

# WESTERN STYLES

FALL 1993

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PHOTOS & STORIES**

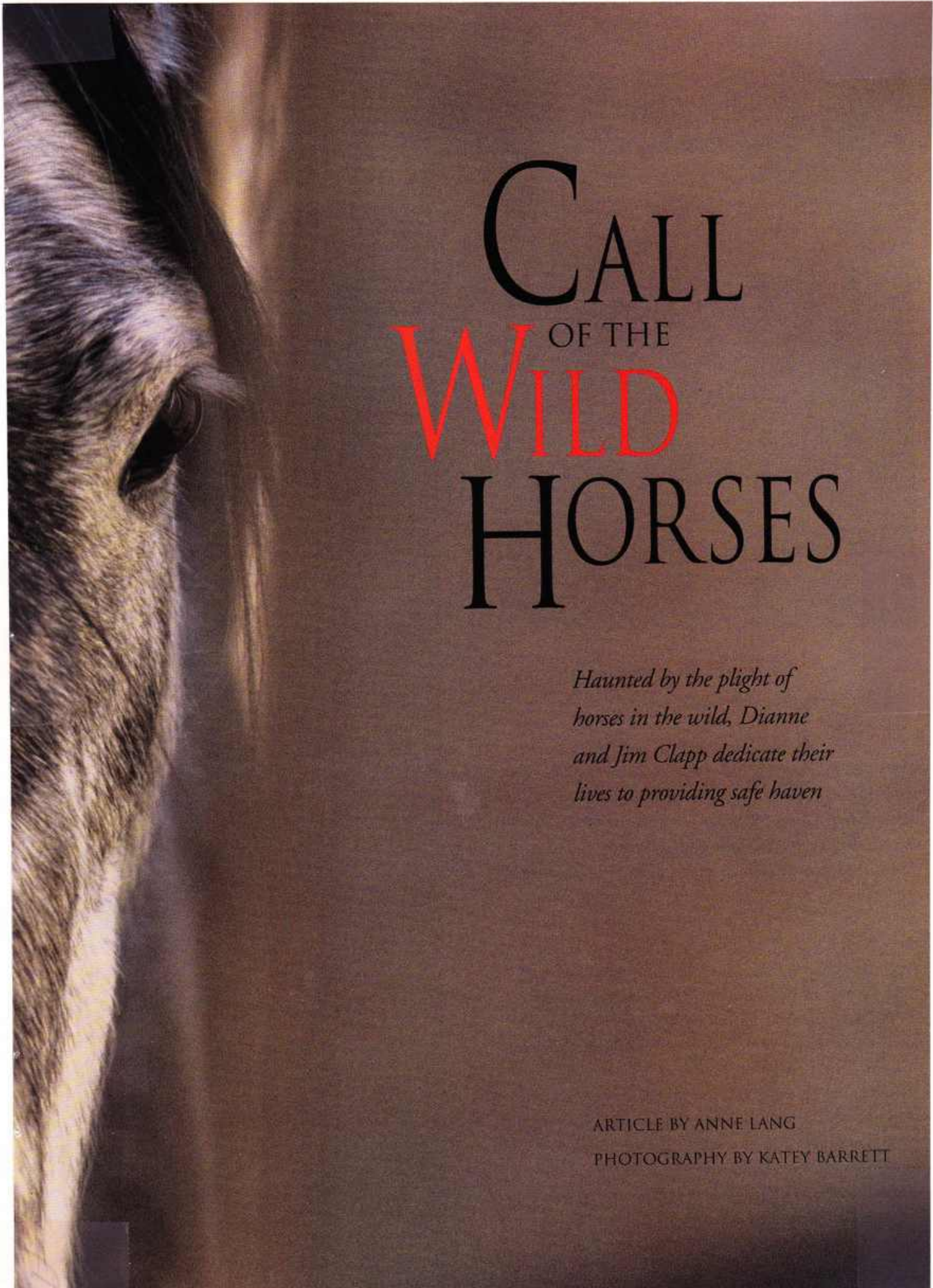
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# CALL OF THE WILD HORSES

