

Hey Neighbor



## For The Love Of Horses

By Frank J. Buchman

### Action taken to save endangered Abaco Barb horses

Despite recent diligent efforts, survival of direct descendants of horses brought to the New World by Columbus is in question.

"On the island of Abaco in the Bahamas, located 150 miles off Florida's Gold Coast, are the eight remaining Abaco Barb horses," said Milanne Rehor, project director for Wild Horses of Abaco Preservation Society, WHOA.

"They are a strain of the Spanish Barb breed, as designated by the Horse of the America's Registry," she explained.

In 1992, Rehor, writer and media consultant now at Abaco, spent three months in the Abacos and brought the horses to the public's attention. "Nearly exterminated in the '60s, the Abaco Barbs had made a slow comeback, with about 30 horses then living in the pine forests," she related.

origins remained unclear until 1998, when it was recognized that the horses probably were Spanish Barbs," she added.

In August 2002, based on three separate DNA analyses plus photo and video records, the horses were accepted by the Horse Of The Americas Registry as the Abaco Barbs, descendants of horses brought over at the time of Columbus' explorations. "Their genes are unique. Throughout the world, Barbs are recognized

as critically endangered," Rehor pointed out.

Few people would have expected domestic horses to exist that long. However, bred to survive long sea journeys and harsh conditions, the Abaco Barbs lived by finding food, shelter and water in the pine forests. "Only a few horses were lost to people from the outer islands who captured them for work at sugar mills," according to Rehor.

However, in the 1960s, disaster struck in the form

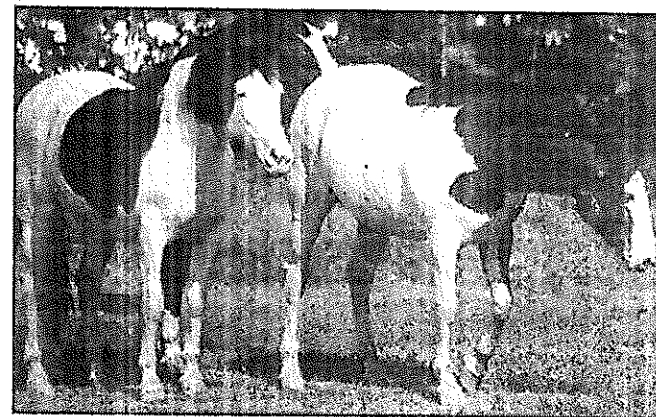
of a road from one end of Abaco to the other, creating habitat change and giving in routes to human predators. The horses were trapped, killed and destroyed in various ways, Rehor indicated.

"The biggest tragedy involved the death of a young child who tried to ride a tame wild horse while unattended, and that resulted in an unwarranted wholesale slaughter," she explained.

The count was reduced to three head, which shared shelter and feed with cattle on a farm. "Once populations were up to 12 head, they were released back to the wild of the pine forest," Rehor elaborated.

As stated, the count was up to over 30 by 1992, but declined to 17 by 1997, then 13 in 2004. It is now eight due to irresponsible human intervention and habitat changes.

"There are four mares and four stallions in a preserve in their old habitat in the forest," Rehor said in a



With an ancestry dating to the Spanish Conquistadors, the Abaco Barb wild horses have roamed the beaches and forests of Great Abaco Island in the Bahamas for over 500 years. (Photo courtesy Mimi Rehor.)

telephone conversation from Abaco last week.

Arkwild, Inc., has been formed as a tax exempt corporation to support the horses.

Goals include providing

medical care and support for the Abaco Barbs for both natural injuries and those resulting from inappropriate human intervention.

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Despite efforts since then, environment changes and some irresponsible human intervention have again drastically reduced populations. Alarm is now being spread to prevent extinction.

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"We hope to open up the genetic bottleneck with careful breeding to minimize potential bad genes and encourage preservation of the unique genetic line," Rehor vowed.

"Our overall goal is to provide these rare and beautiful horses with a safe and secure future, by educating the public about inappropriate human intervention that has prevented them from once again reaching viable numbers," Rehor expressed.

The Salmon 4-H Model Horse Club in Salmon, Idaho, is one group that took action when they heard about the endangered horses, commented Susan Dadaist, the group's leader.

Eleven-year-old club member Cameron Angeny said, "Our 4-H leader told us that the Abaco Barb horses on the Abaco Island were close to extinction, and we knew we had to help save them."

Club members developed a plan, using the writing skills they had learned keeping 4-H record books. They petitioned Breyer Animal Creations to create a model to raise awareness about the horses.

The company was so inspired by the 4-H club that they did develop an Abaco Barb model for their 2005 line and created an annual benefit model horse program.

"These young people were an inspiration for us all," said Kathleen Fallon of Breyer. "This is a power-

ful lesson for these children to know that they can make a difference."

Capella, named after one of the Abaco Barb stallions, was the first horse in the annual benefit series, and one of the company's top five model horse sellers in 2005.

A portion of the profits from sales of Capella models help benefit Arkwild.

"The 4-H club continues

to raise money and awareness for the Abaco Barb horses through the nationwide Abaco Barb Youth Project, a program that provides ideas for others to help," Dudasik commented.

Information about the program can be found on the club's website at [www.geocities.com/smh4hc/](http://www.geocities.com/smh4hc/).

Updates on Abaco Barbs are available at [www.arkwild.org/](http://www.arkwild.org/).



Country singer Johnnie U joins members of the Salmon Model Horse 4-H Club as they kick-off their Abaco Barb Youth project during the 2004 Salmon Select Sale.

## Action To Save Endangered Abaco Barb Horses

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Country singer Johnnie U joins members of the Salmon Model Horse 4-H Club as they kick-off their Abaco Barb Youth project during the 2004 Salmon Select Horse Sale.