



# Preserve & Protect

FREE

Cape Lookout National Seashore

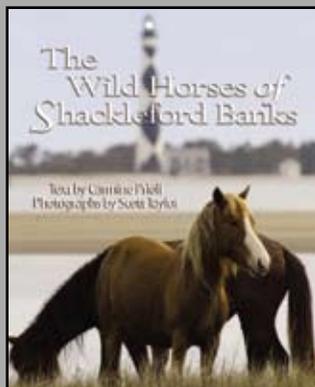
2007–2008 Edition

## Wild Horse Watching Tips, Shackleford Banks

Shackleford's 110-130 horses live in about 30 groups called "harems" (stallions, mares and foals) and "bachelor bands" (only stallions). They may be seen in all parts of the island but you may need to hunt around a bit to find them.

Remember that the horses are wild – they must find their own food and water and protect themselves from danger. Wild horses see humans and dogs as something dangerous. If you get too close to the horses they may defend themselves by charging, kicking or biting. For you and your pet's safety:

- Watch the horses from a safe distance. If the horse stops what it's doing to stare directly at you, stop there. If it starts to move away, you are already too close.
- Bring binoculars and use a telephoto lens so you won't disturb the horses or endanger yourself.
- Keep your dog on a leash for its and the horses' safety (and it's the law!).
- Always carry fresh water for yourself and your pet. During the warm months, bug repellent is recommended.



The Wild Horses of Shackleford Banks  
by Carmine Prioli

## Wild Horse Behavior

Wild horses display a myriad of fascinating behaviors for anyone who has the time to sit at a distance with binoculars and watch. Here are some behaviors you might see.



**Observing:** Horses will stand on dunes to look for other horses. They also stand on high spots to take advantage of the breeze that keeps insects away.



**Mutual Grooming:** A stallion and his mare scratch each other on the backs and necks. This behavior is also seen between mares who know each other well and between mares and their older offspring. The stallion's ears – part way back – show his concentration.



**Following:** Harems most often follow their alpha (most dominant) mare. The stallion most often brings up the rear unless he is checking ahead for a potential rival



**Herding:** Stallions keep their mares in the harem and away from other stallions by herding them.



**Flehman:** Stallions (mostly) use their vomeronasal organ (sensory apparatus in the nose) to detect pheromones (chemicals used for communication) by closing their nasal passages with their upper lip and raising their noses in the air.



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## Aggressive behaviors

Remember that these aggressive behaviors can be directed toward other animals, like dogs, and toward people. Keep your dog on a leash and stay away from the horses for safety.



**Checking a potential threat:** Stallions will often come out of their harems to see if the creature they see approaching is a rival stallion.



**Nose-to-Nose:** Stallions size each other up by sniffing noses



**Pinned Ear Threat:** Horses threaten each other by pinning their ears back (normally even closer to their neck than this) and tightening their lips. This young bachelor is trying to chase his neighbor from the water without success.



**Parallel Prance:** Stallions try to show their opponent how formidable they are by trotting side by side with their necks arched and manes flying.



**Striking:** This stallion is striking the ground during a conflict. His opponent seems unimpressed – and later won by chasing off the aggressor. Stallions also strike at each other and can inflict dangerous blows.



**Kick Threats:** Feuding horses threaten each other by backing towards each other and threatening to kick with the hind legs. Mares do this more than stallions, but this photo shows two stallions. The stallions are defending their mares (seen on right and left sides of the photo).

## Dogs Can Threaten Wildlife

*While most visitors know that dogs must be leashed, many fail to understand how dogs can negatively impact the seashore wildlife and other visitors.*

The seashore provides critical breeding habitat for many coastal and migrant bird species in North Carolina. Coastal birds nest on bare sandy beaches and it is often not obvious to visitors that birds are nesting nearby. Loose dogs can interrupt breeding behaviors, chase birds off of their nests and expose the nest to predators. Once disturbed, birds may abandon nesting at those locations altogether.

Most bird species are protected, and many are listed as threatened or endangered. For example, about two-thirds of all the piping plovers (an endangered species) in North Carolina nested at the seashore in 2005.



You may never notice the bird nest nearby

**Warning:**  
The fine for having  
your dog off leash is  
**\$150**