

## THE 4<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL CASPIAN CONFERENCE

Rasht, Guilan Province, Northern Iran

Monday 7<sup>th</sup> September to Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2015

The International Caspian Conference held in Rasht this year was the 4<sup>th</sup> international Caspian conference overall, but the first ever held in the homeland of the Caspian Horse. The Conference had been planned to coincide with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Louise Firouz' discovery of the Caspian in 1965, which added an extra poignancy to the occasion. CHS was well represented. Eight members attended, including five of the speakers who, among many topics covered, explained the role of a national ICS member society like CHS in ensuring the survival of the Caspian and how the ICS works with national societies to preserve Caspian breeding records. Two new members joined us afterwards as a direct result of the Conference.

Many of the speakers and delegates were paying their first ever visit to Iran and were overwhelmed by the generosity, warmth and attention they received, whether from the hosts and organisers of the event or the ordinary people they met. Rasht and its surrounding area were more green and beautiful than we could have imagined. Some people went on after the Conference to discover for themselves some of the incredible historical places that we've all heard about, like Persepolis, Esfahan and Shiraz.

The Firouz family were honoured and thanked for their long association with the Caspian Horse by our hosts, the Equestrian Federation of Iran. There probably wasn't a person there who didn't express regret that Louise herself had not been with us to share the celebration of her lifetime's work for Caspians and the obvious pride of horse-loving Iranians in their beautiful Caspian horses.

The International Caspian Society is a comparatively new concept to the majority of Iranian breeders, so it was heart-warming and encouraging to see their eagerness to work within the ICS for the registration and recognition of the excellent Caspians they are now breeding. The ICS were co-hosts of the Conference, but although Ateshe Firouz-Larsson and a few members of CHS and ICS helped with planning, organisation and sponsorship, it is to the Federation that we owe our biggest thanks and appreciation for the original idea and the majority of the organisation and funding of the Conference.

The quality of the Caspians at the Breed Show held on the third day showed how much attention is being paid to Louise's Breed Standard. Handling and presentation had improved immensely in the five months since a show in April judged by Ateshe Firouz-Larsson and Elizabeth Webster, who also ran a Judges' Seminar together on the same visit. Those responsible for this marked improvement are to be congratulated.

Assessments for the Iranian Stud Book (and eventually the ICSB) were undertaken simultaneously with the judging. A respected Iranian assessor, who has been involved with the breed since its early days, was part of the assessment team and a noted Iranian judge of Caspians was part of the judging team. It was a long and extremely demanding day for all, but we couldn't afford to miss the very rare opportunity to assess so many Iranian Caspians in one place. There is still much work still to do, but that was one important stage ticked off the list. The judging finally ended at midnight!

A beautiful framed print from the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Calendar was presented by Ruth Staines, on behalf of Farokh Khoroshi and Colin Barker, to the Equestrian Federation's Chairman Dr Masoud Khalili, on whose behalf it was received by the Vice Chairman, Fariba Hosseinabadi. After more presentations and speeches to close the show, we finally got to bed at around 2.00 a.m. – tired of course, but grateful for all we had seen and heard over those very special few days.