

## **POLISH KONIK HORSE – CHARACTERISTICS AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF NATIVE DESCENDANTS OF TARPAN**

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**Abstract.** The year 2014 marks the round anniversary of 100 years of the pioneering constitution type research on the native Polish horse breed – Polish Konik, which was initiated by two eminent hippologists – Jan Grabowski and Stanisław Schuch. Genetically and environmentally, the breed is extremely valuable not only because of their primitive traits, which these horses inherited from their direct ancestors – the tarpan horses, but mainly due to the fact that in a natural world, the Polish Konik horses, next to the Przewalski horse, represent, for the representatives of the *Equus caballus*, an invaluable genetic reserve of the primitive biological features, especially those related to longevity and health. The purpose of this study was the characterization of the Polish Konik horses, giving a broad outline of their diverse usability to the wider group of readers outside Poland and bringing attention to the accuracy and reasonable necessity to protect this breed that is priceless to the natural world.

**Key words:** history, native horse breed, Poland, Polish Konik, Tarpan

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Characteristics of the Polish Konik horse breed**

The Polish Konik horse is the primitive horse breed originating directly from the tarpans. Breeding these horses is as ethnically Polish, and their official registration falls in the second half of the twentieth century (in 1955, a Polish registry of the Polish Konik horses was issued, and in 1962 the first volume of the stud – book for the breed) [Jaworski 2003, Jaworski and Jaszczynska 2004, Jezierski and Jaworski 2008, Jezierski et al. 2008, Pasicka 2010].

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The Polish Konik horses are a valuable genetic reserve, due to inherited from the tarpans, unique characteristics of the constitution type and unique abilities to adapt to environmental changes, which are unknown in other horse breeds. With these skills, they are able to survive even in extremely difficult conditions of existence, which mobilise their organisms [Kownacki 1984, Jaworski 2003, Pasicka 2010].

Breeding the Polish Konik horses is characterised by two different ways of maintaining them. The first system is traditional – keeping them in stable, while in the second system they are maintained in a reservation – like conditions, that is, in conditions similar to the natural ones [Kownacki 1963, Jaworski 2003, Jaworski and Jaszczyńska 2004, Jezierski and Jaworski 2008, Jezierski et al. 2008, Pasicka 2010].

The distinctive feature of the discussed breed is mouse grey coat colour with a stripe along their backs, sometimes with visible brindling on thoracic and pelvic limbs and around the shoulder (Fig. 1). This coat colour may be of different degrees of the white light remission and the tone. The variation in the coat colour in mouse grey horses may be reflected by their adaptation to the environment [Stachurska et al. 2004a], as well as seasonal variations in hair length in this horse breed, which depends on the type of breeding [Kownacki 1962, Stachurska et al. 2006]. At present, worldwide the mouse grey coat colour is a breed feature only in the Polish Konik horses, although it often occurs also in the common trunk of Biłgoraj horses [Stachurska et al. 2004b].

As a distinguishing features of the discussed breed, we can mention their numerous practical advantages associated with their adaptation to local environmental conditions, for example, herd behaviour strongly manifested especially in reserve – reared horses [Jaworowska 1967, Sasimowski et al. 1990, Jaworski 2003, Łuczyńska et al. 2008], modest requirements in terms of their maintenance, rational use of low – quality forage [Pruski and Jaworowska 1963, Jaworski 1999, Jaworski 2003], very good reproductive indicators, strong constitution [Hroboni 1959, Kownacki 1963, Pruski and Jaworowska 1963, Jaworski and Jezierski 2000, Jaworski 2003] and large tractive force in relation to body weight [Grabowski and Schuch 1921, Wrześniowski 1934, Jaworski and Jaszczyńska 2004].

Many years of research carried out by Kownacki [1984] argue that young Polish Konik horses are characterised by large capacity of compensating for growth and development, and in adult horses – of storing fat reserves in periods of abundance of feed, which allows them to survive periods of food shortage in the winter and early spring.