*Haunted by the plight of  
horses in the wild, Dianne  
and Jim Clapp dedicate their  
lives to providing safe haven*

ARTICLE BY ANNE LANG

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KATEY BARRETT





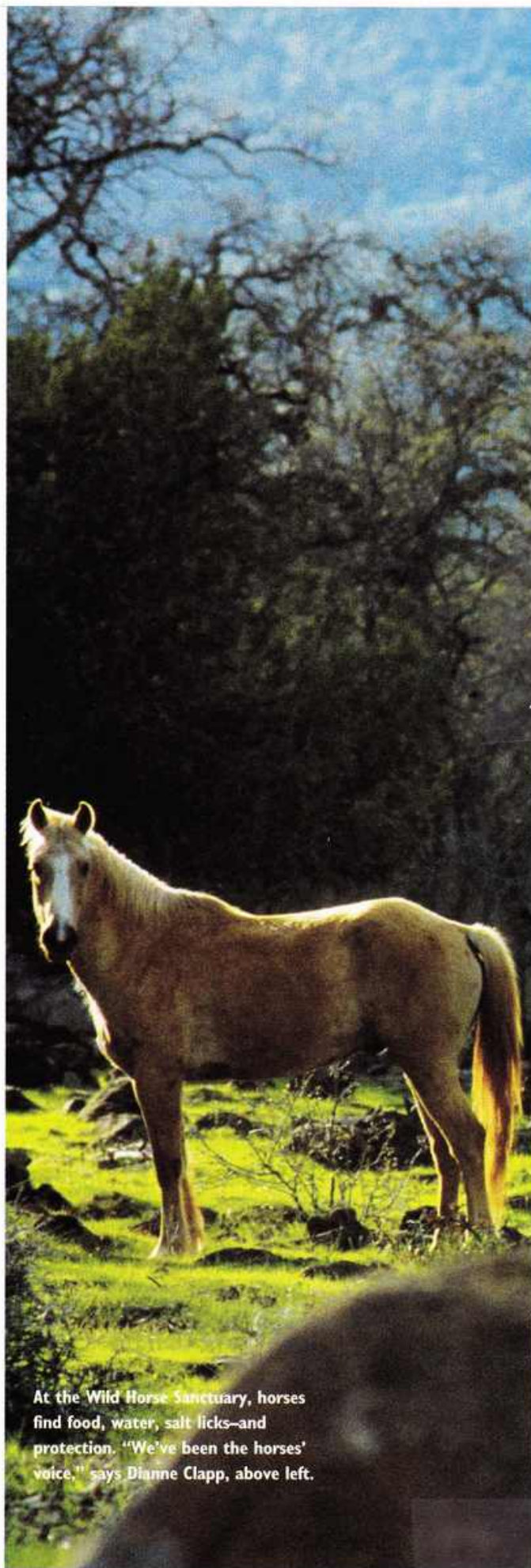
**T**HE CALIFORNIA SUN IS JUST STARTING TO CLIMB OVER the snowcapped peak of nearby Mt. Lassen as Dianne Clapp, working against the comfortably cluttered backdrop of her 130-year-old ranch-house kitchen, deftly wraps the last of a dozen sandwiches for the day's pack trip. At 6 AM, she has another two hours or so before the weekend trail riders start arriving to choose saddle horses from the bunch now being rounded up by her husband, Jim.

As she scurries down the gravel road to the office, a shrill whinny from a nearby corral diverts her attention. It's eight-month-old Pathfinder, a wild orphaned foal bottle-raised by the Clapps and now a hopelessly spoiled member of the family. Indignantly tossing his toffee-brown head, he wants to know why the heck she's so late with his morning treats.

"Hello, sweetheart," Dianne calls over her shoulder. "I'm sorry. I promise I'll come visit later." She emphasizes her vow with a mock neigh.

