A Study of the Awareness and Attitude of the UK Equine Industry to an Unwanted Horse Population
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Aim
Limited information exists concerning the population of unwanted horses in this country. The aim of this study is to gather views, opinions and perceptions from stakeholder groups and organisations within the industry who have an interest in the welfare of horses. Over 80 participants completed an online questionnaire, and focussed interviews gathered the views of key stakeholders within the UK equine industry.

Background and Relevance
- Redwings, the largest horse sanctuary in the UK, has released figures suggesting that since 2009 the abandonment of horses has tripled.
- Recent media attention has highlighted the issue of horse welfare.
- A recent study in Ireland discussed a recognition that issues, such as equine welfare, are better informed by the addition of qualitative and not just quantitative studies.
- To investigate speculative reasons for the increase in the numbers of horses rescued and relinquished.
- The National Health and Welfare Strategy Group (BHIC) aim that, by 2015, all equids should enjoy good standards of health and welfare.
- In America the Unwanted Horse Summit 2009 cited the need to identify determinants for horses becoming unwanted and the characteristics of owners who relinquish them at the top of their plan for action.

Results of survey
- 66.5% respondents believe numbers of unwanted horses are increasing a lot
- 44.7% chose expanding horse slaughter as their last choice
- Old age/injury and indiscriminate breeding are thought to be primary causes with all others contributing
- Only 22% agree prices of competition and travel have an effect
- 59.7% and 64.7% respondents agree that the cost of disposal and cost of euthanasia contribute to numbers of unwanted horses
- It is identified that education of horse owners and regulation of breeding practices will help alleviate the problem

Conclusions
- Almost all respondents perceived unwanted horses as a problem.
- 79% of respondents were Horse Owners. Further targeted inclusion of other groups may have made this number less biased, although this may suggest a greater willingness to participate within this group. Response was greater than anticipated.
- Feedback comments strongly suggested Travellers and horse breeders were to ‘blame’ for problem of unwanted horses.
- Suggested solutions for the problem included – stallion licenses, breeding licenses, qualifications to own horses, compulsory gelding with subsidised castration, a central system for recording microchip information and improved enforcement of the Welfare Act.
- Levels of participation and volume of suggestions show a desire to find a solution for the problem of unwanted horses in this country.
- More research is required in order to identify common ground for all interested groups which could lead to decisions that will have lasting impact on the problem.

References