A significant resistance, vitality and longevity of the Polish Konik horses is worth highlighting. Hubalek et al. [2008], on the basis of blood samples collected from 78 Polish Konik horses, demonstrated this breed's resistance to West Nile Virus, which is transmitted by migratory birds, including those living in Poland. Romaniuk and Jaworski [2008a] assessed the breed susceptibility to the extensiveness and intensity of the invasion of chewing lice (*Werneckiella equi*) in approximately one – year old foals, depending on the type of the breeding system. They claimed greater resistance of the horses reared in forest, which were toughened in the natural environment; these horses have natural defence mechanisms: thicker skin, longer and harder hair and, in particular, no tendency to flaking skin. In addition, there have been no cases of a disease or a clear deterioration in the physical fitness of the representatives of this breed, caused by the invasion of the internal parasites. This may result from the immunity, which is natural for this breed of horses (especially in reserve – reared horses), consumption of plants containing substanc-

es that inhibit or eliminate parasites [Jaworski 2003, Jaworski et al. 2003, Romaniuk and Jaworski 2008b]. In addition, the Polish Konik horses reared in the reserve – like system do not have problems with excessive growth of a hoof horn. The diversified diet of the horses reared in the wild has undoubtedly affected the quality of hoof horn, its structure, elasticity and hardness and it affects the growth and breaking of the hoof horn. Lameness associated with possible rupture of hooves are extremely rare [Jaworski 2007].

The fact is that the representatives of this breed can live a long life and mares are characterised by high fertility. An example would be mares from the Popielno reserve: Lalka (21 foals) – lived 33 years, Niwa (20 foals) – lived 29 years, Nuta (21 foals) – lived 27 years, Ożyna (24 foals) – lived 25 years, a nearly a 33 – year old Tarka (25 foals), was a record – holder in terms of prolificacy in the post – war history of the Polish Konik horse. Some of the other mares, especially those reared in the wild also live very long, keeping in good shape and maintaining long reproductive capacity. In the natural conditions, stallions (Hajdamaka 22 year old, Liściak 23 year old, Tulipan 21 year old) live shorter, due to the functions that they are required being to perform as the leaders of the herds. Often, only the constitution type features give evidence of the length of life and the breeding career of these horses [Jaworski 1994, Jaworski et al. 2003, Jaworski and Jezierski 2006, Pasicka 2010].

Since 1984, the Polish Konik horses have been kept pure, and the addition of the blood of other breeds of the horses is impossible [Jaworski 2003].

According to data for 2010, the analysis of the number of national population of the Polish Konik horses showed 150 mares and 40 stallions in state breeding centres and 550 mares and 130 stallions in the field breeding [Jezierski et al. 2012].



Fig. 1. Polish Konik horse (stallion Parwus, male line Wicek) (photo by E. Pasicka)  
Ryc. 1. Konik polski (ogier Parwus, linia męska Wicek) (fot. E. Pasicka)

Considering the number of the Konik horses entered into the 9 volumes of the stud-books, a quantitative increase may be noticed. At the same time, the current national population of the Polish Konik horses is characterised by relatively low genetic diversity, because the increase in the number of the Polish Konik horses is observed only within several lines, while others show a downward trend or stagnation. Currently, in the breeding population, among 35 females lines and 6 male line, only some of them show breeding activity. Among 35 dam lines, 16 are active, and 6 of them demonstrate a clear progression (Liliputka I, Karolka, Zaza, Urszulka, Tarpanka I, Traszka), while 10 of them are characterised by slight growth or stagnation (Tygryska, Popielica, Wola, Białka, Ponętna, Misia II, Dżina I, Tunguska, Bona, Geneza). Currently, the most endangered dam lines are: Bona, Ponętna, Geneza, Białka and Tygryska (Fig. 2). Among the 6 male lines (Liliput (Fig. 3), Wicek, Goraj, Myszak, Chochlik, Glejt I), all demonstrate sufficient breeding activity, the least numerous are the lines represented by stallions: Liliput and Glejt I [Hrobboni et al. 1970, Jaworski 1997, Jaworski 2003, Jaworski and Łuczyńska 2008, Jaworski and Tomczyk-Wrona 2009, Pasicka 2010].

