

# Light-breed Horse Ranches

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## A Landscape with Horses

The Hidaka region is known to be the nation's top producer of horses. Biratori, located inland along the west coast, boasts the 5th largest number of light-breed horses among the 7 districts within the jurisdiction (table 1).

The ranchers are mostly located in Kawamukai, Honcho, and Nibutani, thus, grazing horses are a part of the everyday landscapes in these areas. The landscape of horses in the *chise* village around the Munro residents and other traditional Ainu sites in town are scenes that represent the changing lifestyle of Biratori residents along the Saru River.



**Photo:** Grazing light breed horses. Horses eat fodder in the morning and graze in the pasture during the day. The production of military horses, agricultural horses, and racehorses has been continuously handed down through the generations since the Meiji era.

## Light-breed Horse Production in Biratori

### (1) Warhorse

Biratori's livestock has always gathered attention because of its hilly geography suitable for grazing, and its mild winters.

Commercial scale production of warhorses in Hidaka started in 1872 when the Niikapp Imperial Stock Farm and the Hidaka Studhorse Farm began.

After 1884, officials in the area

**Table 2: The History of Light-breed Horse Production in the Hidaka Area**

- 1872: Niikappu Imperial Stock Farm, Hidaka Studhorse Farm opens.
- 1884: Horses are imported from overseas in an attempt to improve the quality of warhorses.
- 1945: Warhorses loses purpose after the war. Role shifts to agricultural use.
- 1954: The town switches over to producing racehorses (light breed horses) in order to cater to the budding horseracing industry.
- 1960: Tractor-use becomes widespread leading to the decline and termination of agricultural horses. Production of light breed horses expands due to regulations on land conditions, etc.
- 1970: Transition towards the production of light breed horses progresses due to laws reducing rice crop in the region.

(Hokkaido Hidaka Promotion Bureau 2011)

**Table 1: Statistics On Light-breed Horses within Hidaka (unit: 10,000,000 Yen)**

District	Hidaka Promotion Bureau	Hidaka	Biratori	Niikappu	Shin Hidaka	Urakawa	Samani	Erimo
Agriculture (1)	4690	1114	621	771	1312	716	78	78
Light-breed Horses (2)	2949	686	70	493	978	641	56	25
Fishery (3)	1831	110	0	54	225	320	302	820
Manufacturing (4)	3709	1544	91	135	401	389	917	232
Wholesale, Retail (5)	11072	1997	346	479	4726	2181	676	667
Industry share ratio of light breed horse to other industries (2)/((1)+(3)+(4)+(5))	13.8%	1.4%	0.7%	34.3%	24.7%	17.8%	2.8%	1.4%

(Hokkaido Hidaka Promotion Bureau 2011)

advocated for better quality horses and began to import better-quality horses from overseas (table 2).

After the Russo-Japanese War began in the latter half of the Meiji era, Biratori began the process of forest grazing for their warhorses in large-scale farms such as the Shukushubetsu Bokujo (currently, a town-owned pasture). The area where Lily of the Valleys grows has been specified as the town's natural monument. It still reflects the landscape of these war-time periods.

## (2) Racehorse

After the end of the war in 1945, the town saw a decline in the demand for warhorses and agricultural horses. However, the demand for racehorses increased due to the start of the full-blown horseracing industry. The switch and specialization in producing light breed horses progressed especially in the Hidaka area, which became the largest producer of light breed horses in the nation.

In 1955, farmers in Biratori began breeding Arabian horses in the Kawamukai district and its vicinity. By 1965, the number of 2-year-old horses was 55: 16 Thoroughbreds and 39 Anglo-Arabian horses. In November of the same year, the Biratori Light-breed Horse Production Promotion Association was established with the goal to organize production.

The members of this association played active roles in producing horses. The producers have triumphed in many significant races with their Arabian horses all over Japan. Numerous horses produced by the members of the association have won G1 titles in Chuo Keiba (table 4).

In the region, the Monbetsu Racecourses in Hidaka next to Biratori hosts horse racing events in Hokkaido. During the months of April to November, the Racecourse hosts nighttime horse racing events, where the audience can enjoy the sight of powerful horses right in front of their eyes.

Table 3: Number of Light-breed Horses in Biratori

Year	Number of Breeding Female Horses (Total Produced)	
	Thoroughbred	Anglo-Arabian
1965	45 (18)	74 (47)
1980	184 (119)	173 (137)
1985	187 (106)	204 (154)
1990	284 (197)	152 (118)
1995	287 (194)	169 (117)
2000	281 (212)	36 (28)
2005	240 (198)	5 (2)
2010	230 (144)	0 (0)

(Hokkaido Hidaka Promotion Bureau 2012)

Table 4: In-town Breeders Who Have G1 Titles

Year	Race Name	Horse Name	Breeder Name
1980	21st Takarazuka Kinen	Terutenryu	Inahara Bokujo
1985	26th Takarazuka Kinen	Suzuka Koban	Inahara Bokujo
1991	8th Mile Championship	Daitaku Heriosu	Shimizu Bokujo
1992	9th Mile Championship	Daitaku Heriosu	Shimizu Bokujo
1996	26th Takamatsumiya-hai	Flower Park	Hiraku Takahashi
1996	30th Sprinters Stakes	Flower Park	Hiraku Takahashi
1998	39th Takarazuka Kinen	Silence Suzuka	Inahara Bokujo
1999	16th February Stakes	Meisei Opera	Hiraku Takahashi
2000	34th Sprinters Stakes	Daitaku Yamato	Miyabi Bokujo
2007	37th Takamatsu-hai	Suzuka Phoenix	Inahara Bokujo
2011	134th Nakayama Daishogai	Majesty Bio	Shimizu Bokujo
2012	14th Nakayama Grand Jump	Majesty Bio	Shimizu Bokujo

(JA Biratori Website)

Table 5: Horse-related Jargon

Light-breed Horse:	Usually refers to Arabs, Thoroughbreds, Anglo-Arabs, Arab mixes, and Thoroughbred mixes used as racehorses and warhorses.
Heavy-breed Horse:	A horse specifically bred for agricultural use.
Arab:	A horse species. In Japan, it usually refers to an Arab mix called Anglo-Arab, which is a mix of other species such as Thoroughbreds.
Thoroughbred:	A type of horse species that has been bred through selective breeding to be racehorses. It refers to the Arab mix with the bloodline of Arabs from Arabian Peninsula and North Africa. Mainly used for competition.
Equestrian Horse	A horse that has been raised for equestrian competitions.
Race Horse	A horse that has been raised for race competitions. There are Thoroughbreds and Arabs. In Ban'ei horserace, Ban'ei species usually dominate.

"Cultural landscapes of the Saru Valley formed by Ainu tradition and modern development"  
Designated as Important Cultural Landscape as of July 26th, 2007

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