

Australian Brumby Research Unit

February 2011 Newsletter



Our team has just completed another journey to the desert of central Australia. We spent almost three weeks on the road - driving from Victoria, through South Australia and finally arriving in the Northern Territory Outback. We started in Melbourne following The Functional Hoof Australian Conference www.thefunctionalhoof.com and continued along the Great Ocean Road to Adelaide. From Adelaide we drove north to Flinders Ranges and picturesque Wilpena Pound. As the Oodnadatta Track to Lake Ayre was closed due to recent rain, we took the Stuart Hwy to Cobber Pedy and continued to our final destination: Kings Creek Station.

We were in search of harsh and remote Australian outback landscapes and were seeking interaction with the stunningly beautiful wilderness Australia has to offer. We wanted to experience the land in its best condition in decades. Since our last visit in June 2010, the desert received approximately 500mm of rain (double the yearly average). We wanted to witness the transformation from an arid to lush landscape ourselves.



Our international group consisted of Tone Wien (Norwegian veterinarian), Tuomas Kauko (Finnish farrier), Jo Shannon (Australian

veterinarian and psychiatrist) and Wynne Collins (American researcher, now based at The University of Queensland). We covered huge distances in the first week of the trip and camped each evening in a quiet and picturesque location. The group mastered the outback style of sleeping in swags for the whole duration of the trip!



Each morning we woke to different surroundings: partially dried creek beds, moon-like landscapes, salt lakes beside the car and red desert sand dunes overgrown by mulga shrubs. The changing landscape reminded us that we were getting closer to our final destination: the

red centre. A bush breakfast consisted of damper and proper Norwegian style coffee prepared by Tone. We spent exciting days at cool water holes in the desert and glorious nights gathering around glowing campfires, feasting on Australian tucker cooked in the camp oven beside an open fire.



The desert welcomed us with an abundance of colors: red, blue and green. The green hasn't been seen here for a long time. All temporary water holes and creeks were full and each location was vibrant with life. Feral bulls were big and heavy and didn't seem worry about the approaching 4WD. They seemed to switch to a lazy, stagnant mode of living. Feral camels walked slowly through green desert "paddocks", not resembling the earlier dusty semi-arid landscape. And the main reason of our trip - the wild horses; happily grazing in lush green pastures. The horses were many, with fat bellies and shining coats.



This year our study area is full of life and abundant in resources. Life for the feral animals is at its peak! It was a great opportunity for our research team to experience the change and reflect on the "bad times" of the recently broken drought. We enjoyed sharing our knowledge about the characteristics of the observed species,

each so well adapted to one of Australia's harshest environments.



This trip was also dedicated to the new research project which is determining the foaling rate of feral horses in the study area. We will perform observations and collect footage to determine harem band structure, number of foals born this foaling season and horses body condition. Watching wildlife is a challenging task and recording observations on video even harder. However we are optimistic to collect sufficient data for the project. We are planning of conducting observations several times this year to complete the "mark-recapture" study on this year foaling season. The full scope of the research project was released in ABRU December Newsletter. More about our recent findings will be published in the [ABRU March Newsletter](#). Magdalena can be contacted directly at m.zabek@uq.edu.au.



The March Brumby Safaris trip is already booked by the group from Sweden. We are going to take them to the places we visited in February as well as new locations around the desert. It is never a dull moment with the ABRU team! If you have enquiries or want to book a Brumby Safari tour, please contact us via email: us@brumbysafaris.com.



Our adventure-seeking guests took every opportunity to photograph wildlife. Their SIM cards were full of images of wild horses and camels, as well as kangaroos, lizards, birds and emus.



For the action seekers we held the usual brumby handling sessions. We spent a few days working with two brumby stallions and 4 mares which arrived at Kings Creek Station a couple of weeks earlier. It was a great opportunity to experience horsemanship at its best. Tuomas developed a great relationship with the young grey stallion, which was ridden on the second day and by the third day followed Tuomas everywhere. Magdalena worked with 12yo buckskin stallion and after a few sessions was riding him bareback.



On the last day we took a more "touristy" approach. We said goodbye to the horses and traveled to Uluru (Ayers Rock) seeking some great photographs in the shade of one of its water holes. It rained the day before and we were not disappointed!



ABRU and Brumby Safaris team