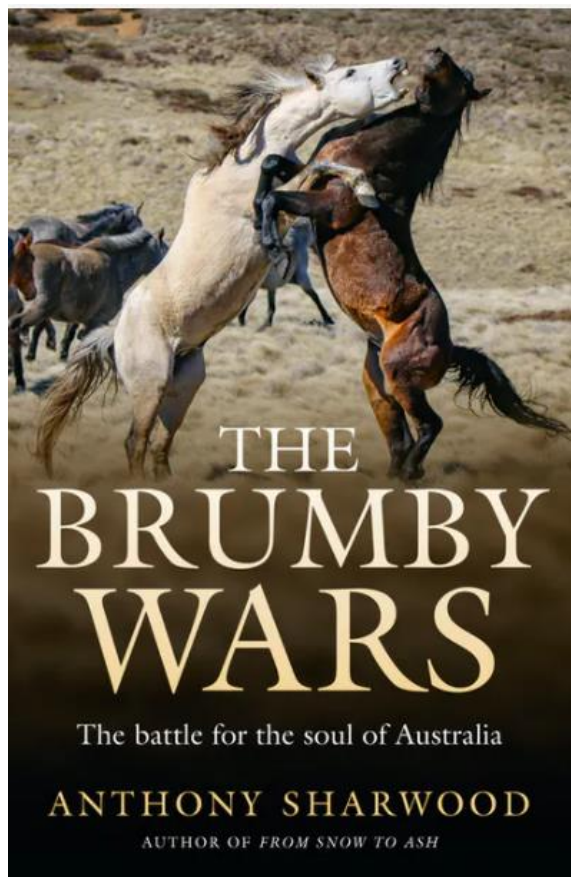
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BRUMBIES IN THE MEDIA – The Brumby Wars - Book Review

In his new book *The Brumby War* (approx. \$23), Anthony Sharwood pulls together almost 60 interviews of listening to the passionate debate that surrounds the wild horses of Australia's High Country and beyond.



The cover image is courtesy of Michelle Brown who writes *“In loving memory of Paleface, lost in the devastating summer bushfires of 2020 in Mt Selwyn area of Kosciuszko National Park. Forever, free, forever in the hearts of many, forever loved by all.”*

I felt both sides of the debate were mostly fair and ranged across John Barilaro, the Brumby and anti-Brumby extremes, moderates, Rehomers and the work by NSW Park staff, who attempted the first stage of balance for limited Brumby populations living within park areas. The book reflects views that range from *“feral pests that ruin the environment”* to *“icons of our national heritage”*.

Originally I was going to comment on particular aspects of this book that I liked or disliked, rang true or not, but then realised, as Sharwood indicates, it is better for readers to start with an open mind, on a journey of lasting legacies of actions, emotions and the need for balance in the Brumby debate.

A debate on environmental Brumby damage; but also acknowledging “there’s so much more



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to this issue than ecological concerns.” Sharwood himself deepened his understanding of the debate, concluding opinions on both sides have a right to be heard “a lot of people love these wild mountain horses for a lot of different reasons – historical, cultural, spiritual” and that “There’s a reason people write songs about wild horses”.

I sensed the writer’s belief that while the High Country should be protected he also believes Brumby advocates should be respected, listened to. I admire how Sharwood has “tried in this book to navigate a path towards it (compromise)”.

The Brumby Wars is a book about wild horse life, but also a lot more, such as colourful characters, bush yarns and history “overwhelming evidence” that the legendary stockman featured in The Man from Snowy River was Aboriginal.

I thank Sharwood for providing this record of the broad ranging emotions and echo his words “*Wherever you sit on this issue, I hope you enjoy the ride.*”

Jill Pickering

To purchase THE BRUMBY WARS

Link: <https://www.hachette.com.au/anthony-sharwood/the-brumby-wars-the-battle-for-the-soul-of-australia>



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AUSTRALIA'S FORTRESS CONSERVATION IS OUTDATED

Australia's 'fortress' conservation is outdated - the world has moved on.

The Master's Thesis titled "Rewilding" and Tourism - Analysis of an Optimistic Discourse on Nature Conservation by Lusine Margaryan (cited as Wageningen 2012) shows just how out of step with the world Australian environmentalists are by refusing to assess the potential values of sustainable heritage Brumby populations living wild for 150-200 years in our parks.

'FORTRESS WILDERNESS' IS FLAWED

Lusine says that since the nineteenth century, celebrating wilderness has appealed mainly to well-to-do city folks who think "Environment" is essentially an anthropocentric concept and "nature" as everything un-interfered by human agency". Australian environmentalists further exclude all but fit people able to walk in/out of wilderness in self-sufficient modes.

