



By Jane K. Greenwood

Windcross Conservancy is a multi-faceted 501c3 non-profit corporation organized to preserve the **American Heritage Horse**.

You may be wondering, "What is an American Heritage Horse?" The American Heritage Horse is an American horse of historical Iberian descent, sometimes called a **Spanish Mustang or Colonial Spanish horse**. Because of the confusion between the mustangs of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the rare Spanish Mustang, politics among some Spanish Mustang registries and a need for stricter guidelines to insure type, a new name has been given to these rare foundation horses of Iberian or Spanish descent. Windcross Conservancy strives to provide a refuge for this living piece of American History - the American Heritage Horse. They also provide guidance and support for the American Heritage Horse Association, as well as preservation and educational programs. Just as important is the support they give to their breeders.

Unlike the other Colonial Spanish registries, the American Heritage Horse Association (AHHA) works in partnership with the University of Kentucky to DNA

www.applesnoats.com

record all registered horses. Besides fail-proof identification if needed, this assists the two preservation projects of Windcross Conservancy: The Spanish LP Project and the American Sorraia Horse Project.

Because the American Heritage Horse Association has a large number of horses with the appaloosa color pattern, the Spanish LP Project works in close conjunction with The Appaloosa Project, which is an international collaborative effort by scientists interested in unraveling the mysteries of pigmentation in the horse. The goal of the project is to identify and isolate the main genes responsible for Appaloosa patterning, and to investigate key physical traits associated with these genes. The Iberian appaloosa pattern was the foundation of today's modern Appaloosa breed.

The American Sorraia Horse project contains Spanish Mustangs that are the rarest of the rare, horses containing a very special genetic history. The American Sorraia Horses are the proven genetic descendants of the endangered Sorraia Horse of Portugal. There may be less than 200 surviving Sorraia Horses in the world today, most of them found in Portugal. There are only about twice that number of

documented American Sorraia Horses living today. The goal of the American Sorraia Mustang Project is to preserve both the genotype and phenotype of the Sorraia Horse of Portugal.

There's a saying in the horse world - *You don't ride the color* - but often color is a big factor in many people's choice of a mount. Great horses already come in all colors, so why create a conservancy to preserve colors that can already be found in many other breeds? The Windcross Conservancy and the American Heritage Horse Association are preserving a breed of horse already listed as "endangered" by the American Livestock Breed Conservancy (a nonprofit membership organization working to protect over 150 breeds of livestock and poultry from extinction. <http://www.albc-usa.org/> . According to their web site: "The Colonial Spanish horse is a group of closely related breeds that descend from horses brought by Spanish explorers and colonists to the Americas, beginning in the 1500s. Horses were an integral part of Spanish success in the New World, and both domestic and feral stocks spread far and wide. For centuries, Spanish horses were the

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most common type of horse throughout the Southeast and all of the regions west of the Mississippi. Beginning in the mid- to late 1800s, however, almost all Spanish stocks were crossbred with or replaced by horses of larger size, including Thoroughbreds, other riding horse breeds, and draft horses. Ubiquitous in 1750 and 1850, the pure Spanish horse in North America was almost extinct by 1950. So the American Heritage Horse is an important part of America's history and on that basis alone deserves to be preserved for future generations.

The AHHA LP project accepts registered Colonial Spanish horses that display LP characteristics and meet the conformation criteria of the AHHA. The horse must display, at birth, at least three of the recognized LP characteristics:

- white sclera
- striped or amber feet on dark legs
- mottled skin on genital area and or on the face
- spotted blanket with varying degrees of white expression

- snowflake pattern (usually two years of age or older)
- LP roan with bony protrusion holding their base color
- Snowcaps or near Few Spots having no spots within large blankets of dense white

Like its Portuguese cousin, the American Sorraia Horse is a slim, leggy horse with a long elegant Iberian head, expressive deep set eyes, and a clean throat latch. They are always dun or grulla, with no red dun accepted. Most striking are their primitive markings which they can have any number of: a dorsal stripe, leg and shoulder barring, brindling as well as some facial webbing. These horses have excellent bone, feet and gaits. The American Sorraia pheno-type Spanish Mustangs that are within this project are the proven genetic descendants. With the aid of the Windcross Conservancy, the American Sorraia Horse Project has begun to locate, preserve, and protect the few remaining American Sorraia Horses in the world today.

Education is also an important part of the Windcross mission. Several conformation clinics are held during the year at various locations across the country. These three-day clinics focus on the differences between the Colonial Spanish horses and horses of varying breeds. For example, *what makes an AHHA horse different from its Peruvian Paso cousin, or the Quarter Horse?* Conformation is just part of what makes these horses so different. Personality, great heart, physical strength and mental acuity all are part of what make the American Heritage Horse the unique horse it is today.

For more information on the Windcross Conservancy and the American Heritage Horse please visit their web site at www.sorraiamustangs.org

Photo, Below: Shelby plays with a little American Heritage Horse and part of the LP project. He's gone to Virginia to be a stallion for the project.

Horses involved in the LP project are the appaloosas; the Sorraia project horses are the duns (please see the top ad, at right).

All Photos by Lucia Roda

