



Viewing the Assateague Horses Safely



Will I See Wild Horses? During your visit to Assateague, you will most likely encounter at least a few of the island's most popular residents.

Petting or feeding the wild horses may seem like a harmless and fun thing to do, but the consequences can be terrible.

For your safety and the safety of the horses, please obey park regulations and do not approach, touch or feed the Assateague horses.

Dangers of Being Too Close

- Horses bite and kick in response to crowding or competition for food
- Visitors can be knocked down and stepped on if horses spook or react suddenly
- Horses are large animals, making it dangerous for anyone, especially children, to get too close
- Any horse may bite, but be aware that each band has a harem stallion whose job is to protect his mares, and most bites are by stallions

Dangers of Petting and Feeding

- Both petting and feeding cause harmful behavior changes in horses
 - Horses become unafraid of humans – this is **not** the same as being “tame”!
 - Horses begin approaching cars and visitors, becoming more aggressive over time; your actions today can endanger future visitors!
 - Horses are attracted to roads, increasing the risk of being injured or killed by a vehicle
- In searching or begging for food, horses:
 - Grab objects from visitors, bite at clothing and hands
 - Push visitors away from open trunks, car doors and picnic tables
 - Tear into tents and destroy property

“They Seem so Tame!”



This woman received a painful bite from a stallion defending “his” water source (pooled water at the base of a campground water pump). Wild horses sometimes perceive the presence of a human as a challenge or a threat to food, water, foals or other band members.

Points to Remember while Observing Horses

- For your safety and the safety of the horses, do not approach, touch or feed them
- Stay at least a “bus length” away, but remember that may still be much too close depending on the circumstances
- If horses approach you, back off and return to your vehicle
- If horses approach your vehicle, roll all windows up
- Don’t open trunks or coolers if horses are nearby
- Assateague horses DO bite and kick, and can carry rabies
- These horses are WILD; they don’t behave like domestic horses and can’t be treated like domestic horses
- Citations may be issued for feeding or petting horses or any other wildlife

How Close is “Too Close”?

Is a “bus length” still too close? Think about it! Each visitor to the island must use common sense when observing any wildlife, including horses.

If a stallion began herding his mares away, if a fight broke out, if the horses spooked – could you stand where you are and not be at risk of getting run over? **No?** Then you’re too close.

Is your presence changing the horses’ behavior (are they approaching you or moving away in response to your presence)? **Yes?** Then you’re too close.

Treat the horses with respect - move back, stay safe.

Consequences



(Left) This stallion was hit and killed by a car. The average death toll for horses on the park’s roads is one per year. Horses which are not used to people spend very little time near roads, and are much less likely to end this way.

(Below, left and right) These children were too close and were bitten. Most children will not understand the dangers of getting too close to wild horses. Adults are responsible for their children’s safety around horses.

