

Length of life and reproduction in Polish Konik mares from the PAN reserve in Popielno

Summary

An important factor in the assessment of breeding performance is the length of life of the parent individuals. With respect to horses, with issue has yet to be fully elucidated. We are not able to specify precisely how long horses live because this is usually decided by people, who do not allow them to survive to a natural (physiological) death. In the Polish Konik reserve breeding system, mares live in the reserve until their death, which may be due to accident or disease, but is most often a natural death. Due to the continual presence of a stallion, they are able to fully realize their reproductive potential. Polish Konik horses have been bred in the PAN reserve in Popielno for 60 years. Among 75 mares qualified as dams, 17 lived at least 20 years, and three of these – Lalka (1952), Tarka (1963) and Trawa (1969) lived to the age of 33 years. The mare Naroczanka (1982) died in the reserve at the age of 32 years. The average age of death among the 17 mares analysed is 25.5 years. They gave birth for the first time at the age of about 3 years, and for the last time at about 23 years. During this time each of them gave birth to 18.3 foals on average and reared 17.1, with the following mean reproductive indicators: pregnancy rate – 91.3%, fertility – 89.9% and prolificacy – 83.8%. These high indicators confirm the widespread opinion that the reserve system of breeding Polish Konik horses is favourable to their longevity and reproduction. At the same time it makes it possible to determine the potential physiological length of life and reproduction in horses of this breed kept in natural conditions.

KEY WORDS: Polish Konik, reserve breeding, length of life, reproductive indicators