

= Kaimanawa horse =

Kaimanawa horses are a population of feral horses in New Zealand that are descended from domestic horses released in the 19th and 20th centuries . They are known for their hardiness and quiet temperament . The New Zealand government strictly controls the population to protect the habitat in which they live , which includes several endangered species of plants . The varying heritage gives the breed a wide range of heights , body patterns and colours . They are usually well @-@ muscled , sure @-@ footed and tough .

Horses were first reported in the Kaimanawa Range in 1876 , although the first horses had been brought into New Zealand in 1814 . The feral herds grew as horses escaped and were released from sheep stations and cavalry bases . Members of the herd were recaptured by locals for use as riding horses , as well as being caught for their meat , hair and hides . The herd declined as large scale farming and forestry operations encroached on their ranges , and only around 174 horses were known to exist by 1979 . The Kaimanawa herd was protected by the New Zealand government in 1981 , and there were 1 @, @ 576 horses in the herd by 1994 . A small , mostly unmanaged population also exists on the Aupouri Peninsula at the northern tip of the North Island . Roundups have been carried out annually since 1993 to manage the size of the herd , removing around 2 @, @ 800 horses altogether . The Kaimanawa population is listed as a herd of special genetic value by the United Nations ' Food and Agricultural Organization , and several studies have been conducted on the herd dynamics and habits of the breed .

= = History = =

The first horses were introduced to New Zealand by Protestant missionary Reverend Samuel Marsden in December 1814 , and wild horses were first reported in the Kaimanawa Range in central North Island of New Zealand in 1876 . The Kaimanawa breed descended from domestic horses that were released in the late 19th century and early 20th century in the middle of the North Island around the Kaimanawa mountains . Between 1858 and 1875 , Major George Gwavas Carlyon imported Exmoor ponies to Hawkes Bay and crossed them with local stock to produce the Carlyon pony . These Carlyon ponies were later crossed with two Welsh stallions , Kinarth Caesar and Comet , imported by Sir Donald McLean , and a breed known as the Comet resulted . At some point during the 1870s , McLean released a Comet stallion and several mares on the Kaingaroa Plains and the bloodline apparently became part of the wild Kaimanawa population . Other horses were added to the bloodline through escapes and releases from local sheep stations and from cavalry units at Waouru that were threatened with a strangles epidemic . It is also thought that in the 1960s Nicholas Koreneff released an Arabian stallion into the Argo Valley region .

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries , horses were harvested from the feral herds and used as riding and stock horses , as well as being used for their meat , hair and hides . Originally there were many herds that roamed land owned by the British Crown and the native M?ori , but many were eradicated with the intensification of large scale farming and forestry operations combined with increased mechanization that decreased the need for stock horses . Kaimanawa horses today have the highest amount of genetic similarity with the Thoroughbred and other Thoroughbred cross breeds .

Pressure from land development and an encroaching human population reduced the range and the number of the Kaimanawa horses , and in 1979 it was found that only about 174 horses remained . Starting in 1981 , the Kaimanawa population , range size , and herd movements began to be officially measured , and a protected area was formed for the breed in the Waouru Military Training Area . Legislative protection was similar to the kiwi and other native species . There was a rapid increase in the herd size following the protection of the breed , and 1 @, @ 576 horses were known to exist in the area by 1994 . There is also a small population of horses on the Aupouri Peninsula at the northern tip of the North Island , which is mostly unmanaged by the New Zealand government . In 2008 , the Kaimanawa herds were the focus of a novel called Kaimanawa Princess , by Dianne Haworth .

= = Breed characteristics = =

Many characteristics of the Comet type are said to be shown in the Kaimanawa horses today , although the varied gene input has produced a wide range of sizes , colours , and body types among the wild horses . The Kaimanawa breed varies widely in general appearance , with heights ranging between 12 @. @ 2 and 15 hands (50 and 60 inches , 127 and 152 cm) high . Any coat colour or pattern marking is acceptable . They are usually well @-@ muscled . Their feral way of life has given them the ability to adapt quickly and live on very little , and they are usually sure @-@ footed and tough . They have a medium @-@ sized head in good proportion to their body , with wide variation in shape due to the different conformation of their ancestors . Kaimanawa horses have a short , deep neck with a thick throat area , straight shoulders , a deep girth , and a short to medium back . The hindquarters vary from sloping to well @-@ rounded . The legs are long and well @-@ muscled , with strong hooves , and hind hooves that are generally smaller than the front ones . All horses are considered to age a year on the first of August , regardless of their actual foaling date .

