



## ***News Release***

11 April 2014

### **HACKNEY HORSE SOCIETY HONOURED BY ROYAL BOOST FOR EQUINE CONSERVATION PROJECT**



A project to ensure the conservation of Britain's native breeds of horses and ponies has received a boost with a donation from The Prince of Wales's Charitable Foundation. In his role as President of the Hackney Horse Society (HHS), His Royal Highness has made a donation to the £1.5 million Equine Gene Bank appeal which has been launched by the Rare Breeds Survival Trust (RBST) of which HRH is Patron.

The donation was announced at a special reception hosted by The Prince of Wales at Highgrove House for the Hackney Horse Society as a 'thank you' to members and supporters of the Society whose efforts are dedicated to promoting and maintaining the breed. The HHS says: "His Royal Highness is a great supporter of the Hackney breed and we were extremely honoured by his gracious invitation to Highgrove. It was when we explained to His Royal Highness that we are facing a crisis in the decline in the numbers of pure-bred registered Hackneys, and the steps being taken by ourselves and RBST to ensure that all of the UK's native breeds will survive into the future, that he made this most wonderful donation. He was surprised by how rare the Hackney has become and is extremely supportive of the Gene Bank project."

The HHS adds: "The Hackney Horse Society has always felt there was a need for all the equine rare breeds on the RBST Watchlist to work together in the cause of conservation and to promote the outstanding qualities of the UK's traditional breeds. To this end, we pioneered the Rare Breeds of

the Year Show incorporating our own Championships which are supported by both the Horserace Betting Levy Board and RBST. This will be taking place this year on 4<sup>th</sup> October at the prestigious Houghton Hall Equestrian Centre.”

RBST is the charity that works to ensure the survival of the UK’s native farm livestock and equines. Figures revealed with the publication of the 2014 RBST Watchlist, which monitors the numbers of breeding animals, showed that there is a decline in numbers across all of its equine breeds. Much of this can be explained by the current oversupply of horses in general, which equine charities have described as leading to a welfare crisis.

RBST CEO Tom Beeston explains: “As a national charity, we cannot ethically encourage widespread breeding which could add to the over-population, but we must find a way of ensuring that important genetics survive for the future. We can do that by preserving these genetics, in the form of frozen semen, in our Gene Bank.”

RBST has plans to store semen from at least 25 stallions which are as unrelated as possible, representing each breed within its Watchlist in its Gene Bank over the next decade. Tom Beeston explains: “Ideally, we should collect from a number of stallions from each Watchlist breed every year for the next few years to obtain a spread of genetic diversity within a breed over time. To do this, we need to fund not only the semen collections but also the resources to manage them. We have, therefore, launched this new £1.5 million appeal in conjunction with the Hackney Horse Society and the donation by His Royal Highness's Charitable Foundation will be earmarked for collection from Hackney stallions selected by the Society.”

Cost of collection per stallion averages £5,000. RBST works closely with breed societies to select appropriate stallions for the Gene Bank and relies heavily on the generosity of stallion owners allowing their horses to be used for collection. The Gene Bank currently contains semen from approximately 50 stallions representing 12 breeds.

The Hackney horse and pony, Cleveland Bay and Suffolk horses and the Eriskay pony are in the ‘critical’ category on the RBST Watchlist, each with fewer than 300 registered breeding females. Other breeds on the Watchlist, and therefore considered in danger of being lost, are Dales, Exmoor, Dartmoor, Fell, Highland and New Forest ponies as well as Clydesdale and Shire horses.

## **Ends**

***Caption:*** *His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales, Roger Bass Chairman of the Hackney Horse Society, and obviously Tom Beeston CEO of the Rare Breeds Survival Trust.*

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## **Note to Editors**

**HHS**

1. For further details contact Dawn Hicketts on 01985 840717 or email [dawn@hackney-horse.org.uk](mailto:dawn@hackney-horse.org.uk)
2. HHS is a registered charity no.208905. It is the Mother Stud Book of the Hackney Horse and Pony having a Daughter Stud Book in the Netherlands .
3. The Hackney Horse Society promotes the breed through its Annual National Breed Show, affiliated classes throughout Great Britain which culminates in the Championships. We also maintain the Studbook and promote the breeding of quality animals via the premium scheme.
4. HHS receives no government funding to meet its costs. It depends on the support of its members and donations.
5. Information on the Hackney Horse Society can be found at: <http://www.hackney-horse.org.uk>

## **RBST**

1. For further details contact Linda Trotman on 01564 742731 or email [linda.trotman@btinternet.com](mailto:linda.trotman@btinternet.com)
2. RBST is a registered charity no.269442. It was established in 1973 as the world's first national charity for the conservation of farm animal genetic resources to protect the UK's native farm animal breeds from extinction. During the first seven decades of the 1900's, 26 native breeds of livestock became extinct in Britain. Since the formation of the RBST no native breeds have been lost.
3. To carry out its conservation work RBST maintains the RBST National Gene Bank, develops breeding conservation programmes, works with breed societies and advises Governments. It also promotes the important role native breeds play in the conservation of genetic diversity, landscape management, agriculture and as part of our heritage.
4. The annual RBST Watchlist monitors the registered adult breeding female numbers and vulnerability of over 90 native breeds. Population genetics and trends in breed density and distribution are also facts included in the assessment of breed endangerment.
5. RBST receives no government funding to meet its costs of around £600,000 a year. It depends on the support of its 6,000 members and donations from the public, companies and trusts.
6. Information on the Rare Breeds Survival Trust can be found at: <http://www.rbst.org.uk> and the watchlist can be found at <https://www.rbst.org.uk/rare-breeds-watchlist>