

The Wild Horses of North America

Humans first domesticated horses thousands of years ago. A domesticated animal is one that's been tamed and raised by humans as a pet or work animal. Black Beauty is an example of a domesticated horse.

Horses are native to Asia and Europe. They are not native to North America, which means that North American wild horses descended from domesticated horses brought here by Europeans, such as the Spanish explorers. Technically, this means that North American wild horses are feral and not wild—but we still generally refer to them as wild. A feral animal is an animal that was once domesticated (like a dog, cat, or horse) but now lives in the wild. Wild horses roam two main regions of North America: the west and the east coast.

Here are some of the best places to see wild horses in each of these regions.

The Wild Mustangs of the West

The wild Mustang is a symbol of the American frontier and of the American pioneer spirit. Mustangs are a pretty cool breed of horse. They're intelligent, sturdy, and easy going once they're tamed. They come in different colors and patterns and tend not to be very tall.



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Wild Mustangs primarily live in the western region of the United States and Canada. The federal government manages the wild horse populations in the United States and allows them to roam in protected park areas. Wild horses can be found in Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, and Utah. In Canada, you can find them in British Columbia and Alberta. You can see wild Mustangs in many places in the west. The following are some of the most popular.

The Virginia Range in western Nevada hosts a well-known herd of horses called the Virginia Range herd. This herd is also called “Annie’s Horses” after a woman named “Wild Horse Annie” who worked for years to get Congress to pass laws to protect these and other wild horses in the United States. More than half of North America’s wild horses live in Nevada.

Theodore Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota is another great place to see wild Mustangs in person. You’ll have the best view of the herds from a high point, such as Painted Canyon Overlook or Buck Hill.

The Pryor Mountains in Montana and Wyoming, near Bighorn Canyon are home to about 160 wild horses. The Mustangs in this region have special markings. They usually have a stripe down their backs and zebra-like stripe patterns on their legs.

The Wild Horses of the East Coast

By Petty Officer 2nd Class Nate Littlejohn
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On the east coast, wild horses reside on coastal islands from Maryland to Georgia. The most famous of these horses are actually ponies (smaller horses). They reside on the neighboring islands of

Assateague (Maryland) and Chincoteague (Virginia). Both islands are largely made up of national park areas and you are allowed to camp there if you like. Campers often set up their tents along the beach and can watch the wild ponies roam from a safe distance. To make sure the population

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doesn't get out of control, there's an annual wild pony round up called the Chincoteague Island Pony Swim. Each year professional wranglers round up some of the younger ponies and swim them across the Assateague Channel during low tide. It only takes the ponies about three minutes to swim across the channel. Afterwards, people can purchase these ponies in an auction.

Assateague and Chincoteague became famous after the children's book *Misty of Chincoteague* was published in 1947. The book tells the story of a family that adopts the lovable Misty, a young foal born to a wild mother on Chincoteague Island.

The Outer Banks of North Carolina are a series of islands just off the coast of the state. Once numbering in the thousands, only a few hundred ponies still wander the Outer Banks today.

Cumberland Island in Georgia offers a unique horse-viewing experience. Much of the island is a federal nature reserve and cars are not allowed on the island. Visitors take a ferry to get to the island and can either walk or bike around the island. Large plantations occupied the island in the 1800s. As you walk around the island, you can see both wild ponies and the ruins of the old plantations.