Polish Konik horses are generally regarded as a breed of a similar morphological type, although some authors draw attention to their progressive variation in the type and habit [Pietrzak and Wojciechowski 1992, Pasicka 2010]. Since the Polish Konik horse breeding seeks to maintain the primitive traits, among others, those related to the constitution type, the rules regarding the biometric pattern for that race are strictly adhered to. The biometric standards required for adult horses (4–5 years old) include the height at the withers: 130.0–140.0 cm, minimum chest circumference: 165.0 cm, minimum front cannon bone circumference: 16.5 cm (mares), 17.5 cm (studs) [Jaworski and Jaszczyńska 2004, Jeziński et al. 2012].

Currently, this breed is versatile usable; it is used for recreational riding, hippotherapy and agrotourism [Jaworski 2003, Cieśla 2007, Pluta 2008, 2009, Pasicka 2010, Pasicka and Geringer de Oedenberg 2010, 2012a,b,c].

The Polish Konik horses also perform functions in wildlife conservation, because when reared in the reserve conditions, they do not allow for the excessive succession of certain species of trees and shrubs in open areas. These assets of the Polish Konik horses have been highly appreciated by the British, Belgians, French, Dutch, German, by creating nature reserves, in which these horses participate [Jaworski 2003, Jaworski and Jaszczyńska 2004].

It is worth stressing the fact that the Polish Konik horses, just like Arabian horses are some of the few examples of the influence of the Polish breeding on the foreign breeding. An example would be wild horses from Dülmen in Westphalia (Germany), which were shaped to a large extent under the influence of the Polish horses (Tok – born in 1953 in Białowieża, Nugat – born in 1952 in Grodziec Śląski, Lotnik – born in 1970, in the Racot Horse Stables, Omulek – born in 1989 in Popielno, Nocek – born in 1993 in Popielno, Nowik – born in 1994 in Popielno, Hurmak – born in 1998 in Popielno) imported from Poland [Jeziński and Jaworski 2008].





Fig. 2. Mare Galicja, female line Tygryska (photo by E. Pasicka)

Ryc. 2. Klacz Galicja, linia żeńska Tygryska (fot. E. Pasicka)



Fig. 3. Stallion Nisz, male line Liliput (photo by E. Pasicka)

Ryc. 3. Ogier Nisz, linia męska Liliput (fot. E. Pasicka)

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### Wild horses in Europe

The history of the Polish Konik horses, like all horse breeds, it is not known in detail due to scarce or residual fossil of their ancestors. However, there is a consensus view that the Polish Konik horses, as previously mentioned, are derived from the tarpans (*Equus caballus gmelini*, Antonius) [Pruski 1959, Pruski and Jaworowska 1963, Kownacki 1984].

The name “tarpan” is synonymous with a steppe horse. This is the name for wild horses that once lived in the territory covering the steppes of south – eastern Europe and western Siberia, and from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, they occurred mainly in the plains of the Kherson, Voronezh and Orenburg [Pruski 1960]. Detailed examination of the tarpans, in terms of their origins, was impossible. Only two skulls remained: one of the Kherson tarpan and one of the Crimean tarpan, which, in 1862, were delivered to the zoo in Moscow and in 1884 the skeleton of the Crimean tarpan was handed over by Shatilov [Skorkowski 1974].

According to literature sources, in the eighteenth century the tarpans inhabited the vast steppe and the forested areas of eastern and central Europe [Pruski 1960]. In the wild state the tarpans survived longest in the area around the Białowieża Forest. Approximately in 1780, they were caught and ultimately transported to the wildlife park owned by the Zamoyskis in the village of Zwierzyniec near Biłgoraj. In 1806, they were caught and distributed among local peasants. In this way the final act of domesticating wild horses took place in Poland [Jaworski 1999].