= = Population control and study = =

Due to the increase in population after protective legislation was put into place , the Department of Conservation developed a management plan for the Kaimanawa herd in 1989 and 1990 . A draft plan was made available to the public for comment in 1991 , and the public made it clear that it objected to herd reduction through shooting from helicopters , and instead favored the horses remaining alive after being removed from the herd . However , core animal welfare groups felt that shooting was the most humane option . Trial musters were conducted in 1993 , 1994 and 1995 , and were successful , although costly and with a limited demand for the captured horses .

In 1994 , a working party was established to look at the management of the Kaimanawa herd . They aimed to decide which organization was in charge of long term management , to ensure that the treatment of horses is humane , to preserve and control the best attributes of the herds , and to eliminate the impacts of the herds on other conservation priorities . Goals included ensuring the welfare of the horses , protecting natural ecosystems and features that the Kaimanawa herd may impact and keeping the herd at a sustainable level . Ecological objectives included ensuring that Kaimanawa horse does not adversely affect endangered , rare and biogeographically significant plants ; ensuring that the herd does not further degrade the ecosystems in which it lives ; and preventing the herd from spreading into the Kaimanawa Forest Park and the Tongariro National Park . Herd objectives included ensuring that the public was safe from roaming horses , while still allowing and improving public access to the herd and ensuring humane treatment of the horses ; reducing conflict between the herd and other ecological values and land uses ; and ensuring that the herd is contained to a population that is tolerated by the ecosystems in which they live while still maintaining a minimum effective population that is in general free ranging .

The Department of Conservation has since 1993 carried out annual culls and muster of Kaimanawas to keep the herd population around a target level of 500 horses . The target will be reduced to 300 horses in stages starting in 2009 . These horses are either taken directly to slaughter or are placed at holding farms for later slaughter or adoption by private homes . A main reason for the strict population control is to protect the habitat in which they live . This habitat includes 16 plant species listed as endangered , which the Kaimanawa may endanger further through trampling and overgrazing . These plants include herbs , grasses , sedges , flowers and mistletoes ; among these are *Deschampsia caespitosa* (a very rare tussock grass) , *Peraxilla tetrapetala* (a vulnerable mistletoe) and *Libertia peregrinans* (a possibly locally extinct sand iris) . The 2009 culling of the population removed 230 horses from the herd , the largest culling since the beginning of the program , with homes found for 85 % of the horses removed . Conservation of these horses is an important matter to the public , and between 1990 and 2003 the New Zealand Minister for Conservation received more public comments on the Kaimanawa horse than on any

other subject . In this period , more than 1 @, @ 400 requests for information and letters were received , with public interest peaking in 1996 and 1997 . This was due to a program of population reduction by shooting scheduled to begin implementation in 1996 ; due to public opposition the shooting was cancelled and a large scale muster and adoption program began in 1997 . In 1997 , around 1 @, @ 069 horses were removed from the range and adopted , reducing the main herd to around 500 , and reducing their range to around 25 @, @ 000 ha from around 70 @, @ 000 . Since 1993 , a total of around 2 @, @ 800 horses have been removed from the range . Only one injury resulting in the death of a horse is known to have occurred .

The United Nations ' Food and Agricultural Organization lists the Kaimanawa horses as a herd of special genetic value that can be compared with other groups of feral horses such as New Forest ponies , Assateague ponies , wild Mustangs , and with free @-@ living zebras . Kaimanawas are of special value because of their low rate of interaction with humans . This lack of interaction may result in a herd with more wild and fewer domestic characteristics , which is of special interest to researchers . Between 1994 and 1997 , students from Massey University studied a population of around 400 Kaimanawa horses to learn their habits and herd dynamics . A 2000 study found that although sometimes there are more than two stallions in Kaimanawa horse herds , only the two stallions highest in the herd hierarchy mate with the herd females . This differs from other feral horse herds , some of which have only one stallion that mates with mares , while others have several stallions that sire foals .