

# The Wild Horse Rewilding Action Plan

Rewilding  
Europe®



Humans exterminated the wild horse. Rewilding Europe is now helping to bring back the wild horse to where it once belonged, into the European landscapes, where it used to be a vital part of the ecosystem for hundreds of thousands of years.

# Getting back to where they once belonged



The last European wild horse died out as late as in 1909. Before that, wild horses roamed through most of Europe's ecosystems, from deserts, steppes and savannahs to deep forests and high mountains. It was exterminated and domesticated by our ancestors. Therefore, even though the original wild horse is now gone, there are still millions of horses around, and some horse breeds to this day carry on most of the gene material of the original wild horse. Many of them also live a semi-wild life already, exposed to wild challenges like food shortage, weather extremes, predators, drought and disease. All which seems to step by step help bring back and refine the wild, original traits in them.

Several of our 21st century horse breeds are amazingly close to the horses that feature in the 15,000–32,000 year old cave paintings in Chauvet, Altamira and Lascaux or in the rock carvings of the Côa valley. Closer than we might have expected. One reason for there being so many different horse breeds today is that there were already a number of different wild horse types as well. They had adapted to the different climates and food supplies in the different corners of Europe. Roughly, there seems to have been a steppe version, an Iberian version, a Balkan mountain version and a European lowland version. In horses, domestication was an erratic history of taming, human selection, breeding, hybridising with wild horses again, living wild for a while and then being

re-tamed again when man needed them. All across Europe, several of the local horse breeds have traditionally roamed free in natural areas in a semi-wild state. These horses were expected to find their own food and shelter. This turned out to be a guarantee to preserve important wild traits and appearances, enabling horses to stay fit and alive under semi-wild conditions. The knowledge of how to avoid or defend themselves against predators, the competition between the stallions, how to survive winters, developing coats resistant to rain, snow and ice, was preserved and developed.

The domestication of horses did not change their genes as much as it did with many of our other domestic mammals. The absence of strong human selection and the presence of natural selection has kept some of the wilder and more original breeds quite fit for a natural wild life. Rewilding takes generations, in order to fully adapt and learn to live in the wild again. Rewilded and semi-wild horses store very important gene sources, valuable also for mankind and the domestic breeds.

Land abandonment today offers new opportunities for bringing the wild horse back and developing an economy based more on wild nature and wildlife. Rewilding Europe wants to grasp these opportunities and improve the future for the European wild horse.

## Rewilding Europe intends to assist the wild horse come back, all across Europe

- We will help develop a genetic study of the wild horse, to determine which horse breeds that are closest to the originals, so that these can be used in the further back-breeding of the species.
- We will help the wild horse back to natural densities within some key European ecosystems, offering new areas for the species to expand.
- We intend to help establish before 2022 at least five herds of >100 animals in rewilding areas that are specifically selected for this purpose.
- Leading to at least one connected large population of >1,000 animals by 2032.
- We will actively support business development around the return of the wild horse, thereby directly linking wildlife conservation with local economic benefits.
- We will fundraise to help finance these measures and we dearly appreciate all support in that direction.
- We invite all other willing and able partners (land owners, hunters, horse breeders, land managers, scientists, National Parks etc) to join us and work together with us in this endeavor.

## Making Europe a Wilder Place