The co – existence of the tarpans in the areas of two different biotopes has resulted in the creation of two hypotheses concerning the origin of the Polish Konik horses. According to Antonius [Kownacki 1989] and many other hippologists, the Polish Konik horses descended from a mouse grey steppe tarpan (*Equus caballus gmelini* Antonius) and, according to Vetulani [Vetulani 1933a,b] they descended from the forest tarpan, which was called by him as a forest subspecies (*Equus caballus gmelini* Antonius form *silvatica* Vetulani).

Vetulani’s hypothesis [Vetulani 1933a] on the separation from the eastern European steppe tarpans a group of the forest tarpans, which lived in the middle of the eighteenth century in Poland, Prussia and Lithuania, was met with approval [Grabowski 1982], as well as criticism by hippologists [Kownacki 1959].

The spreading range of the wild horse of Europe (tarpans) and the wild horse of Asia – the Przewalski’s horse has not been clearly determined. According to Antonius [1933], wild horses, which preserved the primitive traits of the mouse grey tarpan, lived in southern Russia until the mid – nineteenth century. According to Gmelin, the eastern range of the tarpan – type wild horses reached the vicinity of Bobrov in the Voronezh province. According to Pallas, wild horses from Samara belonged to the yellow type, later referred to as the Przewalski’s horse, named after the discoverer. Antonius determined the Volga as the boundary of the occurrence of these two horses. He stated, however, that at the turn of the Palaeolithic and the Mesolithic, the Przewalski’s horse probably existed in various parts of Europe [Antonius 1933].

The views of different hippologists on the origin of the domestic horse have not converged, because in the literature, two theories relating to this topic have been mostly presented: polyphyletic and monophyletic.

According to the polyphyletic theory, the domestic horse could have up to several forms of wild ancestors created yet in the Pleistocene. The proponent of this theory was Rütimayer, who, on the basis of the studies regarding excavation of bone remains of horses from Switzerland found that different domesticated forms of this species must have had individual wild ancestors [Kownacki 1959].

The monophyletic theory concerning the origin of the domestic horses, accepted only one ancestor. The first advocate of this theory was Darwin [Bökönyi 1974]. Also, many other authors dealing with the subject of domesticating horses supported the monophyletic theory, some of them claimed that the domestic horse descended from the tarpan [Gromova 1949, Pruski 1959, 1962], while others additionally accepted an admixture of the blood of the Przewalski horse [Vetulani 1949, Kobryń 1984].

Accepting the Przewalski's horse as the ancestor of both the domestic horse and the tarpan determined their adequate classification in the zoological systematics. The Przewalski's horse is considered a species, while the tarpan and the domestic horse a subspecies [Kubasiewicz 1959, Kobryń 1984].

The problem of the precedence of the wild form of the tarpans or their secondary running wild requires a separate approach. According to one theory, the European ponies – described by the nineteenth – century scientist, Gmelin – inhabiting steppes by the Black Sea, were wild horses [Kownacki 1989].

A different view on the origin of the tarpans was expressed, among others, by Vetulani [Vetulani 1925, 1933a,b, Grabowski 1982] and Zwoliński [1976]. According Vetulani, the tarpans were the primitive form of the horse, which the scientist tried to demonstrate on the basis of craniometric research performed on the fossil material of the tarpan – like horses, and in later years on the basis of research on the skulls of the Polish Konik horses. In addition, Zwoliński [1976] attributed to the tarpans the share in the creation of various breeds of domestic horses: Polish, Balkan, Russian, Lithuanian, and Oriental: Arabian and Persian.

The views of other researchers, travellers and chroniclers on the of Poland's wild horses, were divided. In 1794, Hacquet wrote about Poland's last forest horses, which he had a chance to observe in the wildlife park near Zamość. He described these horses as small, black and brown, with large and bulky heads, with short hair in their manes and tails. Because of their excessive multiplication, some of these horses were shot, while other were sent to Lvov. Apparently, these horses drew attention with the impossibility to curb them and their extraordinary courage [Vetulani 1933b].

In his memoirs dated at the eighteenth/nineteenth century, Koźmian also described the horses from the wildlife park near Zamość. He emphasized the low height of these horses, stocky build, uniform black and mouse grey coat colour and large strength. It appears from the description that these horses were most probably handed over to the local community [Vetulani 1933b, Kownacki 1959, 1984, 1989].

