



News about the Rhodian horse

Sometime ago, another foal of the Rhodes breed was born at the installations of «Faethon», the Association for the protection of the small horse (pony) of Rhodes. «Amaltheia» welcomes the success of the Faethon's members and thinks that the Ministry of Rural Development & Food should consider and sustain their efforts, by recognising the Rhodian horse breed as «autochthonous» and «at risk of extinction», in order to achieve the correspondent benefits that are contemplated by the greek and european legislation.

The Rhodian small horse (pony in English) is an integral part of the local cultural heritage of the island. It has been already recorded from Italian agronomists (Manetti 1921, Vezzani, 1929, Colombi 1936) during the italian occupation period of the Dodecanese islands. It is to note that formerly, in Lesbos island, there was a similar breed of small horses that were called «Midilides», and possibly disappeared in the 20th century. Vezzani and Colombi were the firsts who pointed out the phenotypical resemblance between the small horses of Lesbos and Rhodes. Professor Marco Masseti, of the University of Florence, in his writing that was published in 2002, with the title «Uomini e (non solo) topi-Gli animali domestici e la fauna antropocora» (free translated: the people, the domestic animals and the fauna that cohabit with the human presence), considers that the mutual ancestor of the small horse of the greek island regions (of Skyros, Lesbos, Rhodes etc.) is the Aegean small bay horse, which migrated in the balkan peninsula during the bronze age possibly from Asia minor and central Anatolia.

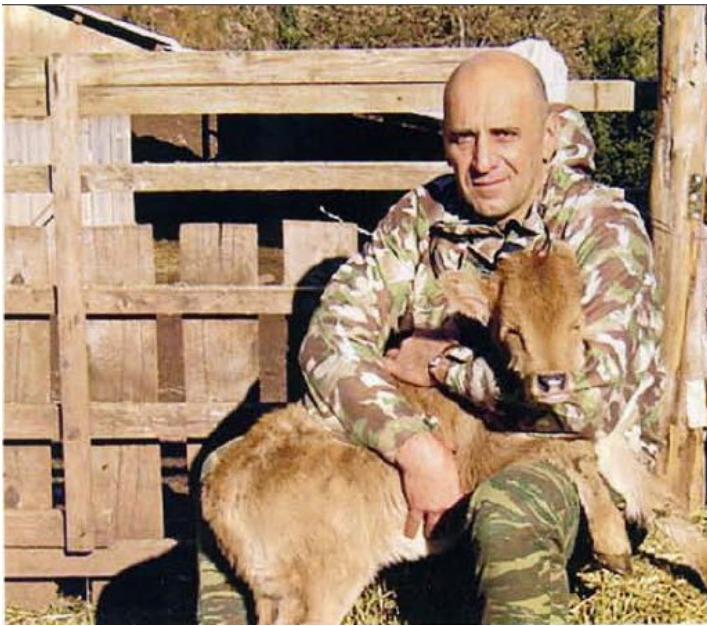


During the after war period, the greek society didn't care much to save this breed, with the result that the population of the Rhodian horse reduced dramatically in the sixties. In order to avoid the extinction of the last stray horses that were surviving in the Archangelos mountains of Rhodes, some residents of the district, with environmental and animal welfare consciousness, founded Faethon in 2001. Their members gathered the remaining Rhodian horses, took care of them and offered them shelter at the installations of the association. At the same time they created a genealogical book of the breed in collaboration with the Genetical Immunology Department of the British Foundation «Animal Health Trust», based in Newmarket, England. Additionally «Faethon» created, alongside to the horse stables, a space to welcome the visitors.



In this way, the small horses revealed to be an attraction for the tourists as well as for the islanders. In the same time, students from all over Greece have the chance to know the small horses closely, as part of their environmental education. In this way «Faethon» promoted a model of agrotourism, in order to save and highlight the rare autochthonous breed of the Rhodian horse.

Kostas Papaioannou
President of «Amaltheia»



The Greek horse's breeds The Rhodian Horse

The small horse of Rhodes has a parallel life to the Skyrian horse since both belong to the same family. The Rhodian small horse started to differentiate at times when it came under sovereignty of the Franks in 1309 A.D., until the liberation of the island in 1948. The Italians appreciated the particular characteristics and abilities of the small horse, by actively integrating it in local events. The small horse is cited in several studies of the Italian Agricultural Ministry, at the beginning of the 20th century. It had stables specially configured to its size in the Italian headquarters that still exist. The kids of Italian officers were taught riding and were taking part in the military parades. After the liberation, the horse was written out, their population shrank and finally it was relegated to the barren mountains of the island. The association "Phaeton", managed to gather the last small horses of Archangelos. Nowadays the population of the Rhodian horse numbers only of 8 animals.

Nikos Kostaras

My favourite profession

We asked Mr. Achilleas Tsaprailis, living in Argitheia in the southern Pindos mountains, how come that he tried so many jobs and finally his choice was animal husbandry

And he answered: My previous job was shipping agent dealing with sea transport. Another job I did was import and trading of spirits. I had studied programming and computer analysis, I was involved in the technical training and I had studied as aircraft engineer.

I decided to dedicate myself to the animal husbandry in an alternative traditional way, but I would have never worked with intensive farming. I chose local animals, because I think that each breed, which is adapted to a certain location, can produce better. I think that nature is the beginning and the greatness. These animals belong to this natural environment and should tie altogether.

They are: Greek shorthorn cattle, black pigs, Thessalian horses, Greek shepherd dogs, Skopelos goats.

