



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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2004 Findings Report on the Shackleford Banks Horses

Federal legislation, passed in 1998, protects the horses within Cape Lookout National Seashore and requires an annual report on the status of the herd. The horses are cooperatively managed by the National Park Service and the Foundation for Shackleford Horses, Inc., pursuant to this legislation and a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 1999.

There are 122 horses on Shackleford Banks. Twelve foals were born this past summer. No horses were lost during hurricane Isabel in September 2003. Twenty horses were removed for public adoption through the Foundation during the January 2003 roundup, leaving 119 horses. Five of the removed horses went to supplement the Cedar Island wild herd.


In 2003, mortality was 8% which is slightly above the 7-year average of 7%. Most of these horses died of natural causes throughout the year and along the length of the island with no discernible pattern. An experienced stallion with a harem and a younger bachelor stallion are believed to have died of fight-related injuries. One mare was euthanized when she was found with a nearly severed leg; monofilament line may have been the cause.

The dams of five (5) of the 2003 foals received Porcine Zona Pellucida (PZP) birth control during their pregnancy; this immunocontraceptive, approved by the Humane Society of the United States, has been shown not to effect unborn foals. (One newborn foal was found dead; this was likely from a non-contracepted mare who tested pregnant, but later failed to produce a live foal.) In these birth control cases, the PZP should give these foals two years to nurse instead of the one year if they were to get a younger sibling in 2004. Mares will nurse their young, with decreasing frequency, until the young leave the harem (often as a 2-year-old) or until a new foal is born.

One mare received PZP in 2002, but conceived and foaled anyway in 2003. PZP is generally considered to be 90% effective, but so far on Shackleford Banks it has been 98% effective.

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Sixty-six (66) percent of the mares have been chosen for contraception in 2004 based on their age and family lines. These decisions are made with the help of genetics and horse behavior scientists. PZP prevents conception for one year at a time. Most of the young mares are contracepted to allow them to mature before the demands of pregnancy and lactation. Some old mares who have a number of breeding-age offspring on the island are permitted to age without further foals. Data from Assateague Island National Seashore shows that contracepted mares who receive birth control-induced rest periods live longer than those who produce foals at every opportunity.

Pregnancy test results predict between 7 and 10 foals in 2004. A partial roundup will be held during the 2004-2005 winter to remove selected horses. Removed horses, including some foals, will be available for adoption by the public. Adoptions are orchestrated by the Foundation; interested parties may request an application. The management strategy resulting from the October 2002 roundtable meeting, including scientist-advisors, Congressman Walter B. Jones' staff, the park, and the Foundation, will keep the herd ranging between 110 and 130 horses.

For further information, contact Dr. Sue Stuska, Wildlife Biologist - Horses, at Cape Lookout National Seashore, (252) 728-2250, ext. 3017, or Carolyn S. Mason, Chairman and President, Foundation for Shackelford Horses, Inc., (252) 728-6437 / 6308.

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