Insightfully, Carver (2007:267) writes "**Earth is now nowhere pristine ... thousands of years of human history have created a landscape that is a mosaic of different land uses, in which even those that appear to be wholly natural are, on closer**

inspection, the product of human action in recent or more distant times."

However there is hope as Lusine writes, the world is moving on from an earlier "fortress conservation and science-based managerial model in the direction of a more open and inclusive approaches".

HUMANS ARE PART OF NATURE

Australia's environmentalists believe any species introduced to Australia since 1788, except themselves, are *bad*, while species already here before 1788 are *good*, which I understand as restoration ecology, trying to turn back a clock that cannot turn back. But if humans are part of nature, then why are Brumbies introduced but not the humans that brought them?

"**Restoration ecology**" is criticized as being based on the same "technological fix" mentality, which has caused the ecological damage in the first place", and yet "another manifestation of anthropocentric wish-world, where human interests shape and redesign natural reality" by "demonstrate human power to first damage and then restore the nature as it pleases".



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WE CANNOT RETURN TO PRE-1788

Lusine cites Taylor (2005:2) *“the whole nature conservation endeavour has been a category mistake, born of false separation between what is to be human and what is to be natural.”*

“We cannot recreate the past” ... “there may be little merit in trying to do so .. we should re-evaluate paradigm of naturalness in light of more functional ethos” (Taylor (2005:10,88,101)

Egan et al (2011) in their book “Human Dimensions of Ecological Restoration” emphasize the importance of “recognizing humans as integral part of nature” .. *“its processes”* and the role they play in *“determining the condition of the environment in which they live”*.

HOW DO BRUMBIES AND NATIVE SPECIES ACTUALLY INTERACT

Australian environmentalists cite impact (change) such as short fresh green grass that grows after grazing as bad. Put simply, their view is that: Brumby = introduced = bad for native species. ***This creates a risk that native species who benefit from a Brumby presence may be disadvantaged by Brumby removal.*** Such a blanket assumption that Brumby = bad is not founded on science, it is based on outdated philosophy.

I understand robust science to first identify impact, then quantify that *impact* as *positive* or *negative* (or a mix), by measuring native species interaction within low to higher areas of Brumby densities to find Brumby densities that can sustain the native species they live with.



Brumbies and kangaroos together.

Photo credit: Michelle Brown

It seems that “fortress wilderness” only sees impact as a *change*, i.e. short grass, hoof prints dung etc. and ignores the emerging “functional ethos” by studying the *functional reality* of an interaction between Brumbies and co-habiting native species. For example, Parks Victoria fail to see Alpine skinks being attracted to dung insects, or native Alpine frogs spawning in the water within hoof prints.

Australians still adhere to “Restoring nature as it pleases”, or as it once was, instead of, for example, studying how introduced species *actually* interact with their native species.



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For example, Parks Victoria are so against brumbies that just one Brumby mob photographed on Cowombat's short green grass "proves" damage.

There is no consideration of the reduction in fire risk provided by the horses by maintaining patches of short grass. This and the surrounding unburnt bushes offered natives species protection from the last wildfires.

Savage (2009) writes *"restoration of natural process allows natural system to find its own dynamic equilibrium. Ecology has moved on from the ontology of "divine order of nature" to realise "natural processes are not teleological but ever dynamic" and "allowing room for chaotic, unpredictable and catastrophic events as a part natural process"* (Adams, 2003).



Brumbies help reduce wildfires.

Photo credit: Michelle Brown

I see Australia's environment as dynamic, with increasing temperatures, wildfires, floods and droughts outpacing the ability of many of Australia's native species to adapt and survive. It seems essential that any new learning must be robustly tested, instead of current kill and kill again tactics - expecting that somehow *this* time it will prevent the decline of native species.

Richard Williams in "Biodiversity and Environmental Change – Monitoring, Challenges and Direction" wrote that despite "considerable investment and effort, Australia has failed to reduce the rate and scale of biodiversity loss" and that "expenditure has not been effective" ... due "in part, to the lack of *appropriate information and monitoring*".

Australia is held back by outdated philosophies that try in vain to restore a vision of native park species as they please; while the rest of the world has moved on to a more open and inclusive approach to managing non-native species in a way that can improve the survival rates of all species - as inter-world travellers, non-native hitch-hikers and climate change inevitably march on.

