

WATCHABLE WILDLIFE



Home on the Range

[By Tim Herd]

Descendants of domestic stock that either escaped or were released or abandoned, today's wild horses scrounge the wide-open range in a semi nomadic lifestyle in many Western states and a few Atlantic Coast barrier islands. While the herd provides a structured social group, springtime is when it's reordered from within.

A dominant mare selects pastures, watering holes and shelters; a dominant stallion protects his harem of mares, foals and young colts and fillies. Just before the mares give birth in April or May, they wean their yearlings, then drop their foals. The wide-eyed newborns can suckle immediately and trot just two hours later, and a new round of breeding begins.

If a competitor attempts to steal one of his daughters, the stallion offers no resistance, but if a move is made on one of his mares, he attacks immediately. He also runs off his older colts, now that they've become a

threat. They retreat to establish their own pecking order in bachelor bands where they hone the fighting skills each eventually needs to round up a harem of his own.

WHERE TO OBSERVE

In the West, many herds are managed by the Bureau of Land Management.
 Black Mountain Herd Area, Ariz.
 East Douglas Creek Herd Area, Colo.
 Cumberland Island, Ga.
 Challis Herd Area, Idaho
 Pryor Mountain Herd Area, Mont.
 Nevada Wild Horse Range, Nev.

Shackleford Banks, N.C.
 Sulphur Herd Area, Utah
 Assateague Island, Va.
 Salt Wells Creek Herd Area, Wyo.

LOOK FOR

medium to heavy-boned horse
 stronger legs than domestic horses
 reddish-brown coat, with variations of gray, black, white, gray-brown or palomino
 harems of several females led by dominant male
 constantly traveling and grazing

<p>Feral horse 13-15 hands (52-60 inches high); 800-1,000 pounds Habitat: shrubby sagebrush plains and mountains, grassy barrier islands</p>	<p><i>Equus caballus</i></p>	
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