

# WILD HORSE OF ASIA

**T**HE ONLY SURVIVING true wild horse—the Mongolian or Przewalski—is going the way of the whooping crane.

Zoologists believe that the fifty or so animals in zoos around the world now outnumber those roaming the old Central Asian homeland. It is even suspected that small herds in the wilderness may have interbred with domestic horses and no longer exist in pure form.

To save the species from extinction, the director of the Zoological Gardens at Prague, Czechoslovakia, has recently circulated questionnaires to all known owners of Przewalskis, asking for detailed records on their history and characteristics. The data will provide pedigrees that will be helpful in breeding.

The Przewalski was named for a Russian explorer who discovered the animals while traveling in Mongolia and northern Tibet during the eighteenth-seventies, says the National Geographic Society.

**C**OL. NICHOLAS M. PRZE-  
WALSKY (also spelled Prejevalsky) was Czarist army officer whose ardent interest in natural history had led him to apply for posts in eastern Siberia.

In 1870 he obtained permission to conduct an expedition across inner Asia for the Russian Geographical Society. Among the thousands of specimens of mammals, birds, reptiles and fish he collected were the skull and skin of a strange small horse.

In an adventure-filled book published in 1876, Colonel Przewalski reported large herds of the horses running wild on the plains of Tsaidam and beyond in western Mongolia. They were quite shy, he said, and when frightened, would continue a flight for days.

Mongol tribesmen told the explorer that although they hunted wild camels of northwest Tsaidan for the delicate flesh, the horses were too swift and alert for the chase.

The Przewalski wild horse is much smaller than the domestic animal.

A closely related wild horse, now extinct, was the Tarpan. So called from its Tartary roving grounds, this creature had a drab-gray color and less notice-

able streak.

Both horses carried on a remarkably organized way of life. The herds, numbering from several hundreds to perhaps a thousand, were set up like armies. At the head of each galloped a sultan-stallion, leader in battle and lord of any mare of his choice.

"Lieutenants" commanded the lower ranks, while restive young stallions served as sentries. They trotted along on the outskirts of the herds, ready to neigh a piercing warning at the first sign of danger.

In a fascinating experiment in back-breeding, the German zoologist brothers, Lutz and Heinz Heck, have succeeded in physically recreating the extinct Tarpan.

### **Bargain Sale**

*A Paris shopkeeper wrote to one of his customers: "I can offer you cloth like the enclosed sample at 900 francs the meter. In case I don't hear from you, I shall conclude that you wish to pay only 800 francs. In order to lose no time, I accept the last mentioned price."*

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