

Shackleford Banks Horse Herd Update

March 28, 2013

Last year the herd boasted its first 30 year old horse. Thirty is old for even a domestic horse, and life on the barrier island is challenging. This past winter she died.

This year, however, another mare has turned thirty. The graying on 68's face helps reveal her age, but she carries good weight for a very old wild horse.



She is living with a big harem including her ninth offspring, 4W, a black colt born in 2009. On average, youngsters don't stay with their birth harems this long; he may move out this summer. Young colts sometimes live alone and other times they take up company with another bachelor until they are old and strong enough to fight for a mare of their own.

Also unusual is that 4W was born when his dam was 26 years old. Further, she had received birth control which should have prevented conception.

Additionally notable is that 4W is one of only two offspring of stallion 2 who was a member of a less-well-represented lineage. His first offspring died at 1 ½ years of age. The successful match seems even more unlikely because the sire died the following year at 17. He had never been particularly good at keeping mares in his harem.

The seven oldest horses in the Shackleford Banks herd (21 through 29 years old) are all females. The disparity between mares' and stallions' ages is thought to be due to the advantage of birth control administered to the mares.

Particularly at this age, 68 has a huge personal space bubble where people are concerned; this photo was taken with a long lens. Horses coming out of the winter need all the time grazing they can get, and visitors can help by not disturbing the harems. Binoculars and telephoto lenses help photographers get "up close and personal" from a long, safe distance away.