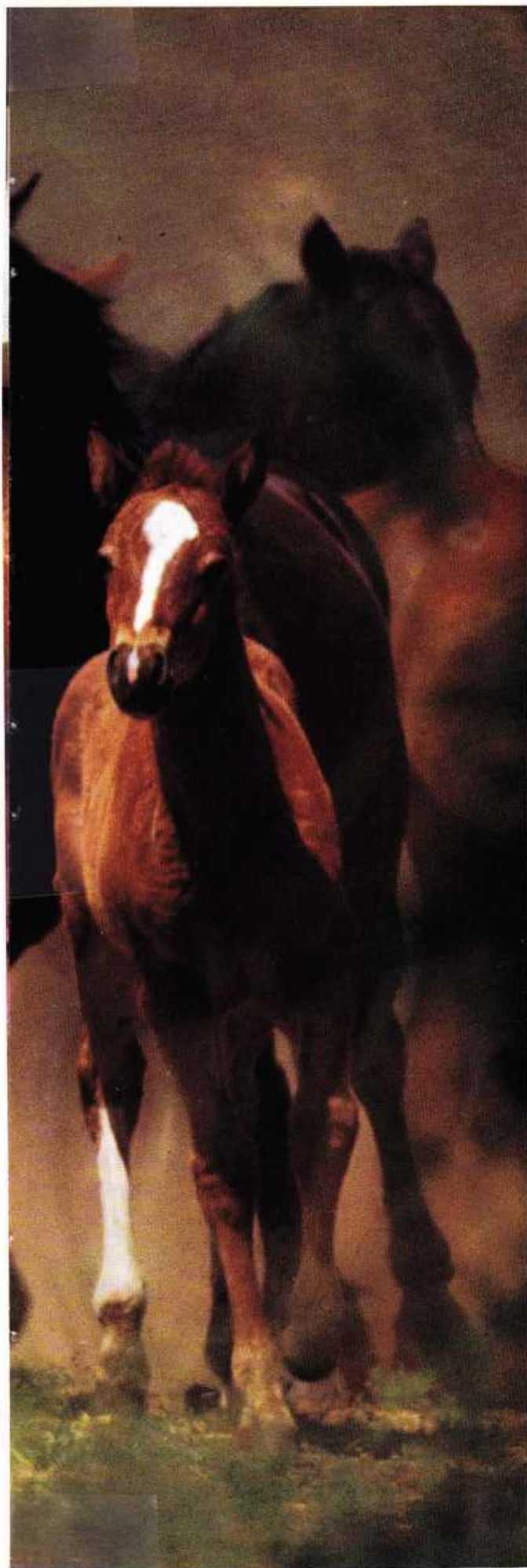
As Pathfinder gleefully responds in kind, the sun bursts free of its mountain cover, bathing the dew-coated meadows and ranch buildings in shimmering splendor. On a distant hill, a band of multicolored mustangs kicks up a cloud of fine red dust as it makes its leisurely way toward a watering hole.

So begins a brand-new day at the Wild Horse Sanctuary, home of one of America's living national treasures.



At the Wild Horse Sanctuary, horses find food, water, salt licks—and protection. "We've been the horses' voice," says Dianne Clapp, above left.





**J**IM CLAPP ALWAYS KNEW HE'D FIND A WAY TO MAKE A LIVING working outdoors. In 1965, he was hired as a hunter by the U.S. Department of Fish & Wildlife, charged with destroying wild animals deemed a threat to ranchers. Benevolent by nature, Jim rationalized that by killing potentially vicious varmints, he was actually saving the lives of countless livestock.

When the orders to kill started to become increasingly arbitrary he developed a distaste for the job. After three years, he quit. "It just seemed like a lot of senseless killing," Jim declares. That observation would later come to define his life's mission.

Jim and his wife, Dianne, embarked on a new life of training horses and running pack trips in northern California's Trinity Alps. They moved from camp to camp with their small children, often living in abandoned ranch shacks with no electricity or running water. When the kids reached school age, they were home-taught by Dianne in a newly acquired house trailer.

