

# Outer Banks wild horses let big white birds ride them for a good reason, expert says

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The wild horses roaming North Carolina's Outer Banks are known for being unpredictable and even dangerous—and this reputation only adds to the mystery why they're often seen patiently giving rides to big, gawky

birds.

Proof of this phenomenon was posted recently by the Corolla Wild Horse Fund: a photo of a horse named Amadeo Jr. ambling around with a 2-foot-tall [cattle](#) egret on its back.

More egrets can be seen standing adoringly at the horse's hooves in the photo, as if waiting their turn.

It's not clear if the [wild horses](#) actually like cattle egrets or just tolerate them, but herd manager Meg Puckett says there is a good reason behind the relationship. "They eat the bugs and other little creatures stirred up by the horses," she wrote on Facebook.

The Outer Banks is notorious for its bugs, particularly female biting flies that get protein by sucking the blood of animals and people, the National Park Service told The Charlotte Observer.

Most of the biting flies and ticks stick to the maritime forest and "other bushy areas" that are shielded from the sea winds, park officials say.

It's in those rugged areas of the barrier islands that the horses retreat for weeks at a time, making the egrets a handy thing to have around, experts say.

Cattle egrets are known for being "gregarious," and experts believe they "pick attached ticks from grazing animals" as they ride, according to Birds of North America. The egrets grow up to 22 inches long and can weigh 18 ounces, according to Allaboutbirds.com.

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