

Research conducted by the WULS Division of Horse Breeding on Polish Konik horses kept in a reserve in Biebrza National Park

Summary

The research conducted by the WULS Division of Horse Breeding in the Polish Konik Preservation Breeding Centre of Biebrza National Park focused on the behaviour, body condition, forage base and parasitological status of the horses. Analysis of the influence of two management systems – free-range and limited-area enclosures – on the behaviour of the horses showed that they tend to maintain a constant pattern of basic behavioural displays. Temperature was found to influence the herd's behaviour. The factor that had the greatest impact on the horses' body condition was the air temperature within 3 months prior to the assessment ($P \leq 0.01$). It is difficult to unequivocally assess the role of Polish Konik horses in the prevention of ecological succession. Horse foraging in the area may have a stabilizing role for purple moor-grass meadows, but mowing is necessary to maintain this ecologically valuable plant community.

KEY WORDS: Konik Polski horses, free-ranging, Biebrza National Park