In 1978, Jim accepted a 12-month contract to round up wild horses for the U.S. Forest Service in Oregon's Modoc National Forest. But as it gradually began to dawn on him that the majority of the horses were being sent to slaughter, Jim felt a growing despair. When he learned that only 80 horses remained out of 300 he'd recently helped round up, and that those 80 also were headed for destruction, Jim took a life-changing action. He adopted all of the survivors.

Acting quickly, the Clapps used part of their savings to buy some land in Alturas, California, and the rest to buy truckloads of hay. Alturas cattle rancher Pete Carey offered an additional 100 acres for grazing, becoming a willing partner.

The group teamed up with another humane organization to





alert the California news media to the government's plan to kill the wild horses. Letters of support, donations, and sponsorships began pouring in, and the concept of a sanctuary was born.

"We got 5,000 letters in one month after the news hit the Bay Area," says Dianne. "The public response told us that the concern was shared by others."

The herd continued to grow. Placing youngsters with as many private owners as they could, the Clapps implemented a \$38-per-month sponsorship fee for those who couldn't adopt but wanted to help. Fifteen years later, despite soaring overhead costs, that fee remains unchanged.

**T**HE RUMOR OF SOME NEW PAINT-COLORED FOALS HAS THIS WEEKEND's riders scanning their surroundings with special attention as they begin the day-long climb to a base camp at 3,500 feet.

By lunchtime, there's still been no sign of the elusive paints. As the riders rest under the shade of ponderosa pines, a movement at the edge of the grove catches everyone's eye. A collective breath is held. Perhaps a wandering wild foal? No, it's a young doe, boldly pausing a mere 20 feet away, until a ranch dog merrily chases her off through the trees.

**A**FTER FIVE YEARS IN ALTURAS, THE CLAPPS SOUGHT A milder climate for the sanctuary. Jim eventually found a 5,000-acre property near the tiny ranching town of Shingletown, 37 miles east of Redding. The couple could afford to buy only the 60 acres on which the main house and buildings stood. But the landowner's cooperative attitude, combined with California's open-range laws, allowed them to use the entire balance of acreage for the horses.

In 1984, the Clapps were hit by a tragedy far worse than anything that could ever befall the sanctuary. Their 14-year-old daughter, Amber, was killed in a car crash, and the grief was almost more than the family could bear. But the incident also served to strengthen the clan's bond, ultimately giving them a renewed sense of purpose to help preserve the wild horses.

That the Clapp children not only have put down roots in the Redding area, but continue to be active in sanctuary development speaks volumes about the values instilled in them. It also attests to their abiding love for their parents.

Wade, 28, oversees the harvesting of tons of excess scrub oak on sanctuary property. His wife, Pam, directs public relations. Jim's invaluable sidekick in the entire operation is Tara, 26. Her husband Matt, a homebuilder, has tirelessly contributed his skills and materials toward ranch improvements. Heather, 22, lives nearby with her husband and their three small children, and helps out whenever she can.

Any number of the Clapps' six grandchildren usually can be found gamboling about the sanctuary, completely at home with ranch life. No Nintendo kids, these. Like their parents, they will accumulate unparalleled wisdom about the most fundamental aspects of life and nature through hands-on learning.

**A**S THE SURE-FOOTED SADDLE HORSES PICK THEIR WAY UP THE rocky trail toward the final ridge, their riders gaze in silent awe at the colorful tableau of the valley far below, framed by imposing Mt. Lassen to the east and Mt. Shasta to the north. It's been a fairly fruitful day of wild horse tracking, although most of the bands re-



maintained at a considerable distance. But by the time the riders reach base camp at 4 PM, there have still been no paint foal sightings.

With the saddle horses fed, watered, and secured in the campsite corral, the riders disperse to five small wooden cabins. A cookhouse and hot shower building complete the rustic scene.

Weekend rides generally produce an interesting mix of people. This group includes a human resource manager, college student, counseling psychologist, university advisor, Army technician, industrial psychologist, journalist, and technical writer. The diverse assortment is linked, however, by a common purpose: to observe and pay homage to the wild horses.

