



# A Guide to the Corolla WILD HORSES



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## Visit the northern beaches to see the wild Spanish Mustangs!

On your Outer Banks vacation, don't miss a trip to Corolla or Carova to get a glimpse of the lovely "Banker" horses who graze the marshlands of their sanctuary and cool themselves in the waterways and ocean.

The Banker horse is a breed of feral horse that descended from domesticated Spanish horses and possibly brought to the Americas in the 16th century. The ancestral foundation bloodstock may have become feral after surviving shipwrecks or being abandoned on the islands by one of the exploratory expeditions.



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# The Banker Horses: Theories of Arrival

It is believed that the Banker horses arrived on the barrier islands during the 16th century from Spain. Several theories about the horses' origins on the Outer Banks circulate but none have been fully confirmed. Here are a few of those hypotheses.

## Shipwrecked Galleons

One theory is that the ancestors of the Banker horses swam ashore from wrecked Spanish galleons. Ships returning home from the Americas often took advantage of the Gulf Stream and continental trade winds, a route that brought the sailors within 20 miles of the Outer Banks. Hidden shoals along the Outer Banks wrecked many ships and, as a result, this region earned the name of "Graveyard of the Atlantic." At least eight sunken ships of Spanish origin have been found in this area, dating between 1528 and 1564. These ships sank close enough to land that the horses might have swam to shore. It is also thought that during dangerous weather, ships might have sought protection close to land, where the horses may have been freed. In spite of these theories, the transport of horses on Spanish treasure ships has not been verified—their cargo was primarily valuables such as precious metals.



## Sir Richard Grenville's Expeditions

One conjecture is that Sir Richard Grenville shipped horses to the islands in 1585, during an effort to establish an English naval base. All five of the expedition's vessels ran aground at Wococon (Ocracoke).

Documents show that the ships carried livestock obtained through trade in Hispaniola, including "mares, kyne [cattle], buls, goates, swine [and] sheep."<sup>1</sup> The smallest of the wrecked vessels were easily relaunched, while one of Grenville's larger ships, the *Tiger*, was almost destroyed. Scholars believe that as the crew attempted to lighten the ship, they either unloaded the horses or forced them overboard, letting them swim to shore. In a letter to Sir Francis Walsingham that same year, Grenville suggested that livestock survived on the island after the grounding of his ships.



## Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón's Expeditions

Yet another theory is that the Banker horses descended from the 89 horses brought to the barrier islands in 1526 by Spanish explorer Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón. His attempted colonization of San Miguel de Gualdape (near the Santee River in South Carolina) failed, forcing the colonists to move, possibly to North Carolina. Vázquez de Ayllón and about 450 of the original 600 colonists soon died from desertion, disease, and an early frost. Due to ineffective leadership, the settlement lasted only two months and the survivors left the colony for Hispaniola, leaving the horses here.

## Conclusion

Although no one knows for certain, one or all of these theories combined can help us understand how these horses arrived on the Outer Banks.

<sup>1</sup> Quinn, David, ed. (1955). *The Roanoke Voyages: 1584–1590*. London: Hakluyt Society. p. 187. ISBN 978-0-486-26513-1.

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# Preserving the Herd

After Corolla began experiencing heavy development in the 1980s, the Banker horses on the Currituck Banks became more and more exposed to humans.

By 1989, eleven Bankers had been killed by cars on the newly constructed Highway 12. During the same year, the **Corolla Wild Horse Fund**, a nonprofit organization, was created to protect the horses from human interference. As a result of their efforts, the remaining members of the herd were moved to a more remote part of the island.



The Banker horses are now confined on 1,800 acres of fenced land that is both federally owned and privately donated. Corolla commissioners have declared this land a “feral horse sanctuary.”

The population of the herd is managed by offering the adoption of yearlings, both fillies and gelded colts and with their “immunocontraception program” to control reproduction. In 2013, legislation was introduced to help preserve the herd on Currituck. Visit their website to learn more.

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# Regulations & Safety Tips

Please be respectful of the horses and their territory. The Banker Horses are protected by federal laws and although they are known to have a docile, calm temperament, they are “wild” and as unpredictable as any other wild animal.

- ⇒ **Stay at least 50 feet away.** This is the law and law enforcement regularly issues citations to violators. [Click here to download the wild horse ordinance.](#)
- ⇒ **Never feed the horses**—it’s illegal. If you feed a Banker horse, you risk inflicting painful and sometimes fatal colic. According to the [Corolla Wild Horse Fund](#), “Wild horses that begin to approach people as a result of being fed must be captured and permanently removed from the beach because they have become a threat to human safety.”
- ⇒ **If you visit during the early spring through summer, please keep in mind that this is both foaling and breeding season.** Mares with foals at their sides can be aggressive and might charge someone who gets too close. Beware of stallions as they will be breeding and even fighting with potential rivals. You don’t want to get caught in their path as you can be bitten, kicked, or trampled.
- ⇒ **Do not climb the dunes.** It’s illegal and every step further breaks down the dunes, which are our only protection from the ocean during hurricanes and northeasters.