Without a doubt, from the information provided by Hacquet and Koźmian it follows that in the early nineteenth century, in Poland, between Zamość and Biłgoraj, the last stage of the domestication of the European wild forest tarpan took place and that this domestication was through Count Zamoyski's handing over the tarpans from his wildlife park between local peasants [Vetulani 1933b].

According to Pallas, a zoologist from the eighteenth/nineteenth century, the tarpans were feral rather than originally wild and he concluded that based on observations of the

tarpan's behaviour in Russia. Another seventeenth – century scholar, Le Vasseur, noted that the Ukrainian wild horses had problems walking, due to the excessive growth of the hoof horns, thus leading to hoof deformities. In 1874, Czapski, describing Poland's wild horses in the second half of the nineteenth century, pointed out that genuinely wild horses had no problems with growth and deformity of the hoof and this proves that those horses were probably feral domestic horses [Kownacki 1959].

According to Rüniger, the Prussian wild horses were hunted in different locations, mostly because of their skin and meat. The attractiveness of the wild horse as hunting trophy can be proved by the information on the measures undertaken to protect these animals, similar to protection of the aurochs, which was almost completely killed off in that period. The same author mentions a wild herd of horses living near Gniewno, upon River Vistula. Many valuable gifts in the form of wild horses came from the herd. They were given to dukes: Ferdinand I and his son, Archduke Ferdinand, who resided in Prague. This historical fact was to prove that the horses, which were so willingly given to the highest potentates next to elks, European bison and aurochs, could not be feral horses, but something unique, which remained in relation to domestic horses, like a male aurochs relative to domestic cattle. It seems that wild horses must have been important inhabitants of wildlife parks, maintained by the great masters in Malbork and Sztumno, and later by Duke Albrecht of Królewiec [Antonius 1933].

Wild horses also remained in the wildlife park belonging to Lithuanian prince Witold, in Troki near Vilnius [Kownacki 1959, 1984, 1989, Pruski 1959].

The Polish Konik horses were quite common even to the end of the twentieth century and were a significant part of the total horse number of the then peasants; however, they did not raise interest of breeders due to being unfit to work in agriculture [Kownacki 1959, 1984].

Grabowski and Schuch [1921] in their pioneering work on horses from the surrounding area of Biłgoraj, in the most primitive tarpan – like type, described in detail the constitution type features, emphasized short legs on these primitive horses, as well as their small growth, stocky build, dryness and firmness of tissues. They pointed to the coat colour: brownish – grey, mouse – grey, tawny – bay and dark – bay, the strength of these horses proportionately large in relation to body weight, and durability in extreme environmental conditions.

### **Genesis of the Polish Konik horse breed**

The history of breeding the Polish Konik horses is nearly 100 years old and is relatively short in comparison with the origin of the other Polish horse breeds. And despite the fact that the Polish Konik horses have always aroused breeders' interest, primarily because of their direct primary descent from the tarpan horses, the deliberate and thoughtful zoo-technical work on this breed dates back to the first half of the twentieth century [Jaworski and Jaszczyńska 2004].

The Polish Konik horses aroused interest in the wider breeding dimension through constitution type research of the peasants' horses from the area of Biłgoraj, which had been undertaken by two hippologists – Jan Grabowski and Stanisław Schuch in 1914 and published in 1921 [Grabowski and Schuch 1921].

The name of the breed 'Polish Konik horse' was given in 1925 by Prof. Tadeusz Vetulani, and his numerous scientific publications concerning this group of horses irrev-



ably supplanted in the zootechnical literature all previous proposals of the names for this breed [Kownacki 1959, 1984, Żurkowski 1981].

The first attempts of breeding the primitive horses in Poland were undertaken in 1923 at the National Stud in Janów Podlaski and in 1928 the Dworzyszcze Farmstead, belonging to the Liceum Krzemienieckie [Hrobni 1959, Jaworski and Jaszczyńska 2004].

