

# Some wild horses mysteriously vanish for months on North Carolina's Outer Banks. Where do they go?

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A ghost of sorts appeared on the northern end of North Carolina's Outer Banks—a wild stallion that goes by the name Dash.

The elusive horse came out of nowhere Aug. 14 with his equally mysterious mom, Rotor, confirming a lesser-known fact about the feral "banker" horses that live on Corolla.

"There are a handful of horses that we are lucky to see once or twice a year because they live deep in the marsh in places that are difficult (or often impossible) for us to access," Meg Puckett of the Corolla Wild Horse Fund wrote in a Facebook post.

"The horses have about 7,500 acres of land to roam and ... it is quite vast once you get away from the oceanfront. Easy for a couple of horses like Rotor and Dash to stay hidden for months at a time!"

That's unexpected, given the Outer Banks are becoming increasingly crowded as an East Coast tourist destination.

It's estimated over 5 million people a year visit the Outer Banks, including about 2.8 million drawn to the beaches and historic attractions at Cape Hatteras National Seashore in 2023.

A herd of just over 100 [wild horses](#) roams the Corolla area, including some that have managed to stay hidden for years.

In 2023, the Corolla Wild Horse Fund announced a secretive family of horses—two adults and a foal—was discovered living like castaways on an island in the sound west of Carova Beach.

"We always assume there are probably a handful more that we never see," the fund wrote.

It isn't completely understood why some hermit horses suddenly show up on beaches, then just as suddenly disappear.

Puckett says it could have to do with the disease-carrying horse flies that plague the islands when conditions are damp and hot.

There comes a point when even the most stoic of wild horses can no longer stand the biting and head for beaches where coastal winds thwart the insects. That's likely what caused Dash and his mom to materialize Aug. 14, Puckett said.

"I'm not really sure why there are some that don't come out of the marsh and woods very often, when the majority of them do go back and forth pretty regularly," she said.

"Probably just behavior that has been passed down for many generations. I'd say there are maybe around 10 to 15 that only come out around the houses and onto the [beach](#) a couple times a year, and maybe half of those are even more elusive and we're lucky to see them once a year."

Their disappearing acts prove a lot of wild habitat still exists on North Carolina's barrier islands, and the horses use it, she said.

Either by instinct or by trial and error, they know how to find secret places that are too remote and too wet for humans.

"Development is definitely a huge issue and presents a lot of dangers to the horses. Development doesn't just mean houses going up and loss of habitat. It also means traffic, garbage, more septic systems and wells going in, more people in general, etc," Puckett said.

"But knowing that A) there really is a lot of untouched habitat west of the dunes and B) it really is so vast that there are horses that can disappear back into it for months at a time helps you stay hopeful for the future. ... It's also a reminder of how wild these horses are, and how

capable they are of taking care of themselves in their [natural habitat](#)."

**More information:** To find out more about the non-profit Corolla Wild Horse Fund's rescue farm and Land Acquisition Fund, visit [www.corollawildhorses.com/](http://www.corollawildhorses.com/).

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