

## EVALUATION OF THE CRUCE HERD OF HORSES

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This evaluation of the Cruce line of horses is the result of a visit to the Cruce property on January 24, 1990.

The Cruce horses are one of a very small handful (five would be a very optimistic estimate) of strains of horses derived from Spanish colonial days that persist as purely (or as nearly as can be determined) Spanish to the the present day. Most other strains have long been absorbed into the Quarter Horse breed (with draft and thoroughbred influence) or have undergone extinction. They are the only known "rancher" strain of pure Spanish horses that persists in the southwest. The Cruce horses are of great interest because they are a nonferal strain. The only other strains of Spanish horses that persist to this day are the feral strains in certain isolated areas (Kiger and Cerbat BLM herds currently, although examples of pure horses of other populations now extinct or contaminated are present in owned, managed herds), and the Choctaw/Cherokee strains which originated in the Southeast. To this very short list can be added the Belsky and Romero/McKinley strains, but neither of these can claim the historic isolation that the Cruce horses have had, and both are of somewhat doubtful purity as to Spanish ancestry. The Cruce horses, as a nonferal strain, are therefore truly unique.

Visual examination of the Cruce herd indicates that the herd history is very likely accurate. The horses are remarkably uniform, and of a very pronounced Spanish phenotype. In some instances this is an extremely Spanish type, such as is rare in other Spanish strains persisting in North America. This type is illustrated in paintings of Spanish horses during the colonial period, and it was a pleasant though great surprise to see it persisting to this day. The horses varied over a very narrow range from this extreme type to a more moderate type that is more common in other North American strains and Iberian strains today.

The color range of the Cruce horses is varied, but less so than in the past. Dun, grullo, buckskin, and palomino occurred in the past but were not seen during this inspection. Most horses are chestnut, including some very good examples of the rare "black chestnut" shade and some flaxen maned individuals. Blood bays were also present, as well as a few black horses. Greys were few in number, as were tobiano, overo, and sabino paints. The overo is only known to occur in horses of Colonial Spanish descent, and only in North America (elsewhere it can be traced to importation from North America). Only a single example of a true roan was seen.

The need to conserve this herd is great, since they do represent an unique genetic resource. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has become interested in rare breed conservation over the last fifteen years, and their interest in horses is limited to those breeds that are uninfluenced by the Arabian and the Thoroughbred. The reason they have limited their interest and energy to horses without such influence is the incredible scarcity of such populations worldwide. The Cruce horses fit in this category very securely, and are therefore of great interest and importance not only in North America. but also in the worldwide efforts to

conserve genetically unique populations of livestock.

The American Minor Breeds Conservancy is very interested in this population. It must be emphasized that this interest is very great in the case of Cruce horses, and very limited with regard to most other horse types. For example, the AMBC has no interest in the conservation of western feral populations except for the few (two) of purely Spanish phenotype. The Cruce population is a most significant discovery of a type of horse largely thought to be gone forever.

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The American Minor Breeds Conservancy was fortunate recently to have been able to directly intervene in the conservation of a unique herd of horses. This is exciting work for the AMBC, and this rescue was very helpful in formulating the ways and means by which rescues can be effectively accomplished. Such rescues always have two sides to them. The one side is that if AMBC is truly effective then direct intervention and rescue should be unnecessary since all populations and breeds will have dedicated breeders. However, in cases where unique populations are in peril it is essential for AMBC to move in, and to do so effectively. With these comments as background I will describe and evaluate this rescue. Many lessons can be learned from this sort of work, and the lessons are as important as the specific rescue since the lessons can be reused with other populations in the future.

The Wilbur-Cruce herd was located on the Buenos Aires ranch near Arivaca, Arizona. This ranch had been in the ownership of one family since the 1600's. The horses on the ranch had been bred by several generations of the ranch family (originally Wilbur, but now Cruce through marriage). Eva Cruce, the present and elderly owner, states that the herd began with the purchase of 25 mares and a stallion from Juan Sepulveda of Magdalena Mexico. These horses were purchased by her grandfather in 1885. No other horses had been added to the herd with the exception of a single stallion, reputedly a "paint Morgan" from Colorado that ran with the herd for two years in the 1930s. This history is interesting, since these horses had a very high likelihood of being purely Spanish ranch stock from the Southwest. Such stock is very rare, even in the Mustang registries which cover pure Spanish stock (Spanish Mustang Registry and Southwest Spanish Mustang Association). As to the "paint Morgan", he could have had some effect on the herd, but was unlikely to be the same as Morgans today (color alone would rule that out) and was likely Spanish himself. The terrain is very rugged in Arivaca, and he could only have had minimal impact on the herd at any rate.

A further word on the original horses is that they are from the area in which Eusebio Kino was essential in encouraging the production of livestock. This occurred in the late 1600s and early 1700s. He brought in good quality stock of various species and was essential in the establishment of the mission chain in Northern Mexico and southern Arizona. This increased the interest in these horses, for we do not know how many of this sort of horse survive in Mexico.

The land on which the horses ranged varies from steep rocky mountains with cactus and ocotillo, to a creek bed with lovely cottonwoods. This land is adjacent to the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge, and Mrs. Cruce was selling the land to the Nature Conservancy to be added to the Refuge. This refuge has the specific mandate to conserve the Masked Bobwhite Quail, which is an endangered subspecies of Bobwhite Quail. As such, the horses had to be removed since the refuge has no such mandate for horses.

Fortunately the mustang grapevine found out about these horses, and that is how I became aware of them and their history. This is really the first important lesson in the rescue: each breed and each species benefits from a network of interested people that keep their ears and eyes open. This is the best way to turn up leads of new populations, or of herds about to be dispersed. This informed network is one of the very important functions of AMBC, and keeps rare or unusual herds and flocks from disappearing without a trace, and without

