

Gallop to the North Carolina Aquarium for Wild Horse Day

HARKERS ISLAND, NC – Bring the kids to Wild Horse Day at the North Carolina Aquarium in Pine Knoll Shores. Enjoy family-oriented fun that includes wild horse trivia, a scavenger hunt, and concludes with children taking the “Wild Horse Protector” pledge. Horse lovers of all ages can learn about the centuries-old wild horse herds that live on the Outer Banks of North Carolina. Meet local dedicated people who act to protect and preserve this national treasure for future generations to enjoy.

This free educational and interactive event, sponsored by the National Park Service at Cape Lookout National Seashore, the North Carolina Coastal Reserve & National Estuarine Research Reserve, and the Foundation for Shackleford Horses, Inc., is open to the public, rain or shine, in front of the North Carolina Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores, Saturday, May 16, from 10 am to 2 pm.

Wild horses have long roamed free on local islands, including Shackleford Banks and the Rachel Carson Reserve. The Shackleford horses are recognized as Colonial Spanish and while their origins may be something of a mystery, the truth remains that the herds thrive in the wild today thanks to sound management and little human intervention. The event is designed to share with the public the ways that they can help ensure the herds continue to thrive in the wild.

“The Shackleford Horses are an important part of what makes Cape Lookout National Seashore such a special place,” said Superintendent Pat Kenney. “This event is a great chance for the public to learn more about the horses and meet the people that work to ensure their protection.”

There will be an opportunity to meet Triton, a 16-year-old bay gelding who was removed as a yearling from Shackleford Banks during a time when the number of horses on Shackleford Banks exceeded the number that the island could reasonably support. He was turned over to the Foundation for Shackleford Horses and adopted by a local family as a domestic horse. The Foundation was instrumental in pushing for the passage of the “Shackleford Banks Wild Horses Protection Act.” Today, the Foundation co-manages the herd in partnership with the NPS.

“We are excited about the opportunity to introduce children to our local wild horses at Wild Horse Day. We want to teach them about the importance of preserving this precious resource and about respecting the horses in their natural environment,” said Foundation Chairman and President Margaret Poindexter. “Once filled with wild horse-watching knowledge from this event, families can safely visit Shackleford Banks and the Rachel Carson Reserve to enjoy the timeless beauty of the Banker ponies.

The Rachel Carson Reserve wild horse herd, located just north of Shackleford Banks, is a small herd that is managed by the Division of Coastal Management’s North Carolina Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve program. Both the Rachel Carson Reserve and Shackleford herds are being enjoyed by an increasing number of visitors in recent years and the managing organizations are hoping to further protect the horses in their wild state by inspiring visitors, particularly, children, to be good stewards for these unique animals.

“One of the joys of viewing wild horses is watching natural behaviors not seen in domestic horses,” said Paula Gillikin Rachel Carson Reserve Site Manager. “At Wild Horse Day we will be teaching children best practices for observing horses in the wild, including using binoculars to get an up-close view, while not causing behavior changes in the animals.”

In addition to attending the Wild Horse Day event, the public can learn more about local wild horses at <http://tinyurl.com/ol6sbaa>

Aquarium admission is not included in the event, but the Aquarium’s restrooms and concessions will be available.

www.nps.gov

About the National Park Service. More than 20,000 National Park Service employees care for America’s 405 national parks and work with communities across the nation to help preserve local history and create close-to-home recreational opportunities. Learn more at www.nps.gov.

About the North Carolina Coastal Reserve (Rachel Carson Reserve): The mission of the North Carolina Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve is to promote, through research, education and example, informed management and stewardship of North Carolina's estuarine and coastal habitats. Learn more at www.nccoastalreserve.net.

About the Foundation for Shackleford Horses: The mission of the 501(c)(3), non-profit Foundation is to preserve and protect the Shackleford Banks Horses, and ensure that these living legends remain an integral part of the history, and cultural and natural heritage of North Carolina and of Carteret County. Learn more at www.shacklefordhorses.org.

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