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# Northern Beaches Driving Tips & Regulations

## Beach Driving Tips

Unless you are in a 4 wheel drive, never attempt to drive in the sand, even if you see other people doing so. More than likely these drivers will sink into the sand and require a tow truck. During the summer, some towing companies park on the beaches of Corolla and Carova knowing that they will soon be contacted to help stranded families! However, even if you are driving a 4 wheel drive, you can still get stuck in the sand. *Before you arrive at the 4-wheel-drive area in Corolla, stop in a legal parking area and adjust the tire air pressure to 15-20 psi in all four tires.* This provides more surface contact with the sand.

Here are a few more important beach driving tips:

- ↪ Fill your gas tank before driving onto the beach. There are no gas stations located in the 4-wheel-drive area.
- ↪ Try to drive in the tracks of vehicles who have preceded you.
- ↪ Watch for pedestrians and dogs. Beach goers will be close to or even in the beach driving path, which is a State recognized “road” or Public Vehicular Area (PVA). Furthermore, the sound of the surf hitting the beach can make it difficult for people to hear approaching vehicles.
- ↪ Watch for wild horses crossing the road, especially at night. The horses freely roam the beach and many of them have dark coats that make them difficult to see at night.
- ↪ Be aware of the **tides**. The beach road becomes narrow at high tide and people have been known to lose their cars to the ocean.



## Northern Beaches Driving Regulations

- ⇒ Once on the beach, you may not park until you reach milepost 14, about 1 mile from the beach ramp. Do not stop until you are clear of all posted no parking/stopping zones. Continue driving to an area where the beach is wide enough to allow other drivers to pass, both at the shoreline and at the dune line.
- ⇒ The speed limit on the beaches of Corolla is 35 mph. *On the shore or beach strand, the speed limit is 15 mph when traveling within 300 feet of any person or animal.*
- ⇒ If you want to pass another vehicle, use your turn signal to indicate on which side you plan to pass. It is customary to pass on the right, when practical. The other vehicle should respond with a corresponding signal.
- ⇒ Doing “donuts” or driving in the surf are examples of careless and reckless driving and are violations of North Carolina Motor Vehicle laws. The beach and the sand roads behind the dunes are Public Vehicular Areas (PVA), and these laws will be enforced.
- ⇒ Driving on the dunes is prohibited.





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# Wild Horse Tours

- ⇒ 1129 Corolla Village Road  
Corolla, NC 27927
- ⇒ (252) 453-8002
- ⇒ [Website](#)

The most relaxing and safest way to see the Banker horses is through a tour company. The Corolla Wild Horse Fund offers tours year-round. *All proceeds are used to help care for the horses!* Visit their [website](#) for seasonal hours of operation.



## Tour Information

- ⇒ Tours are offered Wednesday through Friday each week.
- ⇒ Tours can accommodate groups of 6-7 people in one trip. If you have a larger party please call at least three 3 days in advance.
- ⇒ According to their website, refunds are permitted only when cancellations are made at least 24 hours in advance of your scheduled departure time or if the tour must be cancelled due to inclement weather or a horse emergency.

Tours often fill days in advance. Please book online or call ahead to purchase your tickets.

Tours leave from the Corolla Wild Horse Fund museum-store at 1129 Corolla Village Road, Corolla NC 27927. Please arrive 15 minutes early and check in when you arrive.

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# Wild Horse Museum & Storefront

- ↪ 1129 Corolla Village Road  
Corolla, NC 27927
- ↪ (252) 453-8002

The Wild Horse Museum, which is operated by the Corolla Wild Horse Fund, is located in the old Corolla Village. The museum is open year-round and provides free information about the Banker horses. Please visit their [website](#) for hours of operation.



The museum includes exhibits for children, videos, and more. During the summer, children can participate in live Banker horse visits, horse painting, and Banker horse rides! Visit the official store of the nonprofit Corolla Wild Horse Fund [online](#) or at their storefront located at:  
Scarborough Faire Shopping Village  
1177 Duck Road, Suite 32  
Duck, NC 27949

All proceeds help support the care and management of the horses.

Looking for the perfect Outer Banks vacation rental? [Visit our website](#) or contact Élan Vacations at 866-760-3526.