In 1936, on Vetulani's initiative, the first Polish Konik horses reserve was established in the Białowieża Forest in the Gródek forest district, and in July 1937, the right reserve was established in the Zwierzyniec forest superintendence [Jaworski and Jaszczyńska 2004].

The purpose of the establishment of the reserve in the forest was to restore the forest tarpan through natural selection in the semi – wild conditions of existence [Hrobni 1959].

For this purpose, between 1936–1939, 40 horses with their offspring were introduced into the reserve. During the short, i.e. 3.5 years of existence of the reserve in the Białowieża Forest succeeded in breeding the outstanding representatives of the Konik horses. However, as a result of the war activities, most of the plans for reverse breeding aimed at the restoration of the forest tarpan were abandoned. Only 15 horses survived from the Białowieża breeding material, which Vetulani managed to collect. After the war, attempts were taken to resume the experiment of restoring the forest tarpan, but Vetulani's death interrupted the experience. No concept for further breeding resulted in the distribution of the Białowieża Konik horses to secondary forest schools, and the rest remained as a demonstration group in Białowieża, and some were transferred to Popielno [Jaworski and Jaszczyńska 2004].

During the Nazi occupation, several centres of the Polish Konik horse stable breeding were created, among others in Derażne, Volyn (60 mares), Łuka (former province of Tarnopol) (40 mares), in Wacyń near Radom, in Felin near Lublin (6 mares) and in the National Institute of Scientific of Agricultural Cultivation in Pulawy (12 mares) [Hrobni 1959].

After the war, reconstruction of the Polish Konik horse breeding began. The survived material consisted of 15 Konik horses from the Białowieża nature reserve one of the Białowieża, almost the entire number from the stud farm in Pulawy (National Institute of Scientific of Agricultural Cultivation), 7 from the stud farm in Derażne and individual horses from private farmers. Organising a stud farm in Popielno at the end of 1949 made it possible to collect this material in one place. In 1954, at the scientific and breeding conference in Popielno, it was decided to continue the experiment of 1936. However, it was clear that the restoration of the pure – bred tarpan from the extirpated breeding material is practically impossible. Therefore, the actions taken at the said conference were aimed at breeding the descendants of the tarpan – Polish Konik horses (maintaining their ancient type), and for this purpose the two systems for maintaining the Polish Konik horses in the traditional way in stables and in natural reserve conditions were established [Jaworski and Jaszczyńska 2004].

In 1955, on the initiative of Pruski and Hrobni, the stud farm in Popielno was taken over by the Polish Academy of Sciences. In the same year, in Popielno, the interrupted experiment of Prof. Vetulani was resumed and next to the existing stable breeding, which existed from 1949, the rearing of the Polish Konik horses was started in the reserve [Żurkowski 1981].

In addition to Popielno, other reserves, the so – called sanctuaries of the Polish Konik horses were also created in the Polish National Parks: in Zwierzyniec – in the area of the Roztocze National Park (1982), in the “Janowskie Forests” Landscape Park (1986) [Kaproń 1994], in Zielony Ostrow in the area of the “Siedem Wysp” nature reserve near Węgorzewo (1990) [Kot and Płoński 1995], in the Biebrza National Park (2005) and the Polish Konik horses reared under semi – free conditions at the Experimental Station in Stobnica (1980) [Jaworski 1997].

In addition to the Popielno centre, in the 1950s and early 1960s, small stud farms were created, which also began to rear the Polish Konik horses, including in Łozdaj near Kętrzyn, Stubno, Jeżewice (Experimental Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences), Złotniki Experimental Agricultural Station near Poznań. Shortly, most of them were liquidated or reduced breeding, but the breeding material was not lost and was used in the course of creating centres that have survived to this day. In 1970, at the National Stud Farm in Racot, a division of the Polish Konik horses was created in the Kobylniki farm. As a result of the organizational changes in 1995 this division was taken over by the Poznań Plants Breeding Tulce – Kobylniki Branch. Other centres for rearing the Polish Konik horse have been created in the following years: 1979 – Horses Stud in Dobrzyniewo, 1983 – Stallions Herd Sieraków, 1987 – Manieczki State Farm (KPGR-Manieczki) [Jaworski 1997, Jaworski and Jaszczyńska 2004]. The largest private breeding farms are located in Greater Poland, Warmia and Masuria and Lubuskie voivodships [Pasicka 2010].

