

WAHO CONFERENCE

Abu Dhabi 2025

WORDS BY ANNE BROWN

WAHO (the World Arab Horse Organization) celebrated another successful conference in April. The generous hospitality of the Abu Dhabi hosts attracted a record number of Registrars and delegates from around the world. Who wouldn't want to spend ten days with international Arabian horse fans in a most hospitable country with delicious food, the clear sea lapping at the shore, all in 40 degrees!

The official reason for the biennial WAHO World Registrars Meeting is for each member country to convene, resolve any issues and report on their current status.

Caroline Sussex, the AHS Chair of Council and also Treasurer for the WAHO Executive Committee, stresses the benefits of such conferences.

"This unique occasion allows representatives and guests from around the world to gather for a non-political forum to share views and ideas. It really

helps Registrars to discuss any problems with each other."

"Their solutions help breeders, owners and competitors move their horses more easily around the world and allow the international exchange of registered horses unhindered. They also address horse welfare issues, especially in matters of breeding."

WAHO membership is open to all, so everyone may attend the conferences.

Around the core business meetings, each host country organises stud tours, visits to shows and races – and often camel racing in the Middle East! Additional trips to places of cultural and historic interest are all wrapped up in a whirl of banquets and bonhomie. Host countries over the past 25 years – most recently Jordan in 2022, before that Australia, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Syria, Poland and Turkey – have all put on excellent programmes.



Photo: Anne Brown

Left: date palm farmer at work in Al Ain,
Below: Al Jahili Fort, Al Ain



Photo: Jehangir Rustomjee



WAHO delegate Anne Brown at the conference in Abu Dhabi

So an invitation to an equally enticing event from His Highness Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Vice President of the United Arab Emirates and Chairman of the Board of the Emirates Arabian Horse Society (EAHS), was very welcome.

The immense generosity of the hosts in Abu Dhabi over ten days provided much more than business sessions and instructive lectures. Gulf hospitality is legendary, so the lavish social element permitted breeders and owners to meet and mix with those who share their passion for Arabian horses. The location of the luxurious St Regis conference hotel on Saadiyat Island allowed for a visit to the impressive Louvre Abu Dhabi, and the splendours of the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque. A tour of the grandiose Presidential Palace, Qasr al Watan, with its gold ornamentation and vaulted ceilings, over-whelmed us.

The discovery of oil in 1958 certainly changed the fortunes of this former desert outpost!

A full day's trip via a camel market to the cool date palm oasis and ancient fortresses of Al Ain offered a glimpse of a more traditional UAE. Many forts, such as Al Jahili, have been expanded and restored since they were the desert homes of the founding families of Abu Dhabi.



Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, Abu Dhabi

Unfortunately, plans to visit some of the well-known stud farms were unfulfilled, as they were unable to accept so many visitors in the middle of their busy show and breeding season. The Saudi Championships had diverted most UAE show horses and their handlers to Riyadh. However, the Dubai Arabian Horse Stud very kindly rolled out the red carpet for the 200 WAHO guests. They put on a wonderful display of 61 mares, some with foals at foot, representing

several generations of their breeding programme. It blends bloodlines from around the world, and has garnered major international showing success. All the horses were in superb condition and sympathetically shown. The presentation ended with the dramatic appearance of their two most famous breeding stallions, FA El Rasheem (2011, FA El Shawan x Virtuosa MLR) and his son, D Seraj (2015, out of Ladi Veronika).

The following day, guests were treated to a preview of some fine racehorses at the Al Reef Stables of HH Sheikh Tahnoon Bin Zayed al Nahyan. That evening, the group moved on to the Abu Dhabi Turf Club for the last meeting of the season with large fields filling the six Arabian races.

From the 15 horses in the parade ring for the first race, AHS Chair of Council Caroline Sussex picked number 11, RB Boujee, trained by Ernst Oertel. It won! Formal business sessions covered two days. Peter Pond, President of the WAHO Executive Committee opened proceedings with warmest thanks to the conference organisers, and to HH Sheikh Mansour and to co-host HH Sheikh Zayed bin Hamad Al Nahyan, Vice Chairman of the EAHS Board.

With the retirement of WAHO's Vice President, Dr. Marek Trela, Mr Pond announced his replacement: HRH Princess Alia Al Hussein from Jordan, a very popular choice.

Each country's representative gave a report of their national status. While foal registrations are down in many countries, they are increasing in the



Dubai Arabian Horse Stud visit: mares and foals meet WAHO guests, and left – leading stallions 14 year old bay FA El Rasheem and his ten year old grey son, D Seraj
Photos by Monika Savier



WAHO group at the Qasr al Watan Presidential Palace, Abu Dhabi

Middle East, especially Saudi Arabia. Among European countries, France reported the most foal registrations.

Two excellent talks followed, with Monika Savier expanding on the emotive issue of Mare Choice and Embryo Transfer (ET).

This prompted robust discussion later. Has technology and greed overtaken ethics and the well-being of the mare? Arabian registries are divided on ET, some allowing it with no restrictions, some with limitations, and some prohibiting ET entirely. WAHO strongly recommends a mare be restricted to no more than one foal by ET and one born to her naturally in any breeding year, although it is not mandatory. The AHS currently allows a mare limitless foal births annually by ET.

WAHO member countries continue to ban the registration of foals produced by cloning and by the use of advanced reproduction technologies such as in vitro fertilisation or gene manipulation. Several delegates reported on whether testing and disclosure of stallions' genetic disorder carrier status is mandatory in their country. The three main tests are for Lavender Foal Syndrome (LFS), Cerebellar Abiotrophy (CA) and Severe Combined Immuno-Deficiency (SCID). While WAHO strongly advises testing and disclosure for both stallions and mares, each country makes its own rules. In Britain, the Premium Performance Scheme of the AHS now requires all three tests from stallions applying for Premium status. The results are kept confidential

but any carrier status must be declared to client mare owners proposing to use the stallion. Australia publishes results. In France, stallions must be gene-tested for Cerebellar Abiotrophy and Severe Combined Immuno-Deficiency (SCID), with results published on each stallion's on-line card, for breeders to make informed decisions.

The deeply-researched and well-illustrated talk by Emma Maxwell examined how the 'one-size-fits-all' Arabian of 50 years ago risks splintering into two extremes - those refined for the show ring, and those bred tall and strong for racing and endurance. This led to later discussion and concern about the depleted gene pool which can result from the over-use of top show sires or race winners, to the exclusion of stallions which may have better qualities but do not come from showing or racing homes.

As an accomplished photographer, Emma warned against choosing a horse from a photo. She also cautioned against extremely dished heads, vets and equine dentists constantly see problems with such horses.

"Thank heavens for sports horses!" concluded Emma. 🐾



Speaker Monika Savier

To join WAHO, contact the office at Newbarn Farmhouse, Forthampton, Gloucestershire GL19 4QD, United Kingdom
Email: thewahoooffice@gmail.com
www.waho.org