

## = Sable Island horse =

The Sable Island Horse , sometimes Sable Island Pony , is a type of small feral horse found on Sable Island , an island off the coast of Nova Scotia , Canada . It is a small type , often pony sized , but with a horse phenotype and horse ancestors , and usually dark in color . The first horses were released on the island in the late eighteenth century , and soon became feral . Additional horses were later transported to improve the herd 's breeding stock . They were rounded up for private use and sale for slaughter , which by the 1950s had placed them in danger of extinction .

In 1960 , the Canadian government protected the horses by law in their feral state . From the 1980s on , long @-@ term , noninvasive herd studies have been performed , and in 2007 a genetic analysis was conducted that concluded the herd was genetically unique enough to interest conservationists . In 2008 , the horses were declared the official horse of Nova Scotia , and in 2011 , the island was declared the Sable Island National Park Reserve . The herd is unmanaged , and legally protected from interference by humans . The horses live only at Sable Island and at the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park on the mainland of Nova Scotia , with the latter herd descended from horses removed from Sable Island in the 1950s .

## = = Characteristics = =

The horses that remain on Sable Island are feral . They generally stand between 13 and 14 hands ( 52 and 56 inches , 132 and 142 cm ) . Males from the island average about 360 kilograms ( 790 lb ) and females about 300 kilograms ( 660 lb ) . The available food on the island limits their size , and the offspring of horses removed from the island and fed more nutritious diets are generally larger . Physically , the horses resemble Spanish horses , with arched necks and sloping croups . Overall , they are stocky and short , with short pasterns that allow them to move easily on sandy or rough ground . Sable Island horses have very shaggy coats , manes and tails , especially during the winter . The tail is full and low @-@ set . Their coats are mostly dark colours , but some do have white markings . About half are bays , with the rest distributed among chestnut , palomino and black . Many Sable Island Horses have a natural ambling gait . Prior to their protection , when they could be kept for the use of humans , the horses were known for their sure @-@ footedness and gaits .

The Sable Island horses are a feral horse population that is entirely unmanaged : they are not subject to any kind of interference . Observational research , which is considered noninvasive to the herd , is sometimes conducted . Herd numbers fluctuate between 160 and 360 animals , with numbers changing based on weather severity . The population is split into numerous smaller herds , ranging from 40 to 50 in number , each ranging over approximately 3 square kilometres ( 1 @.@ 2 sq mi ) . Due to the lack of predators , older horses often die of starvation after their teeth are worn down by a lifetime of exposure to sand and marram , a tough grass . A lack of nutritional food on the island limits the horses ' size , and the offspring of those removed from the island and raised on better diets are significantly larger .

## = = History = =

Sable Island is a narrow , crescent @-@ shaped island located approximately 300 kilometres ( 190 mi ) southeast of Nova Scotia . It is 42 kilometres ( 26 mi ) long and covered in sand dunes and grasses . Over 350 bird species and 190 plant species are found on the island , in addition to the herd of feral horses , which are the most well @-@ known inhabitants .

Although popular legends claim that Sable Island horses swam ashore from the island 's many shipwrecks , or were introduced by 16th @-@ century Portuguese explorers , this is not supported by historical or genetic evidence . In reality , the horses were deliberately introduced to the island during the 18th century . The first recorded horses were brought by a Boston clergyman , the Reverend Andrew Le Mercier , in 1737 but most were stolen by passing mariners . The present @-@ day horses are thought by most historians and scientists to have descended mostly from horses seized by the British from the Acadians during the Expulsion of the Acadians . The Acadian

horses were descendents of several shipments of French horses , including members of the Breton , Andalusian and Norman breeds , later crossed with horses from New England , including Spanish Barbs . The Boston merchant and shipowner Thomas Hancock purchased some Acadian horses and transported them to Sable Island in 1760 , where they grazed the island as pasture . Although often referred to as ponies due to their small size , they have a horse phenotype and an ancestry composed solely of horses .

After the government of Nova Scotia established a lifesaving station on Sable Island in 1801 , workers trained some of the horses to haul supplies and rescue equipment . Lifesaving staff recorded the importation of a stallion , Jolly , taken there in 1801 , who was probably similar in type to the original Acadian horses released on the island . Although Jolly was not the first horse on the island , he was the first to be identified by name in historic records , and is known to have survived on the island until at least 1812 . Other breeding stock , probably including horses of Thoroughbred , Morgan and Clydesdale breeding , were sent to the island during the first half of the 19th century , in the hopes of improving the type of horses found on the island and raising the price for which they could be sold on the mainland .

During the 19th and early 20th centuries , the horses on Sable Island were periodically rounded up and either kept by islanders or transported to the mainland , where they were sold , frequently for slaughter . The meat was primarily used for dog food by the late 1950s , and the island horses were in danger of extinction . A public campaign was begun by school children to save the horses . In 1960 , as part of the Canadian Shipping Act , the Canadian government declared the horses fully protected and no longer able to be rounded up and sold . The law requires that people receive written permission before " feeding , interfering with , or otherwise having anything to do with the horses on the island . "

= = = Study and preservation = = =

Beginning in the mid @-@ 1980s , long term studies were begun of the Sable Island herds , and by the mid @-@ 2000s , most horses living on the island had documented histories . In 2007 , a genetic analysis of the Sable Island herd was performed . It was concluded that these horses were genetically similar to multipurpose and light draft breeds found in eastern mainland Canada , with differences probably created by natural selection and genetic drift . However , the researchers also stated that Sable Island horses had genetically " diverged enough from other breeds to deserve special attention by conservation interest groups , " and that the loss of the Sable Island horses would be more damaging to the genetic diversity of the Canadian horse population than the loss of any other breed . Genetic erosion is a possibility within the Sable Island population , due to the small number of horses . In a study of mitochondrial DNA published in 2012 , the Sable Island horse was found to be the least genetically diverse of the 24 horse populations studied , which included horse and pony breeds as well as feral populations from North America and Europe . A 2014 study by Parks Canada stated that the horses were under threat from their low numbers , excessive inbreeding and extreme weather due to global warming .

In 2008 , the Nova Scotia Legislature declared the Sable Island Horse as one of the provincial symbols , making them the official horse of Nova Scotia . In 2011 , the Canadian government created the Sable Island National Park Reserve , which allows further protection of the island and horses . Aside from the island , Sable Island Horses live only at the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park in Shubenacadie , Nova Scotia . It maintains descendants of Sable Island Ponies removed from the island in the 1950s by the Canadian Department of Transport .