**N**OT LONG AGO, NO LAWS PREVENTED RANCHERS FROM catching, selling, or killing wild horses running on land they leased from the federal government. But in 1971, the Wild Free-Roaming Horse & Burro Act was enacted as a means of protecting those animals.

The Clapps and others, however, allege that startlingly high numbers of horses are still being routinely destroyed—at taxpayers' expense—in a questionable attempt to prevent cattle and wildlife from having to share with the wild horses America's 300 million acres of government-sanctioned grazing land.

Fourteen years ago, the Forest Service relinquished control of the nation's wild horse population to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Despite a vigorous campaign to promote its horse and burro adoptions, the BLM has drawn unceasing fire from numerous humane organizations, which claim the agency grossly inflates its wild horse statistics to justify increased population control through slaughter.

According to the Clapps, no one really knows how many wild horses exist. The BLM stands behind an unsubstantiated national count of 30,000 head. The Clapps insist the number is less than 20,000, and rapidly dwindling.

Michael Blake, author of *Dances with Wolves*, last year funded an aerial census in Nevada, home to 80 percent of the wild horse population. The month-long survey yielded a Nevada head count of 8,231; the BLM claims there are 25,887.

Dianne and Jim ruefully admit that arguing with federal bureaucrats is an exercise in futility. But they also agree that efforts to manage the wild horse population will benefit all concerned.

That was why, in 1983, the Clapps permitted Dr. Erwin Liu of the University of California at Davis to use a group of wild mares to test an injection method of producing reversible infertility. Since that time, the *porcine zona pellucida* (PZP) vaccine has proven to render a female barren for one year. "This knocks the birth rate down considerably out there on the open range," Jim points out, "and it proves that herd numbers can be controlled without physically altering the animals."

That's not to say, however, that male horses aren't usually gelded (castrated) as a further means of population control. When a new shipment of rescued horses comes in to the sanctuary, the horses are separated by gender and kept in corrals for observation and feeding. When Liu and his students arrive, they carefully herd each horse into a special chute where they administer a state-required blood test, take identifying photos for the animal's file, determine the horse's age, treat any evident ailments, and geld or inject with PZP. A small percentage of lucky males are chosen to remain intact for stud purposes.



Soliciting private means of support is an ongoing job for the Clapps, below right. Monthly sponsorship fee per horse remains at \$38 per month.







SOMETIMES A REQUEST FOR HELP COMES FROM THE LEAST-expected source. The Sheldon-Hart Mountain Refuge commands 585,000 acres in south-central Oregon, just above the Nevada state line. From an original count of 5,000 head 12 years earlier, in 1989 the refuge's wild horse population had suspiciously fallen to less than 500.

Reacting to a spate of bad publicity aimed at inhumane round-up procedures and the sale of horses for slaughter, refuge officials asked the Clapps to take the remaining horses, in annual shipments of approximately 150 head each. "What could we say?" Dianne recalls of that day. "We knew it would be a struggle, and we were already stretched to the limit, but we'd been doing this for over 10 years, and help had somehow always come."

Fortunately, a large number of the herds have been of adoptable age, enabling the Clapps to place many of them with private owners. (Experience has shown that it's best to try to tame a mustang when he's very young, preferably under three years, before he's had a chance to get fully accustomed to range living.)

Incoming horses who remain at the sanctuary discover an abundance of grass, ample manmade and natural spring-fed water sources, and numerous salt licks and mineral licks. Fresh alfalfa is trucked out to several feeding areas daily, and when the horses appear for that popular event, it gives sanctuary workers a chance to scan the herd for any signs of physical distress.

But the Clapps stress that because of wild horses' inborn tenacity, injuries or ailments usually clear up without aid. Conversely, aged horses or extremely ill ones who seem to know they're ready to die tend to go off alone into the hills and let nature take its course.

