

WILD AND FREE

WHAT MAKES A BANKER SPECIAL?

Seems like a rhetorical question, doesn't it?

The Banker horses of the Outer Banks are unique for a number of different reasons. They are the state horse of North Carolina—a high and well-deserved honor! They are listed as critically threatened by the Livestock Conservancy, and they are recognized as an invaluable cultural resource for Currituck County.

But what is it about the Banker horses that brings on these accolades? A big part of what makes them special is their long, rich history on the Outer Banks—that is undeniable. But the Banker horses display certain physical attributes that are unique to them, and that set them apart from other breeds.

The horses that live in Corolla and Shackleford are Colonial Spanish mustangs. They are commonly referred to as the Banker strain, a classification that sets them apart from other strains of Spanish horses like the Florida Cracker and the Marsh Tacky. As indicated by the names, geography played a large role in the identification and development of these types of horses.

Banker horses are short in stature, but strong in ability. They normally stand around 13.2 hands high, and weigh anywhere from 600lbs upwards to 1000lbs. In the Corolla herd, we see both convex and concave heads, indicating Iberian and old Arabian influence. Banker horses have short backs, with sloped hindquarters and a low-set tail. Some even have one less lumbar vertebrae than most domestic horses, which is a very primitive characteristic. They are very sound horses and have oval-shaped cannon bones in their legs which, in addition to the other physical traits, affords them the ability to carry heavy loads for long distances. Some Bankers will even display an ambling, or pacing gait.

These mustangs were bred by the Spanish to be hardy, easy keepers, and that has not changed over the last 500 years. In the wild, they live off of salt grass, sea oats, acorns, and even invasive aquatic plants. In captivity, they do not require much more than a good quality hay and access to fresh water, and often their diet has to be restricted because they are able to thrive on so little. Bankers are known for being quite docile and level headed, and in captivity are generally easy to train. This pragmatic attitude is also one of the reasons they have survived on the harsh Outer Banks for centuries.

Perhaps most importantly, the horses here display the genetic blood variant Q-ac. This marker is only found in horses that are descended from ancient types of Spanish horses, and is very easily lost through genetic drift. Today it's found only in certain lines of the Paso Fino breed, the Pryor mustangs of Montana, and the Banker horses of North Carolina.



The Mission of the Corolla Wild Horse Fund is to protect, conserve, and responsibly manage the herd of wild Colonial Spanish Mustangs roaming freely on the northernmost Currituck Outer Banks, and to promote the continued preservation of this land as a permanent sanctuary for horses designated as the State Horse and defined as a cultural treasure by the state of North Carolina.

Staff

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Supporter Spotlight

Did you hear our PSA on local radio stations this summer? Have you seen the yard signs we distributed to 4x4 property owners about not feeding the horses? What about our billboard on the mainland? All of those things were the brainchild of Kelly Wilkes, CWHF volunteer extraordinaire!

We recently talked with Kelly about why she chose to get involved with the Fund.

What has surprised you most about working with us? How open-minded you all are to my (educational outreach) ideas. Once I run an idea by you all and you like it you don't micro manage. Probably don't have time to! haha You all are willing to look at yourselves and make changes/enhancements that fit the mission.

What do you find most challenging about the cause? I do feel the general public has a soft spot in their hearts for the horses, but the challenge is most people I talk to really do not realize they shouldn't approach them or try to feed them. They just don't understand they are harming them with their "kindness."

What do you wish other people knew about CWHF? I was really shocked to learn these horses, the state horse of NC, have no federal funding. CWHF exists truly on memberships and donations. I'm sure you are used to this, but it concerns me so much. I'm not sure our donors know how vital they are to everything we do. I mean what would happen to these horses without the Fund?

Thank you Kelly for all of your hard work and dedication! It's because of people like you that the Fund can continue the important work of keeping the mustangs wild and free.

By the Numbers: Winter 2019



10,000+: Calories are important for energy and, this time of year, warmth. Horses generally require around 10k or more calories per day, but this number goes up for lactating mares, breeding stallions, and young horses. In the wild, horses spend up to 20 hours a day grazing and foraging.

51: In the winter of 1775, Betsy Dowdy, a young girl who lived on the Currituck Outer Banks, rode her Banker mare Black Bess 51 miles to Hertford in the middle of the night to warn the American troops there of the advancement of the British army.



99-101: Is a horse's normal resting body temperature. Did you know that in the winter, if you see snow on a horse's back it means they are actually very warm, and there is little body heat escaping their thick winter coat?



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