ForeWord Reviews

Wild Hoofbeats: America's Vanishing Wild Horses
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Horses are seldom seen as wild creatures, only as domestic companions to be bridled and saddled for our own use. The natural life of this majestic animal holds a fascination for equine lovers who desire to see horses thrive in their native habitat rather than conform to human needs in a corral. A comfortable, even posh, enclosure in a climate-controlled environment with a veterinarian-approved diet cannot compare to the elation a stallion experiences when running freely across open terrain. Horses bond with one another, establishing a riveting society with rules and standards that include displays of affection, territorial boundaries, and competition. The gestures of a mare tending to her foal in an open, fertile landscape, or the expression of a stallion staring in stoic outrage behind a chain-link fence communicate the presence of free, intelligent, and emotional creatures.

Few have observed what award-winning photographer Carol Walker has captured in *Wild Hoofbeats: America's Vanishing Wild Horses*. In a striking presentation, Walker chronicles the day-to-day activities of a herd in Adobe Town, Wyoming, until a routine roundup reduces its population. At the Hughes Ranch in Oklahoma and the US Bureau of Land Management (BLM) facility in Rock Springs, Wyoming, Walker focuses her camera on the defeated faces of those confined in holding corrals.

The roundups are a BLM ritual, aimed at managing wild herd populations by relocating the horses. However, as Walker points out, animals are often removed from areas that are not yet approaching overpopulation status; in fact, all wild horses have been removed from 102 of the original 303 designated areas for wild horses.

Not only are the roundups unnecessary, they are dangerous. During these herd-control procedures, the horses are subjected to tremendous stress. Stallions are castrated, and some do not survive their painful ordeal. Equine families with offspring are chased at high speed with helicopters for as many as fifteen grueling miles. Even though care is taken not to separate lactating mares from their foals, wet mares are frequently extracted anyway. Then dependent foals must be bottle-fed on foster ranches, and bonded families are split apart.

Rather than preserving and protecting what remains of America's wild hoofbeats, current

policy, according to Walker, is cruel and irresponsible, overly-responsive to cattle ranching interests, and not supportive of protecting genetically-viable herds.

Carol Walker is a gifted photographer with several decades of experience. Her passion for capturing wildlife on film began when she was a child, and after formal training, she's traveled throughout the world with her camera, immersing herself in nature and portraiture work, including commercial work for the equine industry. Today she has dedicated herself to photographing wild horses along with educating concerned citizens about their plight on public lands in the West. She's pursued herds in Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado, learning about these precious animals by observation.

In this book, Walker introduces particular horses and herds with text and photographs, and follows some individual horses through the roundup and subsequent relocation. She has also done her policy homework, explaining the BLM current and proposed policies, and including the perspectives of other government and university studies.

A part of our natural heritage, these living, breathing, roaming landmarks deserve better treatment than the "politics" of current land management allow. *Wild Hoofbeats* is a profound and beautiful tribute to the wild heartbeats that infuse the American West with vitality.
(December 2008) Julia Ann Charpentier

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