By Jill Pickering 2021

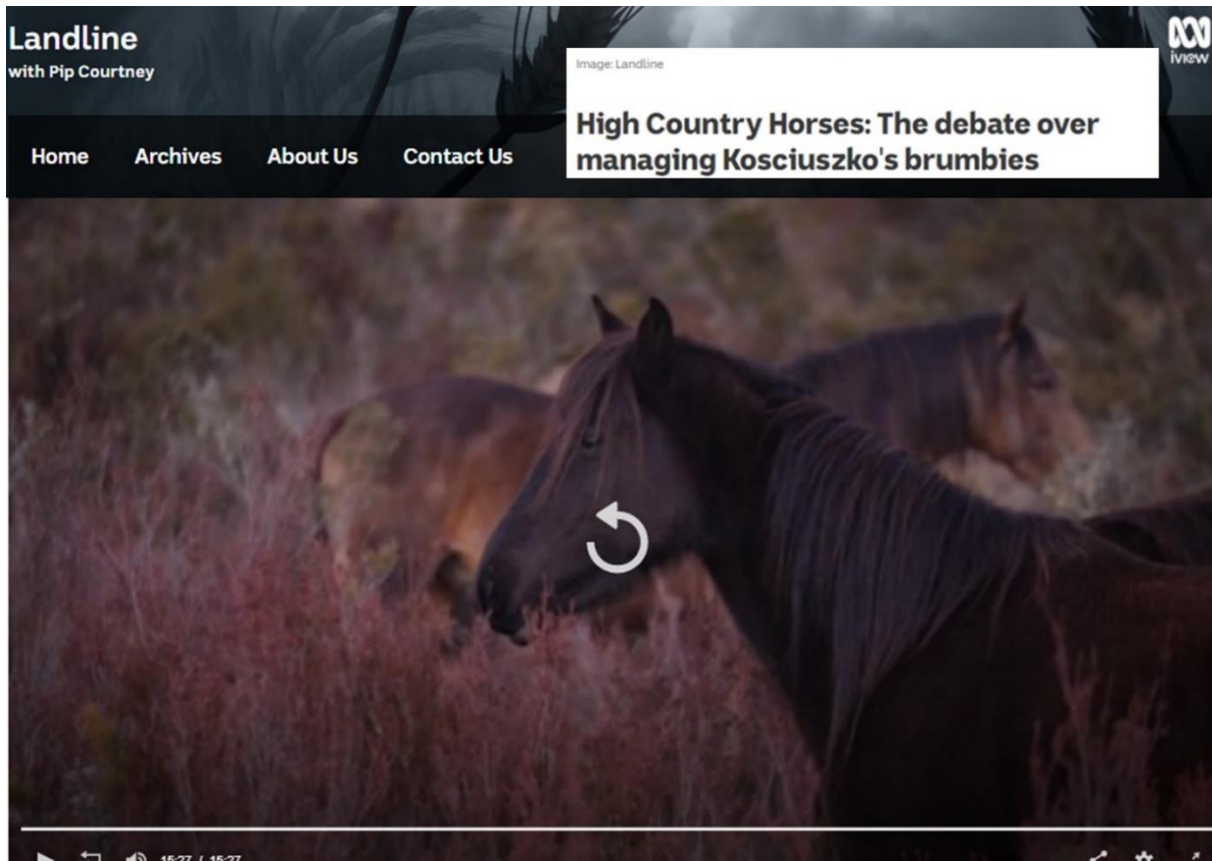


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BRUMBIES IN THE MEDIA – Landline (TV)



LANDLINE episode

Link: <https://www.abc.net.au/landline/high-country-horses:-the-debate-over-managing/13509452>

The ABA wrote to LANDLINE and thanked them for their reporting on the Brumbies, we also expressed some concerns over the inconsistent use of professionals, that scientists were used for one side of the debate only. The ABA also provided LANDLINE with some additional evidence which proved the positive impacts of nomadic herbivores (in sustainable numbers) have on their environment, we also strongly stated that the position of the ABA and the majority of reputable Brumby supporters is for **sustainable** population numbers to remain in the wild, as the episode implied we wanted uncontrolled populations, which is incorrect.



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ABA MEMBER GROUPS

- ❖ Australian Brumby Horse Register
- ❖ Coffin Bay Brumby Preservation Society Inc. (SA)
- ❖ Kaimanawa Heritage Horses (NZ)
- ❖ Save the Brumbies Inc. (NSW)
- ❖ South East Queensland Brumby Association
- ❖ Victorian Brumby Association
- ❖ Heritage Brumby Advocates Australia inc.
- ❖ HOOFS2010!
- ❖ BlueWater Brumbies (QLD)

To find out more, or to join, please contact Jill Pickering on pickjill@hotmail.com

NEWSLETTER

To contribute to the ABA newsletter, please contact Justine on Justine_curatolo@hotmail.com

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