The breeding material, which survived after World War II and used for the restoration of the Polish Konik horse breed mostly had no background. Only the supervision of the Central Board of Horse Breeding, at the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Polish Horse Breeders Association, allowed the records of the breeding value of the Polish Konik horses based on their pedigree [Jaworski 1997, Jaworski and Jaszczyńska 2004].

The rules for entering into subsequent volumes changed along with increasing numbers and consolidation of the Polish Konik horse breeding. The rules for keeping horse breeding registries in force from 1977 to 1984, assumed keeping the initial registry and the main registry. The initial registry was for mares descending from mothers not entered in the registries, but which met the criteria of type and habit. Therefore, it was an open registry. From 1984 to 1995 the rules continued the division of the registry into the initial registry and the main registry, but only the Konik horses after parents horses entered in the registries of this breed were entered there. The rules from the period of 1996–1999 provided for only one main registry for the Polish Konik horses [Polski Związek Hodowców Koni 2001, Jezierski and Jaworski 2008].

In 1999, the program of conservation breeding of the Polish Konik horses was prepared; it covered non – exhaustive rules for entering the Polish Konik horses into the registry. This Program introduces the possibility for an entry into the registry of only those horses which descended from the parents entered in the main registry, and specifies the requirements for coat colour – it allows only specimens having a mouse grey coat colour with a stripe. The mouse grey coat colour may be from light – to dark mouse grey or dun and mouse grey. In addition, in mares, slight white markings on the head are acceptable. Unlike the previous rules, the breeding program specified the requirements for the Polish Konik horses for their usability testing [Jaworski 1997, Polski Związek Hodowców Koni 2001, Jaworski and Jaszczyńska 2004, Jezierski and Jaworski 2008].

Proposals relating to the protection of the native Polish Konik horse breed are currently in force in their modernised and extended form in the Program of Conservative Breeding for the Polish Konik Horses of 1999, Breeding Programme for the Protection of Genetic Resources of the Polish Konik Horses of 2004 and the Polish Stud Book for the Polish Konik Horses of 2012 [Jaworski and Jaszczyńska 2004, Jezierski and Jaworski 2008, Jaworski and Tomczyk-Wrona 2009].

## CONCLUSION

In the light of the above examples, which prove the uniqueness of this breed, it is imperative to preserve the Polish Konik horses as a genetic pattern for the future breeding work both in Poland and abroad, as well as to combat the decline in biodiversity within this breed, which is priceless for the nature.

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## KONIK POLSKI – CHARAKTERYSTYKA I RYS HISTORYCZNY RODZIMYCH POTOMKÓW TARPANA

**Streszczenie.** W 2014 roku mija okrągła rocznica 100 lat od pionierskich badań eksterierowych nad rdzennie polską rasą koni – konikami polskimi, które zapoczątkowali dwaj wybitni hipolodzy Jan Grabowski i Stanisław Schuch. Rasa ta jest przyrodniczo i genetycznie niezwykle cenna nie tylko ze względu na pierwotne cechy użytkowe, które konie te odziedziczyły po swych bezpośrednich przodkach – tarpanach, ale przede wszystkim z uwagi na fakt, że w świecie przyrody koniki polskie, obok konia Przewalskiego, stanowią, dla przedstawicieli gatunku *Equus caballus*, bezcenną rezerwę genetyczną pierwotnych cech biologicznych, związanych z długowiecznością i zdrowotnością. Celami niniejszej pracy były charakterystyka koników polskich, przybliżenie ich rozmaitych walorów szerszej grupie czytelników, poza Polską, i zwrócenie uwagi na słuszność oraz uzasadnioną konieczność ochrony tej bezcennej dla świata przyrody rasy koni.

**Słowa kluczowe:** historia, rodzima rasa koni, Polska, konik polski, tarpan

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