The natural life-and-death balance of the animal kingdom is a highly respected and integral part of the sanctuary. Besides numerous species of benign wildlife, coexisting with the wild horses are such predatory types as black bears, coyotes, bobcats, and mountain lions. Attacks and killings do sometimes occur. But because the Clapps endorse the horses' freedom to exist in the utmost state of wildness, they long ago came to terms with accepting occasional losses.

There are, of course, some exceptional cases. In the fall of 1992, Tara Clapp was throwing hay off a feed truck on the range when she noticed a frail-looking mare named Asia, a longtime sanctuary resident with a history of excellent health, purposefully making her way toward the vehicle with painful, halting steps. She was trailed by a tiny foal. Before reaching the truck, the mare collapsed, and died shortly thereafter from complications involving a retained placenta.

Knowing the days-old foal couldn't survive alone in the wild, Tara brought it back to the ranch, where family members and volunteers took turns as surrogate mothers, bottle-feeding the foal around the clock for eight weeks. Dubbed with the American Indian name Pathfinder, the colt likely will be trained as a saddle horse. Certainly, he'll retain a special place in everyone's heart for the rest of his life.

*IT'S ANOTHER BEAUTIFUL DAY ON THE MOUNTAIN. HAVING capped a restful night of sleep with an enormous breakfast, the guests mount up and begin to make their descent down a new set of trails, ever watchful for the mustangs.*

*They're rewarded many times over, not only by the long-awaited*



*glimpse of the gaily colored paint babies, but also by several bands that allow them to approach closer than those of the previous day. When a wild dun male trots right up to the stunned group and rubs noses with a buckskin saddle horse, the unspoken sentiment is that it doesn't get any better than this.*

*By late afternoon, the riders are back at the corral, bidding reluctant farewells to the trusty saddle horses. For the guests, it's back to urban reality. For the Clapps, it's time to feed the animals and to catch a straying burro.*

**S**OLICITING PRIVATE MEANS OF SUPPORT FOR THE NONPROFIT sanctuary is a neverending job. The entire operation costs between \$50,000 and \$100,000 per year to maintain, depending on the number of horses on site. Hay budgets alone run between \$200 and \$400 a day.

There have been lean stretches, and there have been blessings. Five years ago, a wild horse supporter who prefers to remain anonymous bought the balance of the property and now leases it back to the Clapps. Revenue from scrub-oak firewood covers the lease payments.

Celebrity support has also benefitted the sanctuary. Bob Hope is honorary chairman of the board. Actress Pamela Sue Martin has put in countless hours as national spokesperson. Author Michael Blake stays involved at the legislative level.


In addition to sponsorships and general donations, the weekend rides (offered from April through mid-October) provide a substantial boost to sanctuary funding. And though the

major financial donors are the organization's lifeblood, sometimes the smallest gestures touch the heart in the biggest ways.

"The fact that someone would sell their kitchen table in order to send us some money—that's the sort of faith that keeps us hooked," Jim declares. The Clapps were equally amazed by two teenage girls in Sweden who, after watching a television documentary on the sanctuary, organized a bake sale and raised \$200 to help the wild horses.

"We're committed to these animals, whether anyone sends us any money or not," Jim states. "It's like raising 300 kids: We're responsible for them, and we've proven our willingness to put everything we own into the pot in order to keep them."

As the hoofbeats of time gallop swiftly toward the next millennium, the Clapps are prepared with a clear-cut agenda. Next year, they'll rescue the last 105 horses from the Sheldon-Hart Refuge. They'll continue to promote reversible fertility as a humane herd management tool, with the hope that government agencies will adopt the method as an alternative to slaughter.

Finally, they'll not abandon their ultimate dream: a country where wild horses roam free on public acreage, sharing equal status with cattle and wildlife; a nation where tax incentives and subsidized grazing fees make it attractive for ranchers to run mustangs with their livestock on federal land. In anticipation of that day, the Clapps will keep striving to maintain a species that's durable enough to survive through the ages, preserving the gene pool so that when new laws are passed, the proper foundation is already in place. 





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