

THE ROLE OF THE HORSE IN EUROPE

Editorial

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The horse has a unique place in European society. Historically, it has played a major part in shaping political and agricultural advances. Today, the horse has diverse roles ranging from the companion and leisure horse, to the sporting athlete. The horse continues to work on the land in many European countries, it serves in the police and the armed forces, and in some regions is a source of food. This has resulted in a vast range of horse-human interactions and relationships. Despite the long association between man and the horse we still have a great deal to learn about their behaviour and the constraints that domestication has placed on them. The WALTHAM Symposium on "The Role of the Horse in Europe", organized in association with the Anthrozoology Institute at the University of Southampton, brought together researchers involved in the study of equine behaviour management and horse-human interactions to present some of their recent work and to identify fruitful areas for future research. In addition to the main programme papers, the Symposium also featured a series of poster presentations on a range of topics including the evolution and domestication of horses; their husbandry, behaviour and welfare; and the role of the horse in modern society. The horse industry, and indeed, equine research, appears to be very fragmented by both discipline and country; and European collaboration provides a greater research potential than exists within countries or disciplines. The WALTHAM Symposium was successful, not only in highlighting common areas of interest, but also in revealing gaps in our knowledge where the paucity of information stands a barrier to the advancement of the equine industry, as a whole, across Europe.