Animals that seemingly may not be effective because they are small sized, but they are much more economical and frugal. They can move easily in a difficult environment like the one where I live. They exploit at the most, what the nature offers, thus the period that I have to feed them is reduced, as well as the quantity of food. Their products are superior to imported ones. Animals that are fed from the nature cannot produce the same as animals that are tied, closed in stables and eat various protein rich feed such as genetically modified soy etc. There I aim: to deliver absolutely a quality product, not quantitative.

There are many difficulties. But the biggest one is the state. For example, to keep the road open during wintertime in such a region, you need the municipality, the prefecture....Beyond, in this land, to succeed to be regarded as a breeder, to get the license to install stables etc., is terribly hard. It took me 4 years; incredible bureaucracy. The products of course should be supported because they are quality products, and they are greek, in times of crisis....Beyond this, a change in mentality is needed, from breeders, from the responsible authorities and of course from the common consumer, who lacks of information. Possibly these products could be even exported. My last professional change happened in my forties, I will not do any other change. I hope and I am optimistic, despite the national depression that is reigning. Always, after the storm, the sun comes out.



Animal protection, for all species

At a first glance, some people who deal with the rescue of animal breeds, mainly domestic ones, maybe they just act because they love animals? No. Therefore, "Amaltheia", who is interested to the safeguard of domestic and agricultural endangered breeds, what has it in common with the protection of animals? None!

Disregarding also the fact that between them, there are also horse and dog breeds, even cats, let's stick to the other productive animals and consider the issue, analyzing the regulations and actions of a well-known animal protection association. One example: the GAWF, based in the UK, who is one of the most popular organisations worldwide. In Greece it is active for 50 years as "Animal Action". In the yearly booklet with its activities, it is also mentioned:

a) Equines: "the mobile team of the organization, during 2012, provided the following services to the equines: veterinary education-shoeing therapy-dental care-seminars and educational material deliver of advices to equine owners and other organisations".

b) Birds: “the old type of gage was banned in the entire EU. Despite that, the majority of the greek breeders did not proceed with the necessary changes. We are preparing a network campaign in order to send the message that we choose eggs from free-range breeding farms, a simple action that makes the difference in the life of the egg-laying birds, meanwhile we are in continuous contact with the ministry for this issue”.



c) Cattle: “participation to the european campaign for the improvement of the life of the cows: the health problems of the animals are caused by the lack of care, by the inappropriate stables, by the arduous survival conditions and by the incorrect feed. They cause orthopedic problems, mastitis, infertility, short life expectancy.

d) Pigs: “cooperation with the Agricultural Ministry in order to achieve the 100% application of the directive, to improve the treatment conditions of the pigs and to stop the inhuman castration of the animals without anesthesia, while the sows should be stabled in groups and not relegated in very narrow places where they are forced to total immobility.

Independently from the motivations, life conditions without cruelty are supposed to be obvious and are observed literally in **each free ranging animal breeding unit; and the autochthonous animals belong to this category.** “Amaltheia” is struggling to save them, because the deliver healthy products, because they are adapted to their local conditions, because they are valuable, because they represent “historical attestation”, having the ancestors lived and developed here over long time. Something more: since human times, people struggle and sacrifice themselves to keep their strain, their group, their particularity, that has every human group.

With such thoughts, we arrive to the conclusion: the goals may be different, but the result is the same and has a direct relationship to the welfare of the animals. Perhaps then, this will open to the cooperation between “Amaltheia” and the animal protection associations?

Katerina Plassara’



«Amaltheia’s»

Actions

1. Visit to Makronissos to identify the agricultural biodiversity of the island (see above a type of sheep).
2. Visit to Kea to study the extinct local cattle breed and record the local domestic breeds (figure below) present in the island (goats, sheep, donkeys, poultry).
3. Record of the autochthonous cattle in the area of Mt. Olympus.
4. Presentation of Amaltheia organisation at the mountaineering club of Acharnes.
5. Participation at the Zootechnia exhibition 2013 in Thessaloniki.
6. Presentation of the Alopekis dog (small primitive dog) and distribute of printed material to the Zootechnia 2013.
7. Record of domestic animals in the area of Nea Apollonia of Thessaloniki.
8. Start researching local breeds in the island of Lemnos.
9. Research of Alopekis dog in the area of Evros.



“Amaltheia” at the Zootechnia 2013

The 7th Zootechnia Exhibition was presented from the 7th to the 10th of February 2013 in Thessaloniki, showing quite some interest in specialized topics of animal husbandry, zootechnics, veterinary and other. In our country, it is the most important exhibition in these sectors, and the presence of “Amaltheia” is directly linked to it. It did not participate with its own kiosk, but was hosted by the “Skyrian Horse Union”. The attendance of public at the kiosk was great, especially during the last two days. The people who visited the kiosk were informed about the agricultural and domestic animals of Greece. New information details were also given, concerning unknown strains and populations of those animals, thus enriching our collective knowledge and showing, the richness of the country.

The exhibition was also an opportunity to meet close colleagues, being this a rare event, and to make contacts aimed to constructive actions. Present at the kiosk was also the “Community for rescuing and revitalize the Alopekis dog”, an ancient greek race of a small and primeval dog. Of particular importance were the contacts and exchange of knowledge between people who struggle and care for the future of the old greek autochthonous animals, moreover this is the philosophy of “Amaltheia”, to create a network between people with the common aim, to safeguard and preserve the greek agricultural biodiversity. The “autochthonous genetical material is the origin of all the improved breeds and hybrids”. This small phrase shows the priceless value of it. We thank the “Skyrian Horse Union”, the colleagues present, the ones that helped at the kiosk and of course the visitors for whom we were there. We hope to be present also in the 8th Zootechnia Exhibition.

Apostolos Christopoulos
Vasilis Lekkas



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