

The Story of Kozi and Red

Australian Brumby Rescue at Horse Shepherd Equine Sanctuary

The Horse Shepherd Equine Sanctuary is indeed a busy place - among the twenty plus horses, which feature all breeds and sizes from Standardbred, to miniature, to thoroughbred, Kozi and Red, two small Brumby foals, show their enthusiasm for life by gambolling around their spacious, hilly paddock under the watchful eyes of an eighteen month old quarterback gelding called Quartes, who has taken the young Brumbies under his wing. These Brumbies - just like every other horse in this sanctuary - have been rescued from certain death by New Zealander Anne Young, who buys unwanted horses destined for the dog-meat factories from the Echuca horse sale, in an effort to give them another chance at life at her large farm in Ballarat, in the Australian state of Victoria.

While Anne's original intention had been to save horses by co-establishing a Facebook based service that allowed people from around Australia to bid on horses being sold at Echuca remotely - and thus save as many horses as possible - Anne soon found that there were still a large number of horses that were only bid on by the horse-meat workers. This prompted the birth of the Horse Shepherd Equine Sanctuary, which provides a home for these horses to be cared for. They often have to be nursed back to health and have to be trained, and are then rehomed to carefully select new owners.



Kozi at the Saleyards

Now safely ensconced at Horse Shepherd Equine Sanctuary, Kozi and Red have come a long way from their original home in Kosciuszko National Park. Kosciuszko is a 6,900 square kilometer park located in the southeastern corner of New South Wales and the Alpine National Park in

Victoria to the south, and has a population of about 3000 wild Brumby horses. Unlike New Zealand, where the Kaimanawa horse population is considerably smaller, and managed by one specific Government department (DoC), in Australia the approach to the management of the Brumbies is run in accordance with each individual park.



"It's really crazy over here - it's all park based," says Colleen O'Brien, president of the Victorian Brumby Association. "Just in Victoria for example, we have three different areas and three different programmes to manage them, and in New South Wales I know of six or seven active plans that are all quite different." What this means, is that the approaches to culling varies from park to park, and even - as in the case of Kosciuszko - from one end of the park to the other.

In the southern end of Kosciuszko Park around 200 Brumbies are annually passively trapped by an external contractor, with the majority of these Brumbies going to the slaughterhouse; whereas the northern unit of the park runs an 'in house' passive trapping program which is coordinated by the park rangers who work closely with the Victorian Brumby Association. "It's a really good programme," states Colleen O'Brien. "The horses are trapped really well and humanely, but unfortunately they catch a lot more than you can rehome - you have the same in New Zealand, there are not always people

with the time or the skill or the interest. So a lot of the horses go to the knackery. We take a lot of those horses from the Kosciuszko Park, we take about 40 a year, but on a good year they can trap about 600 horses."

Weanling Brumbies - like the ones that now live at the Horse Shepherd Equine Sanctuary - always present a challenge for the Victorian Brumby Association, who find that most potential adopters of Brumbies want older horses, which can be ridden, and that even the slaughterhouses don't want them: "So that means that there is no market for the weanlings, they don't get enough kilos of meat to justify the effort. So weanlings at that age are just that terrible age to place them - even if the re-homers don't want them, the knackeries don't want them either."

Unlike New Zealand, where rehoming of the culled Kaimanawa horses is tightly controlled and potential new homes are rigorously vetted, the Victorian Brumby Association struggles with the fact that culled Brumbies are made available to anyone on an ad-hoc basis. While the Association has been successful in negotiating with the park so that culled horses are no longer put through the sales, as the park managers "acknowledge that it is a terrible thing to do to a wild horse," the park now "gets stuck between a rock and a hard place, because if they don't make the Brumbies available to the general public then the general public jump up and down and say 'you are sending them all to certain death, and we want to take them' - but then if they do they often fall into the hands of the wrong people."

Colleen's guess is that Kozi and Red were among the weanlings that ended up being taken in by such a person, who then "wouldn't have wasted more than five minutes on them - that would be the



Red at the Saleyards



Anne with Kozi

attitude. Those sales at Echuca are primary knackery sales. If you put a horse through them you really are showing a total lack of regard. So it would have been someone who couldn't make a quick buck, and thought, 'oh, I'll run them through the sales.' And it's a terrible, terrible thing."

Anne Young, who is well aware of the dirty politics of the horse sale-yards, believes that the person who put Kozi and Red through the sales acquired them through dubious means, as "he had a whole paddock of young Brumbies, and what is happening is that he is branding the horses and then claiming that they are Quarter horses instead." When a friend of Anne's first spotted Kozi - then a frightened seven month old - at the Echuca sales, she had no idea what to do with the foal but nevertheless bid against the "dogger", and bought the foal for ninety Australian dollars. Anne took him in, and when another Brumby weanling turned up at the sales Anne had a big decision to make: "There was no question about wanting to save the horse, but I was thinking maybe the more we buy the more we encourage this unscrupulous selling."

In the end, Anne bid for the Brumby, and brought little Red home. Just like Kozi a few weeks earlier, Red arrived skinny and terrified, and had to slowly get used to being handled. Since then both the Brumbies are happy to be led and handled, have had their hooves done by the farrier and have even been gelded and handled by the vet, and despite their shaky start in life are now thriving. "Of all the horses I've got, these are the two I would like to keep," states Anne, who has found Kozi and Red to be "absolutely divine. And although they are still a bit unsure of the world, they are such sweet horses."

Colleen O'Brien reiterates this special quality of the Brumby horses, and wishes that more people in Australia could realise their potential: "As you guys would know from the Kaimanawas, wild horses are what all horses should be like - they are well socialised, they are sane and sound." Too often media attention in Australia has focused on the perception of the

Brumbies as being pests who wreck the natural environment that they live in. "The Brumbies are classified as a pest animal - so that's a real battle. And we have some quite extreme strong green groups here, who are putting out study after study, 'saying brumbies are doing this, brumbies are doing that,' some of which are quite flawed." The need to have public awareness of the issues is imperative, as park management of the horses is very dependent on public involvement. "One of the things we found is that whether there is a good programme very much depends on the locals," states Colleen. "Where the locals don't advocate for the horses, they are much more likely to be disposed of more brutally."

The studies that the Victorian Brumby Association would like the public to be more aware of include a recent study in Kosciuszko from one area where the Association has been working with the Brumbies, and where the study shows that the environment is actually improving. Other public awareness campaigns have included "the kind of challenge that the Kaimanawa guys are running at the moment. We ran one like that last year, and we are in the planning stages for another one, and that was super, to be able to put 8 year olds and 12 year olds and 14 year olds through a challenge like that, where someone could just show how good the brumbies are, because you get the prevailing assumptions 'they are inbred, and they are useless, they are wild, and they can't be trained,' so we work really hard to get positive publicity for them."

The ultimate aim of the Victorian Brumby Association echoes that of the Horse Shepherd Equine Sanctuary - for horses to be treated humanely and to live a safe and healthy life, whether they are within the vast countryside of Australia's national parks, or in someone's paddock. For the two resilient Kosciuszko Brumbies Kozi and Red, this means that their long journey from the wild Alpine ecosystem to the more sedate farmland of Ballarat has been worth it, and while their journey into adulthood is only just beginning, for these two there is now hope for a brighter future as every day they become happier with their new horse - and human - family at Horse Shepherd Equine Sanctuary.

Tanya Allport

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Tanya Allport is an Auckland based freelance writer, who loves writing about horses and their stories. Visit Tanya at www.livingwritingreading.com

To find out more about the Horse Shepherd Equine Sanctuary and the Victorian Brumby Association got to:

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